

Buddha's Tooth

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Author's Note:

There are many quotations and phrases in every language, spoken at times when words of wisdom are required or to quote what is the obvious.

“The Kingdom of god and heaven will not be found in buildings or books. It is within each and every one of us and all around. You just need to stop and look.”

The Gnostic Gospels

“Religion, laws and money are all man made and have been put there to stop you discovering the previous statement.”

R. A. Webster

It's a beautiful planet.

“Think briefly about your past achievements and failures, learn from them, but don't dwell on them. You only bore the pants off people when you speak about them and besides, the present is tomorrow's past.”

R. A. Webster

Live for today.

“Grief is the price we have to pay for love.”

H.M. Queen Elizabeth II

“Son, if you worry, you’ll die. If you don’t worry, you are still going to die and you’re a long time dead, so why worry?”

Pearl Nielsen (1919-2004)

Thanks for all your wisdom and love, mum.



Foreword

Some people are born to be heroes. Some people earn it through years of trying. Allow me to introduce you to three likely lads who had heroism strangely dropped on their heads.

Please enjoy the first adventures of Nicholas (Nick) Godfrey, Stuart (Stu) Wilson, and Spock, three unattached, English, horny, thirty-something lads on holiday, as they almost battle with evil forces, almost rescue damsels in distress and almost save a country from total destruction.

They definitely do however, drink copious amounts of amber fluid and have lots of horizontal fun. The story is set mostly in the amazing city of Pattaya on the eastern seaboard of Thailand. Lush green palm trees, crystal clear waters, warm golden sand and herds of buffalo wandering aimlessly over grassy meadows, you won't find there. However, chrome pole molesters (Go-Go dancers), ogling dens, cheap amber fluid and beautiful, accommodating ladies more than make up for it.

Follow their hilarious antics through the many stages of intoxication; from 'juiced' through 'spannered' and 'shitfaced' up to the ultimate stage of being totally 'wankered', as they unknowingly enter into a chase between good and evil for the recovery of

an ancient holy relic. Enter into a diverse culture of South East Asian people, whose attitudes, traditions and lives have, and will always remain a mystery to the Western world. So, unless you like stories about buffaloes, please read on and enjoy BUDDHA'S TOOTH, an absolute must read survival guide for anyone travelling to 'The Land of Smiles'.

Korp khun krap
(Thank you)

And if you want something to do after you have read this epic. Think about this puzzle:

A man and woman marry and have a baby boy. One year later they have another baby boy, but the two boys are not brothers. WHY?

If you're stumped, the answer is revealed in Chapter 21



Prologue

The ancient stage is set. The delicate scent of spicy oriental fragrance drifts through the warm air of the candlelit main hall of the temple [*Wat*]. Inside, sixty monks of the *Tinju* order, ages ranging from ten to seventy, were kneeling with their foreheads touching the marble floor, arms extended in front of them. Deep in meditation and waiting for the moment; crouching lions waiting for the scent of their prey.

This *Wat* was said to be around 2000 years old, built by monks in *Salaburi*, a remote village not too far from the small south eastern Thai/Cambodian border town of *Pong-nam-rom*. Situated in a dense jungle, surrounded by jungle-encased mountains like a coral atoll, the *Wat* is small by temple standards. Gleaming domes and arches are covered in gold leaf and skilfully-carved statues depicting Buddha's journey through life, as both a prince and pauper, in order to obtain enlightenment.

The *Wat* is situated behind *Salaburi* village, against a mountain backdrop. The meticulously maintained temple building has a large door at the front, a small door at the rear, and a door at the side leading to a meditation room. On the outside of this small, windowless room are mosaic tiles depicting a nobleman

on a horse smiling down at a poor decrepit individual. It is believed this was the moment when Prince *Siddhartha Gautama* decided to give up his earthly possessions and begin his journey to enlightenment, eventually becoming the Buddha and entering *Nirvana* [heaven] whilst still alive.

Inside the meditation room lays an embalmed corpse, a foetus in a glass jar preserved in a clear liquid made from the bark of a local tree and a skeleton. The monks enter this room for intense meditation on the journey through life and to reflect on birth, death and the afterlife. Cut into the floor, a tunnel leads outside to a large cave with a heavy golden gate covering the cave mouth. One hooded monk guards either side, each carrying a small bow and quiver filled with menacing arrows. The handles on their sheathed swords sparkle, even through the dim light. This cave housed the teachings of the Lord Buddha and the Wat's most valuable possession; the four pre-molar 'wisdom' teeth of the Holy Buddha, kept in a golden box the size of a matchbox, adorned with rubies and sapphires from the nearby mines of *Chantaburi*.

The inner chamber of the main temple is very basic, with large smooth marble pillars either side of a three-metre wide aisle. Small mats lay on the marble floor to the side of the aisle for the monks to pray, receive teachings and meditate. Outside the main temple are the monk's living quarters and a large arena where they would learn fighting skills, both with and without weapons. Although the weapons are from an age long since a memory, in trained Tinju hands they are as deadly as any modern day weapon. Handed down from generation to generation, the monk's skills as great

warriors in all forms of combat are legendary. The early Kings of Siam ('Thailand' since 11 May 1949) had used Tinju monks as bodyguards and assassins throughout the centuries.

Due to the inhospitable terrain, the humidity and many biting insects, the approach to the village is difficult. With no roads or visible tracks, the only people with the knowledge to find their way are the villagers and monks. Through this anonymity the village and Wat has remained unhindered for millennia. They farm the land, tend their cattle and survive on medicines provided by the many trees and plants found in the surrounding forest, using knowledge passed down through the ages. They are totally self-sufficient and have no need for the trappings or indulgences of the outside world which had long since forgotten them.

The monks are chosen before birth. When a Tinju monk dies, the next first-born son of a villager becomes his replacement, believing him to be the reincarnation of the deceased Tinju. At just one day old, the infant is taken to the temple. There he would remain for the rest of his life, never knowing his real parents or family. The infant would be taken care of, taught and nurtured by the other monks. For the family it is a great honour to have a son a Tinju because they are known for their great wisdom and kindness in their search for enlightenment. They are born Tinju and they died Tinju.

There are currently seventy-five monks; the youngest, two years old, the eldest eighty-six. For monks of the Tinju credo, their duty is to guard the sacred relic, a duty which starts from the age of ten and stops usually at around seventy years old, with the exception of the 'Prime Master'.

A Siamese trader, and emissary to the King, acquired the holy remnants of Prince *Siddhartha Gautama* (Buddha) over five hundred years after his death, about the same time Christ was born. At the time it was widely believed any ruler who worshipped relics of Buddha was given the power to command and rule wisely. The trader brought the relics to Siam from China after searching for twenty years, but he was well rewarded for his endeavour. They were presented to King Bumnalonkorn of Siam who had a golden box encrusted with locally mined rubies and sapphires made to house the relics. In order to keep them safe he needed the most highly trained *Chang* [elephant] warriors from the Kingdom to guard them with their very lives. After many months of fierce gladiatorial competitions, fifty of the country's best warriors were chosen, along with twenty-five of the holiest Buddhist teachers. With their hair and eyebrows shaved and bedecked in the traditional bright orange robes, with the addition of a red sash, the Tinju monk was created. Their solitary role was to guard the holy relics and every year, on the King's birthday, escort them to the Imperial Palace so the King could ask for continued wisdom to rule.

The King chose a site he later named *Salaburi* in the heart of a jungle and brought in craftsmen from all over the Kingdom to build the Wat. Taking twelve years to construct, it was built next to a cave in one of the nearby mountains and made secure with gates and booby traps. The boxed relics were then placed into small gold statue of Buddha and locked. The key given to one holy man who was then given the title 'Prime Master', and only he knew the booby traps and only he

could hold the key. People from all over the Kingdom, families of builders, carpenters, teachers, doctors and farmers, were selected and brought in to take care of the new monks and make up the population of the village of Salaburi. A new civilisation was created, cut off from the outside world and developing its own culture.

Other than the King, his Chief of the Palace Guards, the head of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha¹ at the Imperial Palace and the Tinju, nobody else knew about the existence of the holy relics. The Chief of the Palace Guards had the responsibility to transport the Tinju to and from the palace. Large army transports would be driven to Pong-nam-rom. The monks would be waiting, load them silently into the vehicles, then precede straight to the Imperial Palace in Bangkok. The monks would then disembark and enter the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, forming rows either side of the aisle. The Prime Master would walk to the Emerald Buddha, remove the golden box from his robe and place it at the foot of the Buddha. He would then ask for blessing for several moments before joining the other monks to await the King's arrival.

In Salaburi, two hooded monks guarded the remnants 24 hours a day. The relics were only removed prior to the current monarch's birthday, in time to transport them to the Imperial Palace. When the

¹ The 'Emerald Buddha' is a large gold coloured statue of a sitting Buddha approximately 50 feet high. On its head is an emerald, approximately 4 inches high with the effigy of Buddha carved into it. This is mounted in a small gold and glass case. The Thais regard this as the holiest Buddha in Thailand. It is open to the public, as are some other parts of the Imperial Palace.

Imperial Palace was located in the former capital of Chiang Mai, the journey took weeks. After its relocation to Bangkok, it still took several days before the introduction of motor vehicles. Now the journey was only a five-hour drive. The monks removed the relics the day before in order to perform their own ritual, the 'Ceremony of the Great Journey'. This was the greatest day in the monk's year, as it meant the next day they would be going to the Imperial Palace and meeting their beloved monarch, *King Bhumipol Adulyadej the Great of the Chakri House*, whose birthday falls on the 5th of December.

Khun Somchay had been Prime Master of the Tinju for four years. Now at fifty-eight years of age, he had the strength of a lion, and the speed of a striking snake. His mentor, the former Prime Master, *Khun Vitthae*, had handed over the honour to *Somchay* after losing his sight and being unable to perform his duties. Within the Tinju society, monks ranked in order from Novice to Warrior to Master and then to Prime Master. Although *Somchay* was not the eldest Master, his merit and courage had convinced his peers he was the man for the job. He now stood in front of the large golden leafed statue of Buddha situated at the rear of the Tinju temple. The statue, approximately twenty-feet tall, was of the Buddha sitting in a cross-legged lotus position with his open hands joined and smiling face looking down at everyone below. In the Buddha's hands lay the small matchbox size gold and jewel encrusted box containing the sacred relic which had been ceremoniously brought from the guarded cave several hours earlier. *Somchay*, his head bowed and hands in the *wai* position, chanting a prayer for enlightenment,

wisdom and courage. His chanting continued for several minutes and then he fell silent.

Two hooded monks standing either side of the statue lit more of the heavily scented essence sticks positioned around the statue in small sand traps. This took a few minutes as small wisps of smoke started emanating from the sticks and the air was starting to fill with a fragrant earthy smell. After all thirty sticks were lit, Somchay took the small box from the Buddha's hands and turned to face the prone monks. He held the box high above his head and uttered a command in an ancient Siamese dialect, lost to the world except for those in this holy place. The monks now sat straight with their faces looking at the holy box and, in a singular crescendo, praised the Lord Buddha so loudly it seemed to resonate in nirvana. This carried on for several minutes all in perfect tone, perfect pitch, and perfect unison.

It was Somchay who first noticed the change in the aroma surrounding the temple. Somchay's sense of smell, as that of all Tinju monks, was honed to be the same as hunting or prey animal. The fragrant smell of the incense had been replaced by a smell he had come across before, similar to the sweet nutty smell given off by cakes made at the village bakery. It was almonds. But he knew this wasn't cake; it was something more modern and his senses told him, much more sinister. The wispy curls of smoke now turned into large plumes of smoke. He shouted out and clasped the box to his body. The other monks were now on their feet and were hurrying toward Somchay. The hooded monk standing to the right of the statue thought he saw the monk to the left putting on a black mask, but he ignored this and

went to protect his master. Confusion reigned, as one by one the monks fell unconscious to the floor. Somchay fell against the statue, the holy box tumbling out of his hand. He looked up at the smiling face of Buddha the last face he was to see in this life. The smoke filled the temple, as one by one the monks gave into this mortal coil and were dispatched to their nirvana.

The only figure standing was a lone hooded monk who quietly walked through the smoke to the lifeless body of the dead Prime Master, bent down and retrieved the holy jewelled box and placed it in a small pocket inside his tunic. He looked through the smoke at the blurred orange clad figures of the monks, now either dead still or writhing and convulsing on the marble floor. One monk caught his gaze and he stared for several moments until the monk's body ceased all movement. Slowly but purposely, he then made his way to the back entrance of the temple were, once outside, he removed his S16 respirator to take a gulp of fresh air. He removed his robes and stood in his camouflage under garment before picking up the remainder of his cyanide flares. *Don't want to leave any evidence*, he thought. Finally, he bundled up his robe into a crude rucksack, tied that and his deadly evidence to his back, took a last deep breath and ran off toward the jungle.

The back door of the temple was left ajar and a faint cough could be heard behind the door, followed by a dull thud as the other hooded monk came crashing through. He had used his robe to filter some of the gas and held his breath as the deadly cyanide billowed out around him. Somehow he found the strength to run out of the gas stream into the fresh air, letting out his breath in a loud throaty roar and inhaling deeply. Still wheezing for air, he

bent over and vomited. He turned his head and caught a glimpse of a figure running in the distance before disappearing into the jungle. He then collapsed into a comatose sleep.



– Chapter One –

The silence was broken by a high pitched screech, followed by several beeps. An arm came out from under a small bundle of blankets and a hand slapped the top of the alarm clock amid mumbling, the sound of breaking wind and the grating of a scrotum being scratched. Stu was finally awake, he pulled back the blankets and rolled out of bed. He made his way over to the light switch. Bloody freezing, he thought to himself, but never mind, this time tomorrow he would be basking in the sunshine. He looked over to an armchair, a white bundle of fur lay with its eyes open staring at Stu as he turned on the light.

“Come on lazy dog; get your useless carcass up. You are going on holiday.”

Stu had moved to Cleethorpes, a small northern English coastal town, and had been living in a flat above a hair salon for four years. Although born and raised there, he had moved away when he was seventeen to join the Royal Navy. After leaving the Navy, he spent several years moving around the country working before deciding to return to Cleethorpes and set up a furniture business. Once there, Stu purchased a dilapidated shop house, very cheaply, and fixed it up so it was habitable. He rented out the shop to a hairdresser and the downstairs flat behind the shop to his friend. He

lived in the upstairs flat with his old dog, 'Chunky', a white boxer bitch.

Although he'd had several ladies in his life, coming and going possibly due to the fact they didn't really like him, he remained alone with his faithful companion who he had dragged around the country for eight years. Chunky was purchased as an eighteen-month-old unwanted pet and, when brought from the animal rescue shelter to meet her new owner, thought she was in for an easy life. Poor misguided animal.

Chunky was well known for her stupidity and affection, both by the neighbours and local fire department, who had been called out many times to free her head from the many railings and obstacles she used to get herself stuck in.

Now into December, England was cold and the icy chill cut to the bone. Keeping extremities warm was a full time task. With the long periods of darkness causing deep depression among many of its inhabitants, England was not a nice place to live during the winter months. Which is why Stu had decided to take his holidays now. He had staff that could take care of his business and his friend Tony to take care of Chunky. He would be back before Christmas so he could spend time with his mum and friends.

Stu was thirty-five years old, short in height with a stocky build and a well formed beer gut. He would be the perfect weight for his height, if he was six feet five, but he fell short of that by over a foot. His mousy brown hair always looked uncombed, mainly because it was and although he thought he looked handsome, in reality he had the looks that only a mother could love. Not a rich man but never short of money, he worked

hard for what he had earned, and had the reputation of being thrifty; *'as tight as a ducks arse in water'* to be more accurate.

His friend, Spock, lived in the downstairs flat. The two had been friends since childhood and had always kept in contact through the years, sharing many drunken adventures whenever Stu was in town. Including having a neighbourhood closed off by armed police who was looking for a crazed man in a checked shirt waving a shotgun around. This was actually a shitfaced [very drunk] Stu who had borrowed Spock's air rifle with its telescopic sights to look for a comet which was supposed to be easily viewed in the northeast night sky. Due to the fact Stu didn't know which way was northeast, he searched the entire sky using the rifle's sights. After waving the gun around to no avail, he gave up, went inside and drank some more. Within ten minutes the street was swarming with police.

When Stu returned to Cleethorpes to live, the terrible twosome met up again. Spock had rented the downstairs flat after finishing with his long time girlfriend who had decided after ten years together she didn't really like him. She did however, like her boss at the fish processing factory where she worked. She even liked his new black eye and crooked nose, courtesy of Spock.

Stu had found a cheap deal on the Internet to Bangkok and Pattaya after finding out they were in a country called Thailand, advertised as the 'Land of Smiles'. The lads booked fifteen nights, flying from Manchester on 7th December and, after meeting several local lads who had already been to Pattaya and told

them some of what to expect, they decided they had made the right decision.

Stu had a hot shower, pulled on his jeans and thick shirt and made himself a cup of tea. He opened a tin of dog food which he scooped into a bowl and went into the living room, leaving chunky with her snout buried in the food. He sat in his armchair and went through everything silently in his mind. Bags packed - 'check'. Tickets, passport, traveller's cheques, - 'check'. Condoms - 'check'. Dog food, 16 days supply - 'check'. Train tickets - 'check'. He thought he had forgotten something but could not think what it was. Then he realised. Shit! He rushed out of his armchair and raced off downstairs.

"Spock are you awake?" he bellowed through the wall to the downstairs flat.

"Yes matey," came the muffled reply. "I'll be up there in ten minutes. What time you taking the dog and what time's the taxi coming?"

Spock, whose real name was Peter Harris, was the same age as Stu. A giant of a man, with his large build and shaven head he looked more like a large primate. He earned his nickname at school because of his unusually large ears. Although not pointed, his ears bore an uncanny resemblance to those of Star Trek's resident Vulcan, so he had been nicknamed 'Spock'. The name had stayed with him all his life and even he sometimes forgot he was called Peter. He loved his single life, loved the parties, and loved his work as a hygiene engineer. A dustbin man.

He was the life and soul of any party with his unusual party tricks. He would sit down, lift his legs to his neck, break wind and ignite this rather lethal gas

which produced a blue flame as methane met spark. His other favourite trick was to remove his top dentures. He had lost all his top teeth in a run-in with a lump of 4x2 wooden club wielded by an unhappy customer during his stint as a doorman ten years earlier. He would drop the dentures in some poor innocent drinker's pint of beer then, with a big cheerful laugh, apologise and offer to finish off the drink for them. This practice had all but ceased after one night at their favourite Indian restaurant, 'The Tiger of Bengal'. Totally spannered, Spock decided to remove his dentures and place them in a girls' drink. In went the teeth but instead of shrieking hysterically, the girl just calmly finished her drink, tipped out the dentures and promptly threw them across the restaurant. Everyone found this amusing except Spock. The dentures were passed around with Spock running around trying to find out who had them. The restaurant was in a humorous uproar. The dentures were eventually found buried in a half-eaten bowl of Bombay mix, taken to the kitchen, cleaned and brought back to Spock on a small silver platter by a very perturbed Indian waiter. The restaurant is now fondly known as 'The Teeth of Bengal'.

The terrible twosome were now on their way. Chunky was taken to her new residence for the next sixteen days and the lads were on the 12:40 train to Manchester airport. They were not due to fly out until 21:50 but they wanted to give themselves plenty of time to check in with China Airways and have a few drinks. They had made it as far as Scunthorpe, a small industrial town twenty minutes from Cleethorpes, when Spock opened his small hand luggage and produced a half-full bottle of whisky.

“Still three hours until we get to the airport so we might as well polish this off. After all, we are on holiday and it would be a shame not to.”

They arrived in plenty of time and checked in their luggage. They were allocated aisle seats and when told about the free drink service on the flight, they felt even happier.

On the plane they met Nick who was in the seat next to Spock and, as luck would have it, was also travelling to Pattaya. Nick was staying three weeks as he did not want to be in England over Christmas. He chuckled that he would have a better Christmas in Pattaya. He lived with his sister in Brighton, a southern English coastal resort, and made this journey many times a year, both for leisure pursuits and business which, as he explained, was buying copy designer clothes and watches to sell back in the U.K. He explained how it was becoming more difficult due to the Thai government’s restrictions on copy gear. He gave Spock and Stu some information of what to expect in Pattaya, the routine about paying bar girls, where to change money and how much to pay for things. The two lads listened intently, especially about the girls. The only time they spoke was when Stu asked about brothels, to which Nick replied chuckling, “There aren’t any. Wait and see.” That became his standard reply to all the following questions.

“Wait and see. Just remember whatever you do, fall in love with the place, do not, repeat, do not fall in love with the girls.”

Nick was a typical ‘Jack the Lad’. Fairly tall and lean, he spoke with a southern cockney accent which he explained he had picked up after spending many years

in London working on construction sites. Puny for a builder; probably a sandwich boy, thought Stu. The three got on like a house on fire and they decided to stick together once they reached Pattaya.

Stu and Spock had never bothered to book a hotel. A friend advised them that it would be cheaper and better to find a hotel once they arrived. This worried them both but Nick confirmed it, stating that he always stayed at the same hotel which always had plenty of rooms, even during high season. [‘High Season’ in Thailand runs from November till March] This put both Stu and Spock’s minds at rest.

The twelve-hour flight brought them to Bangkok’s Don Muang. International Airport at the local time of 16:50. [Thailand is 7 hours ahead of the U.K.] Off the plane the first priority involved several cigarettes in one of the smoking rooms within the airport. Once their nicotine levels had risen, they made their way through Immigration, collected their baggage, cleared customs and headed into the main airport building. They felt unclean and weary but Nick said that would soon pass when they arrive in Pattaya. Stu and Spock stopped at a currency exchange kiosk and converted 100 pound sterling worth of traveller’s cheques into Thai *Baht*, at the exchange rate of 72 *Baht* to the pound. As they made their way to the sliding exit doors, Stu and Spock took in the sights, namely the beautiful olive skinned ladies who were walking around the airport.

They giggled like two naughty schoolboys. It was the same when they were ten years old and their classmate, Mary Tate, lifted up her skirt and pulled down her knickers behind the school bike shed, giving the two embarrassed youngsters a glimpse of something

they would spend their adult life pursuing. Nick walked on, shaking his head. These two are in for a shock, he thought. Stopping at the automatic sliding exit doors, Spock turned to Stu, they both looked straight ahead and in unison spoke, “Well Thailand, we’re here.” They took another pace forward, the automatic doors silently slid open and they all stepped out of the cool air-conditioned airport building. Again they looked at each other and together hollered, “Fuck me! It’s hot.”



– Chapter Two –

There was an eerie aura in the village of Salaburi. The villagers were scurrying around like ants, gathering, collecting, and constructing, although they remained in shock and disbelief. It had been two days since the deadly intrusion on their holy domain. Several soldiers were now in the village, but they were just wandering aimlessly about.

Porntip, whose nickname was *Pon*, lay in the monk's living quarters. He had been drifting in and out of consciousness since *Khun Cenat* found his near lifeless body outside the rear of the temple. *Cenat* had checked the fallen monk and saw he was still alive. He then noticed that the rear door of the temple was open. As he approached he got a slight smell of an unusual aroma so placed his robe over his nose and mouth before entering the main hall. The smoke had almost cleared but *Cenat* gagged when he saw what confronted him. All his comrades and family lay dead, their features and bodies contorted. He looked down and saw the body of the Prime Master leant against the statue of Buddha. Feeling a little giddy and devoid of rational thought, he left the temple and went outside to the fallen *Pon*, then, as if in a hypnotic trance, he hoisted the monk over his shoulder and carried him to the living area.

Khun Vitthae was sitting in the classroom listening to *Khun Tangrit* giving lessons to the very young monks on the teachings of Buddha. *Vitthae*, the former Prime Master, was the eldest monk at eighty-six years old and, although his sight had completely gone, his mind was still as sharp as a razor. *Vitthae* liked to sit in on the lessons of the very young monks whose ages ranged from two to nine years old, especially when the ceremony of the ‘great journey’ was held. He also enjoyed talking to the older monks who were excluded from the ceremony because they were too old to make the pilgrimage. The door of the classroom burst open, *Cenat* stumbled in with *Pon* over his shoulder. *Cenat* placed the unconscious *Pon* on a mat and struggled to catch his breath.

“What’s happening?” asked the old blind master as the young students rushed to aid *Cenat* and *Pon*.

Pon was continually slipping in and out of consciousness and too weak to tell them anything. He was placed on a small sleeping mat then the elder monks tended him, administering medicinal herbs. Several hours passed. *Cenat* had been treated for shock and when he regained his faculties relayed what he had witnessed to the other eight elder monks who were sitting in a circle around him. Utter shock and horror was their first emotion, followed by disbelief then anger. *Vitthae* was the first to speak and it was decided they had to get a message to His Majesty the King. They would send a monk to meet with the King’s escort at the Thai/Cambodian border town of *Pong-nam-rom* at a pre-arranged time tomorrow and relay what had happened. The wise King would decide what to do.

Cenat, the youngest of the elder monks, was chosen to make the arduous trek through the jungle. As a young man, the trek usually took twelve to fourteen hours, but he had not made the journey for many years. Now in his seventy-fourth year, the prospect was daunting but Cenat took up the challenge with enthusiasm.

The journey through the jungle was hard for the old man and with no compass or navigational aids and no tracks or roads to follow, he relied totally on his memory and knowledge of the terrain. The trek took Cenat sixteen hours and he arrived at the meeting point at 07:30. Even though his last visit to the palace had been four years ago, the meeting point was still familiar. At a nearby food stall, the owner gave him a large bowl of *pad Thai* noodles, which he gratefully accepted. The owners of the stall had been there for many years and were expecting the monks, usually between fifty and sixty of them, never knowing where they came from. The monks would eat and, in return, bless the food stall before being taken away in large army transport trucks. The arrival of only a single monk confused them, but the owners never asked questions. Because the monks wore a red sash on their orange robes and were known to carry weapons, discretion became the better part of valour.

Three large UNIMOG army trucks came to a halt by the lone monk standing on a circular patch of earth alongside the road. The Chief of the Palace Guard, who came personally on this assignment, leapt out from the leading truck and approached Cenat.

The Chief of the Palace Guard was a position bestowed upon a high-ranking regular army officer once his active service was nearing an end. Holding no

official army rank because the duties were only at the palace, he did, however, have the power to mobilise the entire Thai army if necessary in order to protect the King. *Khun Taksin Sawaldee* was a retired army Lieutenant Colonel and had held the title for eight years. It was an envious position and he and his family loved the high living at the palace and enjoyed the trappings of power which came with the job.

Taksin listened to Cenat intently, formulating the next course of action. He would have to inform the King, but first had to secure the area until they could gather all the facts. Who could have done such a terrible act and why?

He used his mobile phone to call the nearest army garrison in Pong-nam-rom. It was his old infantry command and his replacement was a good friend and excellent soldier. His request to send five of his best infantry soldiers to his position was met with immediate compliance. He strode over to the second troop carrier and spoke to the lieutenant sitting in the passenger seat. The lieutenant got on his radio to signal the drivers of the troop carriers to start their V8 engines. In a synchronised movement the drivers turned their vehicles around and headed off back along the motorway towards Bangkok.

Taksin stayed with Cenat. He could see that the old monk looked weary but there was a look in his eye that he could only interpret as pure rage. Taksin explained he would send the infantrymen back to the village with Cenat and then mobilise more forces and an inquiry team to find who had committed this sin. He removed a pad from his pocket and with pen in hand asked directions to the village. The old monk glared at him

and spoke in his ancient Siamese dialect, but realising Taksin did not understand, quickly reverted to Thai language.

“That won’t be necessary. I will escort your soldiers and we will do any inquiry, and report directly to the King.”

Taksin knew the fearsome reputation of his charges and nodded. They can do their investigation and I will do mine, he thought. He gave Cenat his card with his mobile telephone number. He knew most of the monks would have never seen a phone, let alone knew how to use one, but it seemed to be only thing he could think of doing while they waited for the soldiers. Not another word was spoken between them.

Twenty minutes later, five non-commissioned officers; one Master Sergeant, one Sergeant and three Corporals; pulled up in two camouflaged army jeeps. The Master Sergeant leapt out of the lead jeep, snapped to attention, saluted Taksin and reported their names and readiness to serve. Taksin returned the salute and informed the sergeant he wanted him and his men to go to the village with Cenat and assess the situation, make the area secure and report back to him, and only him. The sergeant returned to the jeep and gave instructions to the men. They then filed into the second jeep leaving Taksin with one jeep for his own use. They bunched up in the jeep to make room for Cenat. Taksin turned to face Cenat, giving him a long respectful *wai*. The old monk returned the *wai* and looked at the men waiting in the jeep.

“It’s this way, and a long walk. Please keep up,” he said as he turned and walked towards a field leading to

the jungle-covered hills. The five soldiers scrambled out of the jeep and ran to catch up to him.

The trek through the hills was gruelling for the young soldiers. They were trained in the jungle and had done many combat simulations in different jungle terrain against an invisible enemy, but nothing had prepared them for this. It was now dark and the moon, hidden by the tree canopy, was not even visible. In the pitch blackness, they tied themselves together with vine and, although it was attached to the monk, no-one could see what lurked underfoot. Even carrying their 9mm Browning service revolvers and one portable GPS monitor with location tracker, they still felt terrified. The elderly monk never spoke, and although the many biting insects attacked the soldiers relentlessly, the old monk never appeared to be touched. The soldiers were not prepared for this as they hadn't brought any rations. After ten hours of rapidly stomping through mud, over rocks, and trying to avoid walking into trees, a young Corporal collapsed. The other soldiers rallied around him. The old monk came over to the huddled group of soldiers and knelt down.

“OK. We will stop for a short while and eat,” he said.

Cenat stood up, untied himself and walked off into the darkness. Confused, the soldiers started a fire and huddled around, hot, thirsty and exhausted, they chatted about the day's events. Almost an hour later the monk returned with two small dead pythons around his neck, a bunch of bananas, several coconuts and a bag made from banana leaves. The old monk just seemed to appear by the fire, making the soldiers nervous. Who was this strange monk, they thought. Cenat prepared

and cooked the snakes; they drank the coconut milk and ate its milky flesh. As they were eating the bananas, the old monk opened the bag spilling the contents in front of the soldiers. He laid several unfamiliar fruits and some banana leaf packages and peeled back the leaves to reveal a paste. He told them to rub the foul smelling paste on their uncovered areas, their face and hands, informing them it would keep the insects away and relieve the stings and bites already received. While the soldiers complied, the monk split open the fruits which had a sickly sweet aroma. Cenat then took a white poppy pod from his tunic, opened it and crushed the seeds between two stones and sprinkled the powder over the open fruits. He gave the soldiers half each saying "Eat this. It will give you power and dull any pain."

He then tied himself back to the soldiers and waited until the last one had eaten his fruit.

"Come on, we still have a way to go."

"How long?" asked one of the weary soldiers.

"Oh, we are well over halfway," replied Cenat as he turned and walked off in the lead.

Pon was still drifting in and out of consciousness, his chest felt on fire with every breath. Vitthae stayed at his bedside most of the time and the young monks came in to administer herbal medicines prepared by the elder monks. On one occasion while he was awake, Pon told Vitthae what he had witnessed in the temple and about the other hooded monk next to the statue. He explained how the incense sticks flared up, the strange aroma, and how he filtered some of the gas with his tunic, before running out. Then he fell silent, stared at the ceiling, and whispered, "I am shamed master. I have

to retrieve the holy relic and avenge my brothers,” before lapsing back into a deep sleep.

Vitchae was confused. How was somebody able to get past the Tinju so easily and wipe out the most diligent warriors in the kingdom? And for what reason? Who could have possibly known so much about the whereabouts of Salaburi, the layout of the temple, the holy relic’s location and the timing of the ceremony? Only the monks and very few of the villagers knew this. He reached down and found the forehead of the sleeping Pon. Resting his hand on Pon’s head, he looked down towards his hand and, in his dark world, muttered; “Don’t be ashamed for living, young Pon. You are our only warrior left, our only hope for the survival of our creed and culture. You will deal our vengeance. Of that I am sure.”

The old man then started chanting a prayer to Buddha for strength for Pon. He knew ‘an eye for an eye’ was not the Buddhist way but they are Buddha’s warriors and greed, he was sure, played a part in this crime.

Cenat and the soldiers arrived at the village in the early hours of the morning. It had taken them eighteen hours to trek through the hostile terrain and they were tired, hungry and sore. Cenat took them straight to the monk’s quarters which were not usually open for outsiders, but these were exceptional circumstances and no other places were yet available. He woke two young monks and gave instructions to feed the soldiers. With his old bones aching and his body crying out for rest, he then went to Pon’s sick bed, knowing he would find Vitchae there. Cenat had been trekking for nearly two days but he had a duty, and a Tinju never rested until

that duty had been fulfilled. He entered Pon's sickbay. Vitchae was sat crossed legged beside the sleeping Pon on his thin mattress. Vitchae's eyes were open and staring straight ahead. Unsure of whether he was asleep or awake, Cenat gave a respectful wai to the old master. Vitchae felt Cenat's presence and returned the wai. Cenat sat beside Vitchae, taking up the same cross-legged position.

Cenat enquired about Pon and was relieved to hear he would be fine once the poison had been expelled from his system. He informed him of his meeting with Taksin, the arrival of the soldiers and the fact the King had been informed.

"Good," said the elder monk. "You have done well, my old friend. This duty is concluded so now go and rest."

Cenat headed to where he had left the soldiers. They were all huddled in a group sound asleep and the food they had been served remained untouched on the large dried banana leaf woven mat in front of them. Cenat sat down and ate.

The Master Sergeant awoke around four hours later and looked around at his surroundings now illuminated by daylight. He woke his men who slowly arose and also surveyed the room. Two of the younger monks were sitting cross-legged, deep in meditation, behind the soldiers. When they became aware that the soldiers were awake, one boy got up, and slowly and silently slipped out of the room. The other boy monk wai-ed the group and pointed to the food covered by a *fashee*, a wicker dome used to keep insects off, on the mat. "Please eat. We shall bring some fruit and water." They

returned the wai, removed the fashee and heartily tucked in.

Once they had eaten, the soldiers left the quarters and went outside into the hot, humid grounds of the Wat. The villagers and the monks was already busy fetching large blue brittle rocks and what appeared to be white charcoal. The monks crushed this to powder form and mixed it with other powders and a thick, sticky, amber liquid. The soldiers, not quite sure what they was to do, wandered aimlessly around the village for several hours until Cenat retrieved them and put them to work with a carpenter making what looked like canoes from cut down trees.

Fifty-nine large bundles laid out in a line along the back of the Wat were wrapped in some sort of cloth, giving out a pungent odour which made the soldiers gag. Fifty-eight bodies had been recovered from the temple whilst Cenat was away. Another body was later found unceremoniously dumped behind some rocks several metres from the cave's mouth. The remaining monks gathered around their fallen brother. They had all seen the 5mm puncture-mark the dead monk had at the back of his neck and they all knew the cause of this.

“You know what this means,” said Vitthae to the elders. They all nodded in unison.

A long curved spike with eight slits around the point and a carved wood handle, a *Pitou*, would be inserted into the back of the neck, pierce the base of the skull and into the Medulla Oblongata, the part of the brain which controls all major bodily functions, including breathing and heartbeat. Once it had reached its target, the bearer would press a catch on the handle and eight blades would spring out of the slits. With a

quick twist, the medulla oblongata would be turned to mush and death would be instant. Once the catch was released, the blades would spring back and the Pitou could easily be removed. Using one hand to cover the victim's mouth and one hand to operate the Pitou, it was a silent and devastatingly efficient weapon. It was exclusively a Tinju weapon, and their preferred method to dispatch their duties off to the afterlife. So now Vitthae not only knew how the perpetrator got in, but also thought he knew who it could be. He would follow this up after seeing his fallen brothers safely on their way to Nirvana. The dead monk was swathed and placed with the others.

The monks, villagers and soldiers worked long into the night on their appointed tasks. At twilight of the third day they all gathered at the rear of the Wat, on the large area the monks used for combat training and as general meeting place for the village. Pon had joined the remaining fifteen monks. Although still weak, he had to see his brothers off on their last journey.

A very long marble altar stood about four feet off the ground in the centre of the area. On the table lay fifty-nine of the canoe-type containers, all lined with hammered gold obtained from within the mountains. All the canoes contained a body swathed in a hessian cloth and coated with the pungent paste. They were covered with hardened blue-white clay, wrapped in banana leaves and coated in a thick syrupy substance which was then smeared over the top. The sixteen remaining monks, all in ceremonial robes, stood behind the large rapidly constructed altar, facing the kneeling villagers and soldiers and chanting from the Holy Scriptures. Cenat had previously warned the soldiers to keep their

heads bowed well below the altar. They had asked Cenat many questions to which he only replied, “that is our way”, and when asked what the substance was, he just said it’s called *wharm lorn* [sunblaze].

The twilight was giving way to darkness, the chanting stopped and two young monks lit the coffins starting from the left.

Each ignited immediately, and vivid orange and yellow flames filled the night air. Within a few seconds the flames turned blue and the monks, villagers and soldiers, assumed a prostrate position, their heads lower than the altar. The flames glowed white for just a split second then whoosh! A column of white light as bright and as hot as the sun shot into the night sky before the silence and blackness of the night returned.

They all remained silent for several moments. Vitthae got to his feet first, beckoning everyone to rise. It was over, and the smell of scorched wood filled their nostrils. All that remained on the altar were fifty-nine glowing blobs of gold. Tomorrow they would be taken to the sacred burial site but for now the monks would meditate and reflect on their own. The villagers and soldiers would party and celebrate the Holy one’s lives.

Pon was feeling much stronger now. He had been given medicinal herbs and King Cobra liver and had regained most of his strength. It had been five days since that terrible day. He knew if he was going to catch the culprit and avenge his brothers he would have to leave soon, although he did not yet know who he was chasing. At Cenat’s suggestion, he had traded a gold nugget with the Buddha’s image intricately carved on it for a mobile phone belonging to one of the soldiers. The young corporal thought he had made a good trade. This

must be worth a fortune, he thought, that is if we ever get out of here. The soldier taught Pon how to use the phone but as there was no signal in this area, he could only pretend. Pon thought he had the gist of his new tool and Cenat had given him Taksin's card. This was a start, he thought.

He had a large cloth hold-all containing some dried food, liquids, edible roots and leaves, some small round clay containers of various powders including sunblaze, his tinderbox, sharpening and carving tools, his new mobile phone, and his 'ornaments'. Laid out beside him was his *glave*, a small double-bladed weapon with each blade crescent shaped and razor sharp. At the centre, the handle was wrapped with cotton making it the same thickness as the blades. This could be used like a dagger to slash or stab and could also be thrown. It would cut through the air like a disc and was very deadly, very accurate. His sword resembled a Samurai sword. Seven inches of the rear side were serrated and used when hunting, for sawing through animal bone and cutting up the carcass for easy transport. It had a hollow handle with a skilfully engraved tight-fitting flip top which contained his pitou.

Pon was sitting down meditating. He had listened to Vitthae telling him of his suspicion, but as the old master had told him, it was only a suspicion. He had no firm proof. Pon was confused and asking Buddha for guidance. Who did this, and why? From Vitthae he had already learned how and, in a few moments, he would also learn who.

Vitthae entered and came over to the sitting Pon. The old lady from the village following him shocked Pon. Villagers, especially women, were not allowed in

here. It must be important, he thought. Vitchae introduced the woman as Banti Meesilli. Pon recognised her from his morning pilgrimages around the village, when he and the other monks went acquiring food, a ritual to learn humility. The villagers were happy to give food in return for a blessing.

The pair sat down in front of Pon and Vitchae encouraged Banti to tell Pon about her son. She tearfully explained that eight years ago her youngest son had gone into the jungle to hunt and never returned. She had always feared he had been killed and eaten by wild tigers which still inhabited the jungle. But everyone knew these were shy creatures. As a result of many run-ins with the village inhabitants, especially the orange-robed ones, the tigers always came off second best and ended up as food, so their survival instincts passed down throughout the generations had told them avoid man. With tears in her eyes, she told Pon of her young son's bravery and skill as a hunter and her pride at her eldest son being a Tinju, although Pon and Banti was unsure which monk was her son, as only the Prime Master and a few elder monks knew which family the monks was taken from. She went on to explain her youngest son was very close to a Tinju named Jinn who, at four years his senior, was the right age to be his brother. They could all feel a bond with Jinn who she was convinced was her eldest son. She handed Pon a charcoal drawing of her youngest son.

"This is him. This was my beloved Dam. He was only seventeen at the time. May Buddha take care of him and his brother Jinn who has been murdered here," said the woman through tears flowing from her sad old eyes. Vitchae and the old woman stood up, and she *wai-*

ed them both. “Now I have lost both my sons. Please find who is responsible. I beg you.”

She left the room, leaving her drawing in the hands of Pon. He had a strange feeling about this woman. With Banti gone, Pon looked at Vitthae who had sat down again.

“Master, I don’t understand. What has this woman’s dead sons to do with this?”

Vitthae responded by saying, “Her son went into the jungle and never returned. He is the only person in Salaburi to ever have been left unaccounted during my lifetime. Monks left occasionally to undertake a duty or go on the great journey, but only for some days or weeks. I knew young Dam. He was a strong boy and extremely well taught in the way of the Tinju. And,” continued the old master, “I spoke to Dam two days prior to his disappearance. Our conversation did not end well. He is the ‘who’ and of that I am sure.”

Pon thought for a moment. He vaguely remembered this lad who always hung around the temple and the combat grounds. He remembered thinking at the time, why is a villager allowed so much freedom around the holy temple. He came to know Jinn well. They were almost the same age. Pon knew how much Jinn had grieved for his brother after Dam’s disappearance was announced. They had been inseparable. Pon folded the drawing of Dam and placed it in his bag.

“Master, now I must leave,” said Pon, feeling he now had a direction.

“Yes, young warrior, and may Buddha protect you,” replied Vitthae.



– Chapter Three –

The three lads pulled up in a taxi outside the reception of a large hotel. The two-hour journey from Bangkok airport allowed Stu and Spock to take in all the sights. The modern buildings and motorways of the sprawling Bangkok metropolis surprised them. This was not the dirt tracks and wooden huts they expected. What an eye opener. Pattaya had the same effect, driving down streets lined with hotels, restaurants, and large shops and to their relief, *McDonalds* and *KFC*.

They checked into the Siam Sawadsee Hotel. Stu and Spock could not believe the price was only 450 Baht a night, which they calculated to be only 7 pounds sterling. They made their way to their rooms, which was located on the third floor.

The large rooms contained a large Queen size bed, a wardrobe, dressing and bedside tables, large television and a small fridge stocked with beer, soft drinks and bottled water. There was a small en-suite bathroom with a toilet, basin, shower and small hose with a nozzle at the side of the toilet. This was a sort of portable bidet firing a strong jet of water. Aqueous toilet roll, thought Spock.

A patio door led out onto a small balcony and Nick, having the corner room, had a small opening window

behind his door. The instruction from Nick was, “quick shit, shower, shave, shampoo and out.”

It was past eight o'clock and although jetlagged from the long journey, Spock and Stu wanted to see this place that was known as 'Sin City.'

Nick explained the streets joined or branched off the main roads are known as *Sois*. Some were numbered and some named. They were going to *Soi* 6. Nick informed them this was a 'short time Soi'.

“Great,” said Stu not knowing what the hell he was talking about. They walked out of the hotel and got on a Baht bus, one of the hundreds of small covered pick-up trucks that circled the city's one-way traffic system. Stu and Spock noticed that all the way to Soi 6 there was many bars, loud music, a lot of screaming, a lot of noise, people dancing, waving and having a whale of a time.

Soi 6 joins Second Road to the beach road and it is lined with small and large air-conditioned bars on both sides. Each bar has its windows covered by signs or dark glass making it impossible to see inside. Young, scantily clad ladies sit in groups outside the bars, chatting and fixing their makeup, like a group of muggers waiting for a victim.

The lads paid the Baht-bus fare and went into the first bar, which was on the corner of the Soi. The ladies sitting outside leapt up, surrounded them and dragged them inside, in the nicest possible way.

The inside of the bar was dimly lit and the lads were shown over to an L-shaped sofa. They sat down and ordered three bottles of *Singha* beer, the local Thai brew, slightly sweet and with a hint of nut in flavour, but a lot stronger than most European beers.

There were other figures in the bar sitting on sofas and the noise of people chatting and laughing eased Stu and Spock's mind. 'We're not going to get murdered,' they thought. Their beer was fetched over by a young lady, followed by two equally scantily dressed ladies. One lady sat next to Nick, the other two sat either side of Stu and Spock, who was sitting close together like two Catholic nuns at a rugby team party. They had a mortal fear of getting stitched up with a *katoey* [ladyboy]. They had heard the stories from their mates at home who had been to Thailand. They had heard from someone, who knew someone, whose mate's brother had 'mistakenly' been hitched up with a *katoey*.

"Make sure you check their feet size; check for an Adam's apple; check between their legs, before you go anywhere near any of those girls," they were told. This had played on their mind, more so now that they were actually in the situation, even though Nick tried to reassure them the stories were untrue.

"What a load of bollocks," he would say.

Still unsure, Stu ignored the two girls and turned to Nick. "Is this a brothel, mate?"

It amused Nick to observe these Pattaya virgins in action. He remembered his first time here and knew he was the same.

"No mate, not exactly," he mused. He then leaned over and said something to the lady who was sitting next to Stu. With a look of annoyance and disbelief, she looked at Stu, stood up and lifted her short skirt to reveal her bare pubic region.

"Me not ladyboy. Me lady. Sure!"

This came as a shock to both Stu and Spock, as flashes of Mary Tate went through both their minds.

The lady then spent the next few moments convincing them that she was indeed a lady. Ten minutes later, thoroughly reassured and enjoying their ice-cold beers, Stu turned to face Spock who had a stupid, dopey contented grin on his face.

“What an amazing little place,” he said, looking down between his legs at his naked mid section and noting the oral dexterity of his temporary but amenable new friend.

“Yeaah!” replied a totally chilled out Spock looking down at his own, very much smaller sack-emptier doing her thing. Very expertly, he thought. All memory of Mary Tate had disappeared.

Several beers later, after the girls had finished giving relief to the three grateful lads and had been given their reward for their services, namely 500 *Baht* and a few glasses of overpriced wine cooler, the lads decided it was time to move on. They paid their bill and, with Nick mumbling about the price of the ladies drinks, strolled out into the hot night. Sacks empty, spinning heads and slightly juiced, they made their way down *Soi 6*. They ran the gauntlet of ladies jumping off their seats and screaming at them to come into their bars and informing them they are sexy men and fondling their now empty sacks and todgers. They resisted further temptation and got on a *Baht* bus at Beach Road.

“Where next matey?” enquired Spock.

“*Soi 8*,” Nick replied.

“What’s there?” asked Stu.

“Wait and see,” replied Nick. “We don’t sleep alone in Thailand.”

Soi 8 was alive and buzzing with life. Music blared out from the many open-air bars with every bar trying to out-volume the others. Only a musical garbled audio mess could be heard, one bar playing the *Eagles*, one bar playing the *Scorpions*. But that only contributed to the lively atmosphere of Soi 8. Girls were screeching at passing customers to ‘come inside please’. The occasional bell was heard ringing at various bars, much to the delight of the ladies who worked there. That meant they would be getting a free drink and the bar was making money. Lights were flashing. Street vendors selling everything from chewing gum to fake watches were flitting from bar to bar, trying to sell their wares to any drunken foreigner. Egged on by the girls to “buy me this darling,” the customer would be promised undying everlasting love. At least till his money ran out.

The atmosphere at Soi 8 was indescribable. Young men, old men with big beaming smiles sat at the bars playing bar games, connect four, Genga, swallow the sausage. Occasionally a crash of wood was heard as some foreigner had lost, yet again, and he had to buy a drink or ring the bell. An occasional holiday couple walked past, the husband’s head bent down looking at the floor while his wife’s head glared at her husband to ensure he wasn’t peeking at the girls. No matter who was there, the tourist was always treated the same, with respect and fun. After all, they were paying and here money is number one.

The lads positioned themselves at one of Nick’s regular bars. He said hello to *Wan*, the *mamasan* and bar manager. He introduced Stu and Spock who could only manage a grunt, as they tried to take in the never

before experienced sights and sounds. Wan gave instructions to two ladies who promptly went to a large freezer and removed two small packages. They went over to Stu and Spock, popped open the *pah yen* [cold towel] and proceeded to rub the ice-cold towel over Stu and Spock's neck and arms. The two lads cooed with satisfaction, as the heat was intense for them, even at night. Never this hot in Cleethorpes. They weren't prepared for Thailand's heat and, in their jeans and shirts, the *pah yen* provided a welcome relief.

Three bottles of ice-cold beer was placed in front of them along with a small wooden pot containing their bill. Another bill would be added every time they bought a drink. They thankfully took a long slow mouthful of their amber fluid, followed rapidly by several more. They bought drinks for the two girls who had wiped them down and while Nick conversed with the mamasan the two lads made small talk with their newly acquired companions. Speaking Pidgin English, with the odd Thai phrase thrown in, Spock and Stu listened to Nick who seemed to be speaking the same way with certain Thai phrases repeated. This, they decided, was not difficult to understand, and they could therefore have a limited conversation. Mostly, the ladies enquired, where they came from, how long they was staying and did they have ladies yet? The ladies seemed to show more interest when the two lads said they did not have ladies yet. However, they became disappointed when the lady with Spock asked, "I go with you sexy man?"

Spock towered over the lady by at least two feet but still she was undaunted. Spock, not quite at grasps with

this meaning, replied, “I don’t think we are leaving yet, love.”

At that point, the woman said something to her friend in a raised voice and they promptly got off the stools and went over to talk to another older foreigner who had been sitting at the opposite side of the bar. This was much to the merriment of Nick who had been earwiggling in on this exchange.

It was just after the girls left that Spock decided he would do one of his ‘party pieces’ and, as his dentures would not fit in a bottle, it was the ‘flaming arsehole’ that would make its debut. He got off his stool, went to a small wicker armchair, sat down, lifted his legs either side of his waist, took his lighter and held it at his sphincter to await the arrival of its methane fuel. Right on cue a bright blue flame shot out from his anal sphincter, followed a second later by a shorter flame. A good result, he thought, a ‘double bubble’. The people at the bar and several others in the nearby vicinity were in uproar, clapping excitedly and asking for one more performance. Spock took a bow and walked back to his stool, laughter still echoing around the area. He had attracted several more ladies around him and, with Stu, looked liked a couple of cats who had got the cream.

Nick, sitting at his stool, decided that he could do that and these new upstarts weren’t going to upstage him at his regular drinking hole. He went over to the wicker chair previously occupied by Spock. The bar fell silent as all eyes turned toward Nick. Adopting the same position as Spock, he held a lighter in place straining his bowels and distorted his facial muscles for extra power, making him look like a clay gargoyle. He felt the twinges of pressure, here it comes, and a short

blue flame rushed out from his sphincter, followed by a yellow fire which rapidly increased in size around his now burning shorts.

Stu turned to face Spock. "Maybe not a good trick to try in nylon shorts," he stated coolly. They both fell about laughing whilst Nick jumped around like a headless chicken trying to extinguish his shorts, assisted by genuinely concerned bar girls. After a few minutes the commotion calmed down, with just the odd sporadic chortle from Stu and Spock. Nick was standing next to them at the bar, a bag of ice held to his bottom by a small motherly girl. He occasionally winced as the bag moved position to give the lady's arm a rest.

Several more beers were consumed, a 'spannered' state was rapidly being reached and it was getting late. Although the tiredness had worn off, the lads thought they had had too much excitement for one night and they thought Nick would want to go back to the hotel. On the contrary, according to Nick, the night was just beginning. Once the girl he had sent to buy him replacement shorts at the market returned a few minutes later, Nick dismissed his Florence Nightingale and announced they were moving on. Nick counted his change and gave the girl a twenty Baht tip, which she gratefully accepted. "That's not a lot for a tip," said Stu. The mamasan also spoke up.

"Nick *kee-neow*." [Cheap Charlie].

They paid their bill and Stu and Spock left a 100 Baht tip.

"You'll learn," said Nick as they headed off up Soi 8 to join Second Road.

As they walked along against the flow of traffic, the city was still alive with merriment and noise, and it

seemed every bar was having a party. In fact, the whole city seemed just like one big marvellous party. This, thought the lads, is heaven and puts the tourist resorts in Europe to shame. They bought some food at one of the many barbecue stands en-route, and walked along happily champing on small bits of sweet pork, onion peppers and green chillies on wooden skewers. They ate sweet banana pancakes cooked at another street stand and, with the food in their stomach, were steadily sobering up. Spock and Stu was getting their second wind and having fun, walking past the many sporadic outcrops of bars and having the touts latching onto them, trying to drag them in to have fun.

“Buy one drink, just one please, sexy man,” pleaded the girls, followed by the grabbing of an appendage. It amused Nick and Stu to observe an eight stone lady trying to move a twenty stone Spock.

They arrived at their destination, a small bar amongst several others situated on the ground floor of a row of four-storey buildings. These bars are more subdued than the hectic Soi 8. About ten girls sat behind the bar and another ten sat on stools in front laughing and joking with customers, or playing bar games with their new beaus. The three entered and although Nick’s sphincter was still throbbing, it had eased enough for him to sit on a barstool. They ordered their beer and Nick introduced Spock and Stu to the bar owner, a middle aged Thai man known as Charlie. Although not his real name, he thought it sounded more foreigner friendly. Nick explained they would have a few quiet drinks and then move on to a go-go bar he liked for an hour before the bars officially closed at 1am.

“But,” added Charlie with an impish look in his eye, “some bars still stay open after hours.”

Chatting with Charlie, the two newcomers asked many questions. Charlie’s wife came over. Although slightly older than the other ladies present, the years had been kind to her. Well into her forties, she still had her youthful looks, and they could tell she must have been an absolute stunning lady in her younger years. *I’d shag it*, thought Stu now feeling ready for more action.

“Would you like to take a lady to sleep with you tonight?” she asked, looking to the two boys. Well, thought Spock, nothing like being forward. Spock and Stu giggled nervously.

“We are ok, thanks,” replied Stu. The conversation ebbed and Stu started looking around at the previously ignored girls around the bar. They all seemed sensibly dressed, some in jeans and blouses and some wearing dresses. Compared with Soi’s 6 and 8, these seemed very plain. Stu noticed a girl sitting behind the bar reading a book which looked like a dictionary. She noticed Stu looking and smiled. Then she held up her *English/Thai for Beginners* so he could see it. Stu smiled back and she returned to her reading. Stu felt a little awkward but tapped Charlie’s wife on the shoulder.

“What’s that girl’s name?” he stammered.

“*Dao*,” replied Charlie’s wife smiling. “She is a good lady, only worked in bar 3 weeks. Do you want me to have her sit with you?”

“No, no. I was only asking,” Stu blushed.

“Are you sure?” she asked again.

“Yes, thanks. I think we are going now.” Stu took note of the sign behind the bar. ‘HAPPY WORLD

BAR'. The lads left the bar and walked down Soi 13, to Beach Road and jumped onto a Baht bus. Getting off at Walking Street, they walked about a third of the way along until they reached 'Champion a go-go'.

Passing a small beer bar, among the smiling girls an older but attractive lady shouted "hello" to Nick who boasted, "I've done her. Sturdy old tug but a good shag."

A very sexy young lady dressed in a white thong, small white bra and knee length black boots held the door to Champion open for them. "Welcome," she cheerily shrilled. "Would you like some drink?"

The long raised stage comprised five chrome poles all set at various distances apart. As *Guns and Roses* blasted out 'Sweet Child o' Mine', five girls danced and swayed around the poles, occasionally crouching down with legs opening and closing like a goldfish's mouth. They were all dressed the same as the girl who had opened the door and welcomed them, although some had removed their thongs and had them twirling around in their hands.

After downing several glasses of draft *Singha* and watching the acrobatics of the ever-alternating ladies of the pole, there was a returned vigour to their loins. Nick had explained his routine for taking girls back to the hotel. Pay the bar fine, take the lady to your room, do the business then, in the morning give them 500 Baht, although they will ask for 1,000 Baht. Give them 500 Baht unless they quote you a price prior to you taking them.

This was alien to Stu and Spock, but if this was the time old method, then who are they to argue with tradition. And besides, they were horny again. Spock

had noticed Stu was not his usual self, although he looked at the chrome pole molesters his mind seemed to be somewhere else. He just put this down to tiredness and hoped his old mate would be ok tomorrow. They were spannered and rapidly moving toward shitfaced. With speech slurred, they burred on about nothing. Spock occasionally grabbed a passing dancer and played with her breasts, but he did buy her a drink as a reward. The girls didn't flinch, hoping they might hook him in and get a short time, [quick shag] and 1,000 Baht.

They decided that time was pressing on and it was time to move on before the bars closed. They walked into the small bar outside, sat down and ordered more drinks. They seemed to be finishing their drinks a lot quicker and, not being used to the strength of Thai beer plus the long session, had reached 'wankered' stage. Spock was trying to speak to the lady 'Nick had done' who had gone from a 'sturdy old tug' to a raving beauty in Spock's mind. Nick was drooling over another lady who just seemed to smile and nod. Spock looked up and when his eyes centred from the spinning room asked, "Where's Stu?"

Nick turned his head away from his sodden companion. "He was here a minute ago. I don't know."

They remained concerned for all of ten seconds before resuming their drunken mating rituals. Stu and Spock had each taken a name card from the hotel and had been given instructions to follow if they separated; give the card to a motorbike taxi driver and he would get them back to the hotel.

Spock was the first awake. With a belch and a fart he rejoined the living and checked his watch. It was

three-thirty in the afternoon. He had changed his timepiece to local time, but he could not have slept that long. His watch must be wrong. He tried to recall the events of the night before but his memory was sketchy. He remembered virtually nothing after leaving Soi 8. With a raging thirst he went over to his small fridge, took out a bottle of water and gulped the cool liquid down. He let out another rasping fart, still trying to search his memory. There came a groan from his bed followed by sound of the quilt been tossed off. ‘Oh yes!’ thought Spock vaguely regaining his faculties’ ‘I remember now!’ He looked at the smiling naked lady lying in his bed.

“*Men,*”she said.

Spock, not understanding this meant ‘bad smell’, thought it was Thai for good morning and returned the greeting, much to the confusion of *Lek*. He remembered this was the ‘sturdy old tug Nick had done’ from the previous night, but she appeared a lot less attractive than he remembered last night. He could not recall having sex, which he thought was probably better not remembered. He then remembered something about *Stu* just disappearing. He pulled on his jeans, walked out of his room and banged on the door to the adjacent room. “*Stu!* Are you ok mate?”

A mumbled groan came from behind the door. “Yes, mate. I feel a bit rough though.”

“Me too,” said Spock through the door. “I’m going back to my room. See you later.”

Spock returned to his room, and closed the door. *Lek* was lying naked on the bed and Spock noticed she had a few stretch marks around the abdomen. Because he couldn’t recall having sex the previous night, he

decided it would be a shame to let the twinge that he now felt in his todger go to waste. He took out his condoms from his bedside table and presented them to Lek. She slid over to the standing Spock and rolled the condom over his manhood. She then placed the wrapped package in her mouth.

Stu was awake, but only just. His head throbbed; his mouth was as dry as the bottom of a birdcage and, as he looked around, recognized this wasn't his house. Where was his shabby wallpaper? Where was chunky? He then came to his senses and remembered where he was and what he was doing there. He could not, however, remember what happened last night. He recalled being in Happy World Bar and then going to a go-go bar, but everything else was just a blank. He checked his watch. It was three thirty-eight, which can't be right, he thought. He became aware of something in the bed with him and turned to see a figure huddled under the quilt with their back turned. 'Oh no!' he thought, 'what did I do?' He gingerly pulled the light quilt off the figure, revealing a naked olive skinned back. The figure moved and turned around to face Stu. He looked at the face in front of him, looked down the body, pert breasts with small pink brown nipples, small juicy raspberries. Stu had never seen anything so lovely. A small black-haired triangle delicately nestled between crossed over legs. He stared at her face. He had never seen an angel up close before but he remembered seeing this one last night. He thought about the film 'The Godfather' and how Michael Corleone got the 'thunderbolt' when he met his Italian sweetheart. He had never experienced this before, but had it now, even though Nick's words of wisdom still rang in his ears:

‘Don’t fall in love’. He knew where he had seen her but could not recall when or how she had ended up here. He was ‘wankered’ last night for sure. Although his head still throbbed, he was glad to be in this wonderland and as happy as a pig in shit to be right here, right now. The slumbering figure opened her big brown eyes, looked at Stu and smiled.

“Good morning, *pompui*.”

Although Stu thought this was a nickname given to tourists, he later found out it affectionately meant ‘fatty’. He stared at this lovely lady and replied, “Good morning, *Dao*.”



– Chapter Four –

Although Thai people have forenames and surnames, their family also gives them nicknames at a very young age. These names are chosen, usually by circumstances. For example, if it was raining when they are born, their nickname could be *Phon* meaning ‘falling rain’. If they are small, *Noi* or *Lek*, meaning ‘small’ or ‘little’ could be used. They could also use a portion of their first name if it had a meaning. *Duengdao*, for example, could be shortened to *Dao*, meaning ‘Star’. They tend to use and are known by these usually short nicknames as opposed to long actual names throughout their lives, but sometimes revert to their real names when they reach middle age or obtain a higher status.

The word *Khun*, literally meaning ‘person’, can be used preceding someone’s name, similar to the use of Mr. or Mrs.

Khun Somsak Meesilli, nicknamed *Dam* [black], was now twenty-five years old and sitting crossed legged on the back of an open Toyota Hilux pick-up truck. He had donned his monk’s robes in order to get a ride easier. The truck was heading east to Phnom Penh, the capital city of Cambodia. *Dam* had been trekking through jungle and mountains for four days and had made his way to a minor road where he hitched a lift from a passing Cambodian market trader. The trader

was surprised at seeing a monk in the middle of nowhere, especially one whose robes were the Thai Buddhist colour. Cambodian monk's robes are a very dark shade of orange, almost brown. Thai monks, he thought, rarely ventured over the border.

Dam wanted to go home. He had lived with his benefactor and guardian, an Irishman named Andrew Towhee, for seven years now. They lived in Caw Kong, a small town twelve kilometres from Phnom Penh. He lived in a large, luxurious bungalow with Towhee and Miguel, a Spaniard who had come to Cambodia with Towhee many years before. Dam's life was good. He had money in his pocket, ate well, drank well, had his own transport and had many ladies. He was far better off than the majority of his countrymen. And all he had to do was the occasional 'favour' for his good friend Andrew. Besides, most of the people he killed deserved it. He was pleased, when Andrew had given this 'favour' to perform, and was happy, that after telling Andrew about the holy relic many years ago, his guardian had found a buyer, who, he stated, owned a museum so it would benefit all mankind. This he thought, must be fact as even Miguel smiled while the story was being related. Dam tapped at a small hard package in his robe pocket. He thought about 'Jinn' and how he watched him die in the smoke filled temple. He felt a twinge of remorse, "sorry my brother" he said out loud. The sadness soon left him as his thoughts drifted back further to his youth in the village of Salaburi.

Dam was born and raised in Salaburi. His 'marw', mother, had told him at a very early age, his older brother had been taken to be a Tinju. Although sad that

he would be an only son, he had his two slightly older sisters.

Dam was a small child and very dark skinned compared to most of the other villagers, hence his nickname. And as an inquisitive child he would often wander around the temple and watch the other monks in their combat training. He was very much a loner, preferring to watch the monks and explore and discover secret little places around the temple. One day when Dam was only seven years old, he was exploring the small mountainous hills at the side of the temple when he made his way around some rocks and noticed a cave. At the mouth of the cave stood two hooded monks with bows slung over their shoulders, they stood in front of a large Golden Gate. The guards, on hearing him scrambling over the rocks and breaking some twigs on a nearby bush, immediately swung their bows into a firing position and as quick as a lightning strike removed an arrow from their quivers and pointed the deadly weapon at Dam, who froze in his tracks. The two monks recognised him as a village boy and shouted at him to leave immediately and never return or they would kill him.

Gripped by panic and fear, the young boy turned on his tracks and scrambling and stumbling climbed back up the rocks. This cave had become his nemesis.

He was determined to be a monk and a warrior, and although his mother explained that Tinju are specially chosen, and unlike his brother he was not a reincarnation, he therefore could never be a Tinju monk. This did not stop a young determined Dam. Several years later whilst on one of his jaunts to the temple, he was mimicking some young monk's moves

with kendo sticks, he became aware of someone behind him, he spun around and faced a smiling monk, who looked around fourteen years old, about four years older than him. He stared at the monk for a few seconds and said, "Hello my name is Dam." The monk introduced himself as 'Jinn' and instantly Dam knew Jinn was his brother.

Many years had past. Although it was not the done thing to associate so closely with villagers, Vitthae, who was then Prime Master, noticing the friendship between Dam and Jinn, was not unduly concerned, after all Dam was a likeable lad and made him and the other monks laugh with his comical antics. Jinn taught Dam everything he learned, hand to hand combat and weapons and Dam was allowed on the training ground to mock fight with the other monks and although he usually got a good beating, he was undeterred. One day he would be a 'Tinju' like his big brother. He did his schooling with his brother, learning about the wisdom of Buddha. The Tinju forged their own weapons and are taught how to fold steel and mix with locally mined black iron ore, this when mixed with other metals, although had a slightly black tinge became a strong pliable material that could be easily folded and shaped. It was from this metal that they made their 'glaves' and 'swords'. The weapons are given to the novice monks at ten years old, an age they are considered ready to be able to undertake the great journey and to meet the living Buddha. These weapons are the monk's responsibility and stay with them for life. They are given unsharpened and undecorated, very plain, it would be the monk's lifelong task to keep them sharpened and maintained and it was up to them, as to

what decoration they engraved. The monk's day was full, combat and fitness training meditation and spiritual learning, at least a sixteen-hour day and Dam enjoyed every painful minute and he and Jinn became inseparable.

Several years had passed. Jinn was now seventeen, an age at which he would be eligible to take the 'trial of the warrior'.

The trial of the warrior was the hardest event in the monk's lives, it was the time they progressed from 'novice' to 'warrior' the time of becoming a man.

The trial consisted of several parts. First, a Master would start a trek toward Pong-nam-rom, he would be given a two-hour head start, which for a fit Master, this trek would take about eleven hours. The novice would then have to chase after him. When he caught up, he would engage the master in combat with a kendo stick. The novice would have to reach the master, before he reached Pong-nam-rom. This meant the Novice sprinting through the jungle for at least 20km. If the Master reached Pong-nam-rom before being caught or the novice proved unworthy in combat, the novice would fail. He would then have to re-do the test the next day and every day after, until he succeeded. When the novice was successful, he would return to the village, were an assault course would be rigged, the novice armed with his sword, would have to navigate the course, chopping several obstacles on the way from a water melon to chunks of soft rock, this he did blindfolded. This tested his weapons effectiveness and maintenance. He then had to shoot an arrow into a target 20 yards away, the target being an orange. And

the final test armed only with his Glave he had to survive in the jungle for six days.

This was the moment Jinn and every other monk trained for and he was ready.

Now was the first day of his trial. 'Khun Lignet' had gone off through the jungle two hours previously, the other monks lined up in the combat area, and stood in silent prayer. Vitchae was with Jinn, his hand on the young monk's head chanting for strength for Jinn. He then removed his hand "let the trial begin".

Jinn Wai'd the 'Prime Master', and took off into the jungle. He had only just entered the jungle, when he heard a sound from his left side, he spun around swiftly, removing his kendo stick from his sheath and looked upon the smiling face of Dam

"I will run with you my brother, and hide while you beat Lignet." he laughed.

Jinn smiled, turned, and at full sprint took off with Dam not far behind.

Seven days had now past and Dam was anxious. He had seen Jinn catch and fight Lignet and return to complete his assault course, but he knew he could not go into the jungle with Jinn for his last trial, as that was forbidden. Dam was pacing up and down behind the Wat where the other monks were gathered. Then out of the jungle, in the distance he saw his brother running towards the area .The other monks formed two lines and Jinn sprinted between them to Vitchae, who stood at the head of the formation. Jinn came to a halt and 'Wai d' the Prime Master.

"Master," he said, "I have completed my task, I wish now to take my place, and to do my duty as a Warrior."

The old master turned around to a marble altar and removed a red sash, he placed it over the bowed head of Jinn, he then took Jinn's sword, Glave, Bow and Pitou, and placed them in his outstretch arms.

"You have now earned the right to wear the symbol of our creed and from this day you will hold the rank and title, Warrior."

Dam could not contain his excitement for his brother and dreamed of the day he too would stand there and receive the sash. Even though Dam had no weapons, he had carved a sword and glave from wood, and when his brother sat down and carved intricate patterns in the steel or ivory handle, Dam would mimic this in his wooden weapons. He had never seen a Pitou before and he would look at his brothers, "I will carve one later," he thought, a proud day for the young villager.

Several more years past and Jinn had learned a new skill and a new discipline, this he'd been told was a 'duty' and although the monks had only been called upon once, in the last fifty years, (That was one time to dispatch a rather nasty Japanese General. That duty was 'concluded' by a young Vitthae.) It was something they all had to know are proficient at and prepared for. Jinn had taught Dam some of the skills he had been taught and when the curious youngster had asked what the Pitou was for? He had taught him how to use one, but this he did in secret, not knowing if he was allowed to or not, but he did not see any harm, this was his after all his baby brother.

Jinn also undertook guard duty outside the cave that housed the holy relic. When Jinn was on his twelve-hour watch once every fifteen days, Dam would sneak

around to the cave and wait near Jinn. Now Jinn was a guard, Dam was no longer afraid of the cave, he had beaten his fear and although they never spoke while Jinn was on guard duty, just being near his brother made him feel safe.

Dam was coming up to his seventeenth birthday and although he was small, even by Thai standards, his small frame, like the other monks was solid muscle. He knew he was ready to take the trial of the warrior. 'Heck', he thought, I did the first parts when I was thirteen and re-run it many times since with Jinn. He knew his life would change when he became a warrior and he was ready to serve the King, Lord Buddha, Vitthae, the Tinju monks, and his beloved brother Jinn.

On the day of his seventeenth birthday, he excitedly dressed and ran straight over to the Wat. The monks were in morning meditation, he waited for them to finish and went over to Jinn, "Now," he said, "Now my brother."

Jinn got to his feet, and he and Dam went to the temple. Vitthae was kneeling in front of the statue of the smiling Buddha. Vitthae turned around as the young warrior and his familiar companion approached.

"Master," said Jinn, "My young brother would like to take the 'trial of the warrior' he is well versed in the trial and his service to our order would be invaluable, he has lived amongst us most of his life."

The old man looked down at them both, he realised then that he had made a mistake. Vitthae asked Jinn to leave the temple and beckoned Dam to sit. They both sat crossed legged on the floor, Vitthae explained how a monk was chosen, it was not something that could be earned it was a birthright, handed down through

millennia from the time of the first Tinju monks and this could not be changed by man, any man. Dam listened, his head thudding, all emotion gone and the words now coming out of Vitichae's mouth were just a garbled incoherent blur, he was no longer paying attention and was deep in his own thoughts, his own world, his own depression. Vitichae never mentioned the sacred relic, he was certain that Jinn would not have told Dam about this. He was wrong.

Vitichae finished what he was saying, concluding with, "I am sorry young Dam, but we are always here for you, your life can still be with us, that will not change."

Dam got to his feet, Wai'd the old Master and walked straight out and past a waiting Jinn. "Dam, Dam," called out Jinn, but he was ignored as the young villager strode purposefully home.

Over the next few days Dam was not seen around the temple area or the village. Jinn had been restricted to the temple, but not as a punishment. Vitichae had realised the relationship between Dam and Jinn had to ease. He had blamed himself for letting it go on this long, he had caused irreparable damage to this youngster, who should have been learning a village trade like his parents. Dam stayed in his room for two days, emerging on the third with his small home-made bow. Banti, his concerned mother, asked about his well being.

"I am fine mother," he said, "I am going into the jungle to hunt, I will be back later."

He 'sniffkissed' his mother on the forehead. She never saw her son again.

Thai people tend to put their lips and nose to a person and sniff in loudly through the nose, this is a sign of affection between Thais as opposed to a normal kiss. This is affectionately known by westerners as a 'sniffkiss'. But now with western influences they tend to kiss more the western way, but usually only in westernised tourist towns and cities like Pattaya

Dam had stayed in the jungle just walking, hunting and sleeping, but mainly thinking. He knew nobody had ever left the village before, he would clear his head and then maybe return. He was bewildered and confused, he didn't know where he was going, didn't know where he was, and with no purpose now in his life, didn't care. He had not realised during his trek, he had entered Cambodia and a terrain that had become unfamiliar to him. Eventually, he came upon a road, this confused him, he had never seen a road before, let alone this strange monster heading toward him. He crouched down back into the jungle as the monster roared past him and then came to a stop. An old man got out of the car and went over to where the now petrified Dam was cowering. The man spoke to Dam in Cambodian, a language he was familiar with. He had learnt this with Jinn, along with Thai and their usual dialect ancient Siamese. The old man led Dam and sat him in his car.

“Where are you going? Are you Ok? What are you doing way out here alone?”

Dam tried to answer the old man's questions, but he did not know where he was heading. When the old man offered him shelter at his home in Phnom Penh, Dam gratefully accepted and they drove North East toward

the capital, an eight-hour journey, Dam in wonderment at this strange machine.

The old man and his wife looked after Dam for almost a year and he soon adjusted to life in Phnom penh. Although he missed Jinn, his mother and his old lifestyle, he knew he would not return, his confusion had now turned to anger, directed at the arrogant Tinju. Dam was a skilled craftsman, but his real strength lay in his fighting abilities and he entered into, and won, many bare-fist street fights. Although not strictly legal, a blind eye was turned. These contests are brutal and often result in the death of a fighter, but Dam was good, he was Tinju trained and although he was small, his speed and strength was unseen before by any of his opponents. Although the fighters are not paid much, about five dollars a fight, dollars being the preferred payment as opposed to the Cambodian currency, the Re-al. There was big money to be made from gambling at these fixtures. Dam earned a fearful reputation and his fights are always well attended, he was a dynamic ruthless fighter and it was at one of these fights he gained the attention of Andrew Towhee, a well known arms dealer from Ireland now living in Cambodia.

Towhee had watched Dam in several fights and wanted this kid as his property, he could make a lot of money from this young warrior. Towhee went with Dam to see the old man who was taking care of him and gave him one hundred dollars and reassured the old man he would take care of him and moved Dam into his bungalow, in Caw Kong

The relationship between Towhee and Dam became like father and son. Towhee was in his early fifties and

with no family, his only companion was a weasely looking Spaniard named Miguel.

Towhee was an arms dealer, buying purloined weapons and ammunition from Cambodia and Vietnam for little money and then selling to Arab or Middle Eastern buyers making a tidy profit. He was on the run from both Spain and Ireland. He had made a fortune in his home country by selling his fathers herd of cattle many times over to gullible, but rich Irish farmers, who thought they were doing legitimate business with Towhees father on a handshake. After selling the cattle around Ireland and taking up-front payments and promising delivery dates. He then slaughtered the cattle and put on a made up EU stamp, he then sold the meat off in Europe, again for a tidy profit. He left his father to face the music, and went to Spain two million pounds richer. He had developed property in Marbella, a tourist resort in Spain, ripping people off for money on property. His favourite trick was to get his friend and minder, Miguel, to sell an apartment, then after the unsuspecting customers parted with their hard earned cash, Towhee would pop-up and say they owned nothing, as the apartment was his and not Miguel's. He eventually left Spain in the late eighties, due to the developing relations between the European communities. And the fact the IRA had nothing better to do as they are not killing the British anymore, they put Towhee on their shit list. So, with a few pounds of the farmers money as reward, they decided to hunt Towhee. Towhee therefore made his way to Thailand, where he, accompanied by Miguel, set up an export business for arms and ammunition.

There he stayed for five years until police got wind of his operation and their bribes became a constant annoyance to Towhee. They therefore left Thailand and settled in Cambodia, at the place they used to visit in order to satisfy his other great passion in life. Towhee was a paedophile, he loved young boys and girls, the younger the better, he loved to savagely pillage their innocence and it gave him a rush to hear their orifices pop under his large frame, the more they screamed the more excited he became. He had chosen to settle in Caw Kong, which is only a kilometre away from the notorious K11. K11 is a small community exactly eleven kilometres outside Phnom Penh. It is a paedophile paradise, no questions asked and Kip the unofficial headman of K11 knew Towhee and took care of him exceedingly well. Kip would phone Towhee when new, young, lost waif would wander into the village, he would then proceed to Towhees house with a frightened youngster in tow. He would be let in by Miguel and given some money, usually ten dollars.

“Tell Mr Andrew, Kip good friend, takes care good.”

The door would then be closed and while Kip waited outside, the young boy or girl would be taken to a large room, here a bloated mass of blubber, which was Andrew Towhee, would be waiting on his bed. The bedroom door would be closed behind the frightened youngster and after usually 30 minutes of squealing and grunting from the room, the tearful youngster would emerge. Their blood stained clothing replaced with a small ‘Silom’, type of Sarong. They would be pushed out of the door to where Kip would be waiting, lifted

onto the back of his motorbike and driven away in tears, shock written on their young faces.

This is where Dam had been living for seven years now. He started off as Towhees fighter, entering into many fights, always winning and always damaging or killing his opponents. He was ruthless, and his fearsome reputation soon grew, he was driven by hate. After three or four years he out lived his usefulness to Towhee, nobody would fight him, he was too good, and no fights meant no gambling and no money.

Towhee therefore arranged for two Cambodians to kill Dam. They were local hoodlums, who bragged they were also assassins .One night after Dam had dispatched another opponent who, although he knew of Dams reputation, had fought him out of desperation for money. Meanwhile, the two would-be assassins waited outside the arena for Dam who usually ran home, they jumped out at him brandishing pistols and daggers.

Dam sent them to the afterlife with lightning speed and then calmly ran home. Towhee and Miguel where both shocked to see Dam walk through the door and Dam had been a little surprised at them not coming to his fight. Towhee enquired as to what happened, as he appeared to have blood on him. Both Towhee and Miguel spoke Cambodian, although not fluent. Dam relayed the story, announced the blood was not his and sat down and told Towhee his previously untold story of his life and Salaburi, his training and the holy remnants. Dam had suddenly become useful again. Towhee, after all, had many enemies and Miguel was getting old.

Dam felt the pick-up slowing down as they approached Phnom Penh and the sights now were

becoming familiar to him. Night was closing in, good he thought, less conspicuous. He would have to find himself some normal clothes. The pick-up driver had agreed to take him to Phnom Penh centre and to one of his old fight stadiums where he still had clothes. Although he never fought now on a regular basis, he still kept his hand in from time to time and trained the odd fighter, in return for some, usually half, of their small purse if they won; or he would give them another beating if they lost, and survived. He had a small locker space that he kept a shabby tracksuit in; this would do he thought, until I get home. Dam laughed at himself, all that preparation and planning, and no change of clothes.

The pick-up stopped outside a large area of land covered in what looked like a large wooden warehouse. Dam jumped off the back of the truck and thanked the driver, blessed him and then chuckling at himself for blessing someone. Dam entered into the boxing arena and went over to his locker space, his tracksuit had gone and so he took a pair of jeans and T shirt that was lying nearby and walked outside. It was hot and sticky, he had no money but he hailed a nearby 'mototaxi', same as a Thai 'bike taxi' with a large square seat at the rear. Andrew will pay the driver, he will be happy too. The mototaxi headed of along the potholed Cambodian Road toward Caw Kong.

Dam was correct, Andrew was happy to see him, overjoyed in fact, he knew what his pet assassin had for him, or hopefully had a cool million dollars worth of history.

Miguel let Dam in and paid the taxi. Towhee was sitting behind his large '*mystat*,' teak desk, behind his

computer. "Have you got it, have you got it?" asked an impatient Towhee

"Yes my friend," announced Dam and put down his bundle of robes and reached into one of the tunic pockets, producing the small golden jewel encrusted box and placing it down in front of Towhee.

"Excellent, excellent," said Towhee and leant over and picked up a digital camera. He took several photographs of the relic before opening the large safe at the side of his desk and placing the relic on top of several wads of dollars. He closed the safe and locked it with a key, which he then placed on a chain around his neck.

"Ok," he said to Dam and Miguel, "looks like you two are going on a holiday. I will e-mail the photo off to our good friend Mohammed," he said with a sarcastic glint in his eye, "He has been waiting for this."

"Dam go freshen up, we will go celebrate."

"OK, Andrew." Dam said.

He knew Towhees celebration meant he would be going to K11, bringing back a child and while Towhee would be satisfying his sick lust, he and Miguel would be waiting and listening. Still thought Dam, it wasn't that bad, at least afterwards he could slip away on his motorbike to 'The heart of Darkness' a large, lively disco in Phnom Penh. He would have money in his pocket and maybe if 'Fitta' was there, give her a night she won't forget in a hurry. He sullenly walked over to his room and opened the door he looked around at the table and his few possessions. His steel sword made in the image of his old wooden one and his glave which he had spent hours crafting. He unfolded his bundle, hung up his home made robe, washed the dried blood and

spinal fluid off his pitou, and replaced it on its stand. He took out his folded S6 respirator, having dumped the filter in the jungle a long way from the village, and put it in his drawer. He looked down at the table, on it lay several sheets of a brown cardboard material, several containers, some had black some had white powder, some had syrupy solutions within them, although now nearly empty.

“You taught me too well my brother,” he said out loud, as if talking straight to heaven and Jinn “too well.”

Remorse again crept in, he recalled seeing his brother dying in a cloud of swirling smoke, *his* swirling smoke.

Getting to the village unnoticed was easy, he had spent weeks preparing and planning and making cyanide flares, something Jinn had taught him. He recalled how one day an excited Jinn, now a new warrior, had come to him, “look at this my brother,” Jinn would say, and produce a hard brown candle shaped object. “What is it?” asked the inquisitive Dam.

“I will show you and teach you how to make one,” said the excited Jinn.

Jinn and Dam headed off into the mountains, to a small cave they had found. Jinn removed the contents of his tunic pocket and laid them on a flat rock at the mouth of the cave. It was early afternoon and the time usually when the monks were given leisure time or meditating time as it was the hottest part of the day. On the rock lay two small, round, clay containers. A Scelet root, an Aroona root and a small conical shaped parcel. Jinn unrolled the object and laid it out, like a chef

laying out pastry. It was sheets of yellow-brown material that looked liked oily marzipan.

“Are you showing me how to make essence sticks?” asked Dam

“Not exactly,” replied Jinn. He then proceeded to explain the contents of the jars were crushed graphite and sulphur. He then poured this powder in the centre of the laid out sheet and cut about a two inch strip from the moist sheet and rolled it into a compressed chunk, this he placed at the top of the sheet and squeezed the roots. The syrupy juices oozed over the powder instantly hardening it. He then rolled the sheet forming a candle shape, like a hand-rolled cigarette with a filter and then wiped the oily film off and put the object in the sun to bake dry. Jinn sat down with Dam and informed him it’s a ‘*Pai non*’ sleeping stick. But he did not fully understand what they were used for

“I just know,” said Jinn with a menacing grin “They’re deadly.”

When Jinn found out exactly what the stick was used for, he never mentioned it to Dam again. But there was no need to, Dam later figured it out, and improved on the stick by the addition of the powder from a flare and cyanide crystals.

Pai non or sleeping sticks were an effective Tinju tool, although death came slowly, it came peacefully. It was the easiest method for the monks in ancient times to dispatch their duties. In those days the monks were very often used as assassins for the King as buying essence sticks from monks was considered lucky, which was a rumour spread by the monks, possibly the Tinju.

The victim would light the stick, the top two or three inches would burn like normal essence (joss stick) it gave off many fragrant aromas, which were very pleasant. The heat would then hit the mix and the aroma would change slightly but still remain pleasant and the victim would be unaware he was indeed being slowly murdered. After a few moments of the mixture burning, the victim would fall asleep and as they continued to inhale the poison-filled air, their muscles would be paralysed, lungs, heart, and finally, brain. The same effect as Thiapentone, used as an anesthetic and Potassium Chloride, used to stop the heart. The mixture had to be carefully prepared, if there was too little Aroona and graphite, the victim would wake up but remain paralysed, making a very unpleasant death. But sometimes requested by the ruler if he did not like someone. If too little skeet root, the organ paralysis would not occur leaving the victim just in a deep sleep for a few days.

The mixture that Dam cooked up, although looked the same as the monk's essence sticks, he had developed his for instant death.

Dam recalled how he made it to the village on the morning of 4th December he knew what time the relic would be removed. He had hidden in his and Jinn's cave until nearer the time. He went around the rocks to the mouth of the cave, making sure to make no noise and waited behind an outcrop of rocks. He saw Somchay, the Prime Master, come from the small hatchway of the meditating room and approach the guards, who bowed their heads on his arrival, he passed them both and went to the golden gates, opened them and went inside. The two hooded guards turned in

toward the cave, one monk went inside with Somchay, while the other stood and watched the two inside. Like a leaping panther Dam launched himself silently at the remaining monk, placed his hand over his mouth his Pitou already in position, inserted the instrument clicked the catch, and twisted, it was over in a fraction of a second. He then silently removed the body. He knew the Prime Master would be chanting, because they were quite deep within the cave and he would have time to remove the dead monk's bow and place it on his own shoulder. He had rehearsed this many times and it had gone well, he only hoped that his size would not be noticed, he thought it would be all right as they were not concentrating on the guards and most of the time the monks heads would be bowed. The Prime Master and first guard came to the mouth of the cave and walked past the now hooded Dam, who joined on at the rear. They entered the temple and started the ceremony, no one noticed the incense stick box was still half full.

It was easy, thought Dam, all respect for his old idols had gone, he was better than Tinju, and he had in one hit killed them all.

The only ones left he thought, were the too old or too young, the Tinju were finished. He had finished them and they would not have a clue. He sniffed the air loudly. Ah smells good, the sweet smell of success.

His gloating was short lived as a bellowing Towhee beckoned him.

“Dam, Miguel, come here!” Towhee hollered.

Miguel and Dam went to the living room. Towhee was sat with a beaming smile on his face.

“Good news?” asked Miguel.”

“Perfect,” said Towhee. “I e-mailed the photos to the Sheikh and he replied straight away. He is keen to get the relic and is sending an Abdul Rasid, you will meet him in Thailand He will e-mail with the details later, but he will be arriving on the sixteenth. I want you two there at least two days before, that gives you five days, Dam, for your hair to grow back.”

Towhee and Miguel both laughed, while Dam felt his head, he was starting to get some growth back to his shaven head and joined in the laughter.

“Come on,” said Towhee “Lets celebrate. Pop down to K11 Dam and see what Kip has available, there’s a good lad.”



– Chapter Five –

The village of Salaburi was like a ghost town. The villagers stayed mainly in their wooden stilted houses. The monks stayed in their living quarters or meditation room, all unsure of their future. Pon had left the previous evening and with him not only went the hopes and honour of the Tinju, but also the soul of the village. Even the jungle was silent, usually full of the noise of birds and insects chirping and clicking, it was as if the world had stood still on this hot afternoon.

The soldiers were in the monks training area. They had made themselves a rough Mah-jong set and tried as best as they could to occupy themselves. The batteries on their GPS and tracker systems had gone flat, and with no electricity in the village, there was no way to get life back into their only contact with the outside world.

Vitchae was sitting alone in a lotus position. He pondered in his dark world about the events of the past few days and his time as a Prime Master. He should have handled the situation with Dam a lot better he thought. He remembered at the time he may have been a little sharp with the lad, but he had problems of his own, his sight was starting to fail. ‘This must have been Lord Buddha’s will,’ he thought, ‘besides, I have seen

more beauty and wonder than most men ever get to see.' With his already heightened other senses, his loss of sight had never encumbered him. Maybe young Dam was right all those years ago, why can't they earn a place in the scheme of things and maybe it is better to have someone who wants to be a Tinju, than not to have a choice. Lord Buddha after all never created the Tinju, man did, and the comment he made to Dam that man could not change this, might have been presumptuous and maybe now man will have to change the Tinju, who in effect was now finished.

The silence was suddenly and violently broken. The tops of the trees shook and swayed, clouds of dust being thrown up in large whirlwinds. A Sikorsky S92, helicopter roared over the treetops and the Wat, it came in low and flared into a hover above the grounds behind the Wat. The soldiers cowered as the pieces of their game flew away. The pilot lowered the collective and with a deafening roar the helicopter gently touched down, the pilot cut the engines, the noise diminished slightly and the giant rotor blades came to a slow idle stop.

The soldiers hurriedly got to their feet straightened their combat fatigues and rushed over toward the helicopter. The commotion had brought the villagers scurrying out of their dwellings and they were hurrying toward the shiny white and gold monster from the sky. Most of the villagers had never seen a car, let alone a helicopter, as they never left the village. Only the remaining elder monks had seen any form of motor transport and that was only one time a year, while making the journey to Bangkok, but aircraft they had never seen.

Cenat assisted Vitthae and they and all the other monks headed toward the helicopter, weapons in hand.

The Sikorsky S92 was a large helicopter used by the Thai airforce to transport small amounts of troops and supplies. This particular helicopter was certainly not regular, shining white, it was adorned in gold leaf with the royal standards skilfully crafted and a high glazed wax that made it sparkle like a new pin in the sunlight.

Its side door slid open and six heavily armed soldiers jumped onto the field taking up a defensive stance around the helicopter. Six elder monks behind Vitthae and Cenat raised and arrowed their bows.

Vitthae and Cenat stopped about 50 metres away, "Wait!" called out Cenat to the monks. The five village soldiers came around the helicopter, and the Master Sergeant ordered his men to form a small rank, as one of the helicopter soldiers barked an order to the Master Sergeant, who saluted and shouted an order to the other four. The soldiers all lowered their weapons and an officer looked inside the helicopter and spoke. Now all eleven soldiers formed two lines either side of the sliding doors and faced outwards. The monks stood their ground still poised to shoot. A few moments later a figure emerged from the helicopter. He wore a smart white, crisply pressed uniform, with gold braid and a thick golden sash with red tassels, his epaulets showed no rank, but had large pointed helmet crests on them. He looked over at the monks who had started to walk slowly over. They met about 10 metres from the helicopter. The figure gave a long respectful Wai to the two elder monks. Cenat returned the Wai

"Good afternoon Khun Cenat," said the figure.

“Good afternoon Khun Taksin” replied Cenat.

Cenat introduced Vitchae to Taksin, who noticed the old monk was blind.

“I have someone I would like you to meet,” said Taksin and looked over at the helicopter, two more soldiers emerged, dressed in traditional Thai guards clothes with elegantly carved golden helmets that tapered off to a point. They removed a small stepladder and placed it at the foot of the helicopter. A figure emerged wearing a royal blue colour suit and wearing thick wire rimmed glasses.

A gasp went around the now gathered villagers, they all knelt down with heads bowed, as did the monks and Taksin. This figure they all knew, every home in Thailand had a picture of King Bhumipol. The now seventy-eight year old King is the worlds longest reigning monarch of present time.

The King walked over to the two monks and Taksin and asked them to rise. They stood up and the King spoke to them for a few minutes, then the four headed into the Wat, leaving the remaining monks and villagers in awe.

The party remained in the Wat for several hours in deep discussion, only being disturbed by young monks taking in fresh fruit and water. The villagers remained in-situ waiting for another glimpse at their beloved King. They were discussing the atrocity that had happened. The King and Vitchae discussed the next stage. The King laid out his thoughts and plans and asked Vitchae and Cenat to accompany him to Bangkok to talk more and formulate a mutually beneficial plan, although fearful of getting in the sky monster, they readily accepted.

They emerged from the Wat and headed toward the helicopter. Vitchae vomited as he got to the door of the beast, and was given a drink of cool water. The King, Taksin and the monks boarded the helicopter, followed by the soldiers, including the five that were in the village, much to their relief.

The pilot engaged the engines and turbines, the helicopter growled to life. Taksin was explaining to Cenat that his investigations had uncovered very little, he said his friend had called him the previous night, saying he thought he had seen a Thai monk in a boxing stadium in Phnom Penh. He did not know if it was relevant, but he had relayed the message to someone named Pon.

“He said he was a Tinju and recited the Tinju motto, I assumed he was one of yours.” said Taksin

Cenat looked shocked, “Pon?” he asked

“Yes,” said Taksin. “He called me in the early hours from a mobile phone. I don’t give out my number. Only very few people know it, you being one of them, although I am not sure that Pon understood. It was hard to hear and I think he was talking through the earpiece.”

The big helicopter with its mighty engines driving the large rotor blades, throwing up dust and debris sent the villagers into a panic, covering their faces and drowning out the conversation between Taksin and Cenat. The pilot set the throttles and watched his instruments. With the dial indicators in position, he looked around for any obstacles or debris blowing into the intake, all clear. He raised the collective gently up, and the big bird rose off the ground in much commotion. The pilot, using his rudder pedals aimed the helicopter at a clump of trees in the jungle, and

pushed the cyclic stick gently forward. The nose of the helicopter dipped and slowly moved forward and accelerated, gaining speed and height, it cleared the jungle canopy and disappeared out of view.



– Chapter Six –

Nick had a restless night. He had bought back the lady he was drooling over at the bar in front of Champion a-go-go. He had managed to wangle a ‘freebee’ after drunkenly arguing with the mamasan and he left alone, without paying the bar fine. He accompanied Spock and Lek and the three started walking down the street. They were caught up with by ‘Von’ who said

“*Mai pen rai*, never mind,” she said, “No problem, bar closed now I go with you, no bar fine.”

Nick who was wankered slurred “good,” and the four got on a taxi and went to their hotel and up to their rooms. Nick’s interest in Von had waned, she was fairly old and unattractive, he did not really want to pay her for sex, a waste of money he thought and gave her 20 Baht for a taxi, and told her to leave. She mumbled something in Thai, and stormed out slamming the door. He then showered, the cold water felt good on his now re stinging sphincter. He felt between his butt cheeks, the hairs had been scorched off and he could feel blisters starting to form, ‘This is going to sting,’ he thought. He was right and he spent the night tossing and turning in bed, at times getting out administering ice to this rather sore area. Nick had eventually nodded off around daybreak, he was woken with a loud hammering thump on the door

“Are you up matey, it’s five o’clock.”

“Yeah, Spock,” he said, “come in.”

A large cheery faced Spock entered his room.

“That’s a bit dangerous leaving your door unlocked,” said a concerned Spock.

“No,” said Nick “it’s ok, never any thieves here.”

Nick thought for a moment about his door and the damage Spocks thumping could do.

“Don’t knock next time, just tap and walk in.” said Nick

They talked about the events of the previous night that Spock was finding difficult to believe or fully take it in. Spock told Nick that Stu was in his room, but did not know who with. He explained, he had woken Stu well over an hour ago and had just spoke to him through the door, he was getting up, just in the middle of something and mentioned he was on his ‘vinegar stroke’ so to go away. Spock asked where Von was, Nick told him he had paid her and sent her away, not mentioning he only paid 20Baht. Nick enquired where Lek was, Spock explained she had to go to work, she started in the bar at 6pm and wanted to shower and change.

“I told her I would see her later,” said a smirking Spock,

“And will you?” enquired Nick.

“Very unlikely, she was a sturdy shag but a bit of a horror.”

Nick laughed “you’re learning mate there is plenty more, now sod off while I get dressed. I’ll meet you in reception.”

At six o’clock they all met up in the hotel reception, Nick, Spock, and Stu who was the last to arrive arm in

arm with Dao. The other two looked at them both, they had seen Dao at the bar reading but didn't really pay much attention to her. So, thought Spock, so that's were the little bugger had disappeared to and that's why he was acting strange, the daft twat has gone and fallen in love. He looked at his long time friend who was beaming from ear to ear.

"What happened?" asked Spock.

Stu explained he had no idea, he went on to explain that he remembered leaving the Happy World bar and couldn't get Dao out of his mind. He vaguely remembered the go-go, and the next thing he remembers was waking up next to Dao. Then after coming around a bit, they showered together, and made mad passionate love, Dao spoke a little English, but the word she would describe what they did, was not mad passionate love but a damn wild '*Boom boom*'. Shag.

Stu wanted to keep Dao, but was unsure how, he asked Nick, who explained he must pay a 'bar fine' 200Baht for every night he took her away from the bar. Stu thought this a little seedy as this was love and not just a fling, but gave Dao 200Baht to go pay the bar, she wanted to go change and shower again in her room. Nick told Stu to meet her at her bar later; "She can't go anywhere with anyone else because the bar has been paid." And added, "She's been reserved."

Stu kissed Dao goodbye, he would see her later. The other two looked at each other and smiled. The lads headed into the hot sticky night air, it was getting dark. Night-time in Thailand is usually about 6:30pm. This never alters throughout the year. They stopped at a clothes shop and Stu and Spock bought some vests and shorts. Spock bought some thick camel shorts, which

both Stu and Nick thought he would be too hot wearing. They ate at an outdoor restaurant, ordering a full English breakfast. Although late, it was their first meal of the day and the first real food they had since eating on the plane the previous day, apart from the street barbecue, which Stu had worked out, had given him rather loose stools, (the shits.)

Now fed, they changed back at the hotel and decided to go explore this magical place some more before they met up with Dao at the Happy World bar. Stu was pining already, it had been nearly two hours since he last saw her. They made their way to Soi 2. A lively Soi, situated at the top end of North Pattaya. There are about fifty bars in a covered area, many with live music. The lads settled in one bar that had a band, which consisted of three Thais blasting out a not too bad version of *'I shot the sheriff.'* They ordered Singha beer and settled in, they were all a little bored with the taste of beer, having sunk copious amounts the previous night, however they forced it down.

They moved around Soi 2 for a few hours, now juiced and groping the happily willing bar girls, they're en-masse behind and in front of the many bars. Every time Stu or Spock had a pair of breasts outside of the giggling girls clothing, they would buy them a drink. Nick, they noticed however, kept his hands well away from his wallet, still they were having a great time and they crept up to spannered state. They came across a quiet bar, and although it had many girls, it was not as noisy as the others. They sat down and Stu could see Spock with his 'time for the trick' face on; 'that's why he bought thick cotton shorts.' thought Stu.

Sure enough, true to form Spock made his way off his stool and positioned himself on one of the small chairs around the bar. The girls who had been talking to the lads and other girls around the bar with their foreign companions, all watched as Spock got into his position, legs up, lighter ready he could just feel his methane supply bubbling, one good push. He furrowed his brow for extra push power; a look of relief, followed by horror came across Spock's large face. He put his legs down, put the lighter back on the table and with a nonchalant look picked up his drink. No flames, no entertainment, nothing. What was happening? The people looked puzzled and went back to their conversation and drinks with Spock still looking bemused and shocked. Stu got off his stool and went over to his large friend

“What happened mate... and what's that smell?”

Then he realised what had happened.

Nick leaned back on his stool and asked “Lads, shall we start on the ‘shorts’, I am fed up with beer.”

“Yes mate, order me a vodka and coke,” said Stu trying to keep a straight face, “and make Spock's a size XXL, he appears to have shit his.”

Stu then fell about laughing. Spock was embarrassed and looked at his old friend in tears of laughter on the floor.

“Yes matey, very funny, now get up, and go buy me some new ones.”

‘Never trust a fart in Thailand’

Now getting quite late, and spannered, the lads headed for the Happy World bar, Spock in his new shorts, he had changed and cleaned up in the toilets, best five Baht I've spent, he thought. (Cost for using

some public conveniences.) While they waited for Spock, Stu noticed a large hotel-like building with a large sign which read 'Sabaiiland body massage'. It was on a corner which made it look a little out of place.

"What's that?" he asked Nick. With a smirk Nick replied it was a 'soapy place' and they could go tomorrow.

They reached the Happy World bar, the girls all whooped at them, "Welcome Nick, welcome Spock," they all looked at Stu and laughed "Hello Stu."

Dao was sitting behind the bar reading her book, she saw Stu and stood up and fetched them drinks, then she went to sit next to Stu.

"What happened last night?" he asked Dao.

"You not remember?" said Dao smiling.

"No," said the grinning Stu "All I know is I got you," and pecked Dao on the forehead

"Better you don't remember, stupid man." she said and smiled.

Dao was twenty-two years old, and like most bar girls in Pattaya had been lured there with the dreams of finding a foreigner to take care of her and her family. Many 'bar girls' are country girls, usually from the Isaan region, a poor area in north east of Thailand, most had children. Dao being no exception had a baby son. The girls usually go to the tourist area, here they could find bar work, leaving their children, this is the Thai way. They usually come with hard luck stories of their child's father who would have either been a drunk, taking drugs or a butterfly, someone who went from girl to girl. Many of these stories are untrue, but told in order to get a foreigner to send money for them. Many of the girls will have several foreign men sending

money, which they share with their friends and maybe current Thai boyfriend. This is again, the Thai way. Western society considers this as degrading and believes they are forced into this life, and are being exploited, and yes, probably some are. But as most bargirls will tell you they have good money, can take care of their family, party every night, get a shag, and get paid for it, plus to a Thai, sex is just another bodily function. But they won't go with a man if they don't like them, it is their choice and not the man's. The girls all stick together, and have many excuses why they can't go with a particular man. Although when the girls first come to work the bar, until they have a few '*farang*,' foreigners under their belt, are usually shy, and learning the ropes from the more experienced girls and the '*mamasan*'. Usually at this stage, they haven't been corrupted or brainwashed by the experienced bargirls and get whisked off and marry a foreigner, as that is their dream and the dream of their family. This happens quite frequently, a Thai wife, is a loving, loyal and usually beautiful partner. Not all Thai girls are bar girls, it is a very small minority, most are usually the same as the western ladies, housewives, doctors, students, teacher's etc. But bar work is a very accepted part of the Thai way of life, which is why many single (and married) men come to tourist areas like Pattaya and Phuket.

Especially, now the buffaloes have all gone.

Stu was Dao's second *farang* experience. Her first time being an old German man.' Mamasan had told Dao, the older they are, the better.

"Can't get it up," she smiled, "Only want company, usually fall asleep, a real catch."

Dao, having been there now two weeks, had seen the men come and go and she was no longer afraid of the large foreign invaders. She decided it would be ok and go with 'Kurt'. Dao got her bag and went around to the other side of the bar. Kurt bought her drink after drink, good for the bar she thought, only orange juice, but he was getting charged 120Baht a time, of which she got a cut of a 'lady drink' usually 20Baht.

Kurt looked about eighty, a lot older than her granddad she thought. By the time they left the bar Kurt was well wankered. They got back to the room and like mamasan had told her, he went off into a loud snoring slumber. The old man woke in the morning gave, Dao 1000 Baht, (Two weeks salary in her village, picking rice.) She showered and left, easy money, she thought and she never saw Kurt again. Her second experience was now with Stu, and was not so easy. She had noticed Stu, and liked the look of this odd shaped man, nice smile she thought she saw him talking with her boss, Charlie, then leave the bar.

He later returned and made a terrible noise, that Charlie said was singing, and with a rose in his mouth he went behind the bar, grabbed a rather bemused looking Dao, asked the boss to play a record that was earlier being played in the bar '*Wonderful tonight*'. Stu twirled and serenaded Dao for 10 minutes, then collapsed in a chair, then like a fat novelty Buddha statue, he fell asleep. Occasionally waking up and continuing with his song. Charlie's wife the mamasan asked Dao if she liked him and she thought hard and looked at the heap in the chair.

"Yes," she said, "he makes me laugh."

“Well take him home, and take care of him.”
Ordered mamasan.

They knew which hotel Stu was staying at, he was Nick’s friend, and Nick always stayed at the Sawasdee. They bundled Stu in a taxi and Dao took him to his room. Stu was coming around a little bit, so she put him in the shower and turned the water cold, at which point he shook himself, looked at Dao naked in the shower with him, pointed at Dao and slurred, “You’re lovely,” a stupid drunken grin came over his face. He got out of the shower flopped onto his bed and promptly fell asleep, still drooling.

The next day they had woken, Dao expected to be paid and go back to the bar, she never expected anyone actually found her attractive. (Many Thai women think this, as they see models on TV with make up and walking on catwalks or in movies. They believe all foreign women are beautiful, and Thai humbly think they are ugly.) It was a pleasant surprise that Stu had told her he wanted to keep her, he wasn’t sure how, but he would find out and he wanted to keep her forever. This made her feel happy. Dao quite liked this funny little man. She enjoyed her first real snog and sex was no different to that of a Thai man, it just took longer and not usually three times, but she enjoyed it and maybe the novelty would wear off like mamasan said it usually did.

Now in the Happy World bar. Stu had decided to go home early, after he and Dao had finished their drinks. Spock and Nick were going to head off to a go-go and try Soi 7 to look for the lucky lady who was going to get a damn good rattling that night. Spock knew what kind he wanted tonight and she would have to be

sturdy, he was in the mood. Stu had asked Nick if they were going to see that place tomorrow, Sabaiiland. Nick said a very elated “Oh yes,” but was shocked when Stu asked if Dao could come, whereupon he said a firm, “Oh no.”

The next morning Spock was woken by a knock on the door. It was Stu wanting to know if he was going for some breakfast. He said he would meet him downstairs. Spock got his bearings, he had a strange taste in his mouth, he moved his tongue and felt something odd, he pulled out a small thin serrated leg, “how did that get there?” Once again he was wankered, he looked over at the figure laid next to him and nudged it.

Lek turned over and saw Spock holding up the leg, she rolled over taking a bag from under the bed, and presented Spock with a half eaten bag of fried locusts.

Nick had another troubled night, he had lost Spock in the Soi 7 and had once again returned alone. Never mind he thought, Luanne would be here later and maybe my arse will have stopped hurting.

Luanne was between boyfriends, one had just gone back and another was due out in a few days. Nick had known Luanne several months and had been with her several times, he had called her on the off chance she was free and she arranged to come later and spend a day and night with him. Luanne liked Nick, but he never paid as much as her other men, so he was a stopgap every now and again, this arrangement suited them both.

They all met in the reception at around noon. Stu and Dao had already eaten, Stu said Dao was going back to her room, her friend had returned from home

and she wanted to see her; that would give the lads a chance to go for a massage.

Dao's friend Moo had not been home, she had been with her 'boyfriend'. Moo had come to work the bar with Dao three weeks ago. Moo, had taken to bar work like a duck to water, and whereas Dao had been timid and shy around the men, Moo was outgoing, talked and flirted in broken English with everyone. She had been taken her first night and every night since. Her latest conquest, an English man, had taken her for a week and took her to stay in Jomtien, a beach resort about 10km from Pattaya which is much less raucous. The English man had left during the early hours of the morning to fly home, so Moo would be back in the room she shared with Dao.

Dao wanted to see her friend and tell her about Stu, also see what trophy and gifts Moo had acquired this time, gold and mobile phones being the preferred items.

Although Moo was not beautiful like Dao, she was cute and outgoing, and men loved this.

Lek and Dao left the hotel together in the mid afternoon, and the lads headed up to Sabaiiland and entered the swish looking hotel. Stu and Spock were looking forward to a massage, as both of them had aching backs from too much shagging. They imparted this information to Nick who smirked.

The reception area of Sabaiiland was huge, it had a bar on one side and several tables laid out around the floor area with a large flat window on the other side. Behind this window sat very elegantly dressed Thai ladies, about twenty in all. It looked like a giant fishtank. The lads sat down and ordered a coffee. All the ladies had small badges on their dresses with

numbers written on, Nick explained, “These are the err...masseurs,” he smirked.

A smartly dressed looking Thai man came to their table.

“Which one would you like, sir?” directing his question at Spock.

“Hang on, matey,” said Spock “we’re just looking,” and the man backed off.

The lads spent several more minutes looking. Spock had noticed a large lady sat on the back row. ‘She’ll do,’ he thought, ‘she would be able to give me a good sorting out.’ He called the Thai man back over.

“Give me number 34.”

The Thai man explained the price was 1800 Baht for 90 minutes. The man went to the fish tank and called out number 34 and number 26 for Stu. Nick said he would go later which did not surprise Stu or Spock as they had realised that Nick was even thriftier than Stu.

The two were taken up into very smart rooms that more than justified the price. Spock’s room was next door to Stu’s. Spock noticed even though there was a large bed and an even larger round bath, there wasn’t a massage table, there was however, a large inflatable bed propped up near the bath. The lady went over to the bath and turned on the taps. She went over to the confused Spock and motioned the removal of his clothes and handing him a towel. She went over to the bath and carried on with the filling, checking the water was not too hot, or too cold. Spock stood in his towel and she called him over. When the bath was full she told Spock to get in. She then undressed and got in facing the big lad. Taking some soap from the liquid container

at the side of the bath, she gently caressed the foam sensually over Spock's body from head to toe, "marvellous," he said blissfully. After he had been thoroughly bathed she stood up. Spock looked at her Amazonian figure, he never imagined Thais come in XXL sizes too. The lady put the airbed on the floor and motioned Spock to lay on it. He did as instructed, and the lady opened the top of a large squeeze bottle, squeezing its oily contents onto Spock, and herself. She then lay down on top of Spock rubbing her body along and up and down Spock's back. After several minutes of this she rolled Spock over, noticing she was doing a pleasing job as a large proboscis was stood firmly to attention. She repeated the process on his front and listened to Spock cooing, he was happy, she thought. After a few minutes of this performance, she pulled a weak kneed Spock to his feet, flopped him onto the bed, placed a condom on his erect member and proceeded to give him the most sensual 'blow job' he had ever had. A few moments later she replaced the condom, after she had done her job too well and now had to attempt to bring life back into the now flaccid tool.

This didn't take her long, she mounted Spock, gyrating and thrusting herself rapidly up and down. Spock soon deposited his second spoonful of 'man fat'. She then took him back to the bath and bathed him again. They went back over to the bed and turned on the wall mounted TV, she patted the space next to her and Spock lay down beside her. Forty-five minutes had passed and not a word had been spoken between them, mainly because it was a boring routine for her and for Spock he was too gobsmacked and blissful to speak. They lay down and watched an in-house porn movie,

and then in a very soft feminine voice she whispered “If you want to go again, it’ll cost you more money.”

The phone in the room buzzed to signal 90 minutes were up. The lady and Spock both got dressed and made their way back to the reception to where Nick and a smiling Stu was waiting .Stu had finished about two minutes earlier, he was giggling and cooing like a schoolboy. Spock sat down and looked at Nick. “Did you enjoy your first soapy, too?” Nick smirked.

“Yep” said Spock “but my back is still sore.”

They made their way back to the Sawasdee hotel, popping in a few bars on the way back for an afternoon libation. They arrived back at the hotel early evening feeling squeaky clean.

Luanne was already waiting for Nick, he introduced her to Stu and Spock, and told them he would meet up with them later in the Happy World bar. He and Luanne headed straight to his room. Nick was like a dog who had just scented a bitch on heat.

Stu and Spock sprayed themselves with mosquito repellent, and headed off for the Happy World bar. On their arrival, Dao was sitting behind the bar on a ledge playing Connect-Four with her friend Moo and two men on the opposite side of the bar. Stu and Spock sat down at a table, a bit of jealousy crept in with Stu, but was relieved when Dao got up, went to the fridge and brought over two bottles of Singha beer. She kissed Stu and sat down next to him. The two men at the bar glared at Stu. Spock returned the stare and the two immediately returned to their game. The lady who was sitting next to Dao and now playing with the two men at the bar, kept looking over at the giant sitting with Dao

and Stu and smiled. Spock returned the smile and the lady cheekily stuck out her tongue, and smiled again.

Stu and Dao were talking and looking gooey eyed at each other, Spock was concluding a deal with a street seller for a fake Rolex 'Yacht Master' watch. He paid the man and showed his purchase to Stu, who looked at it and agreed it, was a fine looking timepiece.

"It looks like the real McCoy," said Stu.

The two men who were at the bar exited, careful to avoid nudging Spock as they scuttled out. Moo came to the table and pecked Spock on the cheek and sat next to him, it was like she had known him all her life. Dao introduced Moo and Spock ordered a drink for her, mostly in order to get her to stop grabbing his slightly tender todger. Moo took the new watch from the table, looked, then looked again and showed Dao. They both spoke in Thai to each other, and Moo turned to Spock

"You '*Ting tong*', stupid, and started counting using her fingers to demonstrate 1-2-3-5 and holding up 4 fingers. She could see Spock looking confused so she repeated 1-2-3-5, Spock thought, bless her she trying, and said "No 1-2-3-4-5".

Moo held the watch up in front of Spock "Look."

Spock looked at the watch, looked at the numbers on the watch, then realised 1-2-3-5-5, he looked up, and took the watch, put it on the table.

"Little bastard ripped me off."

It wasn't late when Stu and Dao walked hand in hand back to the hotel. Spock followed with nobody by his side, but a petite Moo hanging around his shoulders like a fox stole. 'I hope I don't break her,' thought Spock.

Spock tapped on Nick's room, he had been absent all night, Spock walked in and Nick was in bed watching TV with Luanne. Spock asked Nick if he was OK and he told them about his watch. He left the room with Luanne moaning to Nick about locking his door.

Spock then returned to his room where he found Moo was showering. He had brought some whisky at the 7-11 mini-mart on the way home and was pouring him and her a glass, 'bloody woman drinks like a fish,' he thought, remembering she had kept up with him at the Happy World bar. She finished showering and ordered him to take a shower, which he did, mainly to get some cold water on his worn out todger. He finished showering and got on the bed. There, a naked, smiling Moo was waiting. 'I will just give her a quickie,' he thought, he thought wrong. Spock finished after about ten minutes, but Moo was having none of it, she was going to climax and that was that. With great strength for such a little woman, Moo shunted Spock into position after position, mounting him and widely thrashing and thrusting herself on his now very sore and swollen tool, until after about twenty minute she came. She had broken Spock. He lay there for several moments too worn out to move. Moo was sat up watching a movie and drinking her whisky. Spock looked at Moo, she was cute he thought, and wow! What a shag!

'What can we do now?' he thought, as it was only early, Spock had noticed something about Moo that he wasn't keen on, he stroked his head, 'hmmm getting a bit long,' His hair was about 2mm long but he usually liked to feel his scalp. 'I'll show the cheeky little monkey,' he thought.

The 'thunderbolt' had struck again.

Nick had had a great night just relaxing with Luanne, she had bought him some flamazine cream, and applied it to his now recovering burn, they talked, made love and chilled out all night, then they fell asleep holding each other. Morning came and Luanne got up and dressed, she had to go and meet her other boyfriend who was due in later that day.

Thai woman are good organising the visits of boyfriends so they don't clash, sometimes though, a unavoidable cross of times of visits can take place. The lady tends to take one away, usually the one who sends her the most money, then she will get her friends to tell the other man she has gone home for a few days, 'baby was sick,' being the usual excuse. They usually get way with this, but occasionally lose the man to other bar girls. They are never concerned about this as usually they can be replaced with ease. And this is an acceptable practice between bar girls as it is after all, a business.

You never lose your girl, you only lose your turn.

Nick felt a bit sad at Luanne's departure, 'but at least it's free,' he thought to himself. He got out of bed and went over to the small window next to his door. The corner rooms have a patio door that leads out onto a balcony and a small window that was about the same size as a normal window in the UK. This window opened inwards and looked out onto the hotel entrance and small courtyard. Nick leaned out of the window and watched Luanne get on a Baht bus. Nick was thinking how he wished he earned more money. Although he did

work in London, it was only for a few weeks a time to earn money to come to Thailand, about six times a year, he subsidised his money by selling counterfeit goods, which he bought in Pattaya. The arrangement he had with Luanne was OK, but he would like a more permanent relationship. His thoughts were interrupted by a short loud rap on the door followed by a large Spock bursting in with a big grin on his face.

“Morning matey”

Stu, Dao and Moo were sat on the bed in Stu’s room. Moo was explaining about the previous night with Spock, sometimes speaking in Thai, when she did not want Stu to know the details. She started speaking in her broken English, explaining they had just had sex. Spock got out of bed and produced a Remington rechargeable razor. He went to the bathroom and asked Moo to shave his head even though she had trouble reaching around his massive frame. When she had finished, he thanked her, then removed the towel she had wrapped around herself and tugged at her pubic hair. Spock had not liked this because it was only a small but very long tuft of hair and he liked either a nice triangle bush or nothing, she was to have nothing, and off came the tuft. They were all laughing about this, and the fact Moo didn’t like it because it itched. Spock entered the room and joined the other three, he knew what they were laughing about and said, “She won’t be cheeky again or next time the hair on her head would fall victim to the Remington.”

“Is Nick coming for some breakfast?” Enquired Stu.

“I don’t know mate, I went to his room, his door was unlocked, but he wasn’t there,” explained Spock.

“He might have been seeing off Luanne, she’s going today,” continued Stu.

“Oh yeah, that’s right, but he’s stupid leaving his door unlocked.” said Spock.

They laughed and joked some more. Stu noticed Spock had changed since meeting Moo, the two went on like a comedy duo. Stu had not seen his old friend so happy and contented in many years and he felt the same. Dao went to the balcony to hang out the towels when she noticed a commotion down below.

“Come! Come!” she said.

The other three joined her on the balcony. People were gathering around a white Toyota Hiace van, used as ambulances. Its back door was open and a nurse dressed in a white uniform escorting a hobbling male figure, who was supporting his left arm gingerly with his right. The figure got to the rear door of the ambulance, stopped and looked up at the balcony and directly at Spock with the most contemptuous look Spock had ever seen.

“What’s Nick doing down there?” asked Stu.



– *Chapter Seven* –

The brightly-lit stadium was full to capacity. There was lots of shouting and lots of money changing hands. Cambodians and Thais jumping up and down on small tatty wooden benches trying to get a better view of their fighter. Cheering every time the man, who they were betting on scored a punch on his opponent. Two fighters stood in the centre in a makeshift ring lined with sand, which was splattered in blood. Their hands were covered with a gauze material which had allowed blood to seep through at the knuckles. Both their faces were swollen and bloody. They were punching and kicking at each other in a ferocious frenzy, each one trying to kill or maim the other; it was brutal and the crowds loved every moment.

One fighter landed an elbow to the side of his opponent's temple, stunning him and raining down blow after blow against the now defenceless man's head, he finished him off with a viscous roundhouse kick. The crowd went wild, some cheering some booing, shouting at their fighter to defend himself; this was futile, the man was knocked unconscious by the kick and dropped face first to the floor. The victor raised his hand, chopped at the back of the fallen fighters neck to ensure he would not get up, and stood over the fallen fighter arms waving to the crowd, who

had now lost interest and were either giving, or happily receiving money.

Two men, dressed in shabby jeans and T-shirts came and dragged the fallen fighter out of the circle and away to the back of the stadium. He was not dead, he would recover and live to fight another day, he was one of the lucky ones. Two more fighters made their way to the ring and stood at the side while the sand was being raked over. The victor was walking around the audience trying to get a tip from the crowd of people, he had put on a good show and this they are allowed to do to subsidise their meagre earnings. 'Slim pickings tonight,' he thought and as he was favourite to win, not much money had changed hands against him, so no great winnings meant no great tip.

The fighter returned to the changing area, cursing and muttering under his breath with the noise of the next fight ringing in his ears. He took a bowl of water from a large ceramic drum and poured it over his head. The changing area was outside of the very basic stadium. It was just a corrugated-iron fenced area with a 60 watt light hung over it. The fighters changed and warmed up there, punching and kicking sand filled sacks hung from makeshift beams, their clothes piled up in rows. There was no theft here, usually because they had nothing worth stealing, with the exception being four nights ago, when one of the fighters had his clothes stolen. The fighter took another bowl of water and washed the dried blood from his mouth and nose. He spun around and came face to face with a man wearing jeans and a white T-shirt, his head shaven and a rucksack on his back.

“What do you want?” snapped the fighter in Cambodian.

“I am looking for this man,” replied Pon, also in Cambodian, showing him the charcoal drawing of Dam. “Do you know him?”

The fighter looked at the picture and recognised a young Dam who he had known for several years and had fought many times. Dam always came off the victor, but as friendship amongst fighters was rare, Dam had never killed him, only knocked him unconscious.

“Yes,” said the fighter and not asking the reason for Pons search enquired. “How much will you give me.”

Pon had reached the ‘meeting point’ in Pong-nam-rom in the early hours of the morning but the food stall was closed. He sat down and took the mobile phone from his bag and switched it on. It peeped into life. He checked it had a signal and dialled the number on the card given to him by Cenat. A sleepy sounding Taksin answered “Hello,”

Then the phone went off. Pon tried again, same thing happened. One of the stall owners who was laid outside the stall in his hammock came over to see what the peeping noise was, saw the monk and went to him. Pon was trying the number again, the stall owner took the phone from him, and turned it the right way and Pon replied to the now agitated hellos from Taksin. Taksin explained he had a friend in Phnom Penh working at the Thai consul, who had seen a Thai monk in a boxing stadium a few hours ago. Taksin could not do much as it was in Cambodia and didn’t know if it was relevant. He gave Pon the location and details, Pon thanked him and declined when Taksin asked if he wanted his friend to assist him. He threw the phone in his bag, and the

stall owner offered him some food, he accepted and while the owner cooked, he sat at a bench and looked again at the picture of Dam.

It had been a long hard trek for Pon to reach Phnom Penh. He had walked the few kilometres and stopped at the market directly in front of the border crossing, he swapped his mobile phone for some jeans, T-shirt and a rucksack from a bemused looking market trader. He put his robes and items in the rucksack, and tied his sword onto the back of it. He knew he could not cross the border without papers, so he walked around the back of the market where a small stream, a tributary of the Mekong River meandered under a bridge at the border crossing. This was covered in dense foliage. He waded in and followed the shallow, brown water stream for about six kilometres until he was in Cambodia and unfamiliar ground.

Pon had decided, unlike Dam, to follow the roads to Phnom Penh keeping close to the jungle, in order to rest from the searing afternoon sun. He would travel morning and night, when it was a little cooler, resting in the afternoon and early evening. Although this was a longer way, it would stop him getting lost in an unfamiliar jungle, as Dam did several times on his way back to Salaburi and his return to Phnom Penh.

Pon, made good time. He decided not to stay on the main roads, instead to take smaller tracks that he wrongly assumed would lay parallel to the major roads. At times he got lost and took some wrong turnings. Most of the roads were unlit and very basic dirt tracks. However, he ran and walked, unlike Dam, who had hitched a ride.

During the hot afternoons, Pon stopped in shaded areas of jungle and outcrops of rubber plantations. He would eat from the dried food he had brought with him, and drink the liquified King Cobra liver mixed with oranges and mango for energy and to quench his thirst. He never slept much, his thoughts often returning to Salaburi, his brothers, his masters and Dam.

On the third afternoon he removed a gold nugget from his bag. It was a half finished image of a large winged serpent. He removed a small bundle of craftsmen tools, removed the tool he needed and carried on skilfully carving, his mind now empty of the events about the past, his concentration on his work.

Pon had no money, as Salaburi residence had no need for money because they grew or killed everything they needed. There were many freshwater streams for drinking, washing and fishing and as a community shared everything. The monks and villagers loved to whittle and carve intricate statues from the minerals they found around the village and in the many caves and potholes in the nearby mountains. They sometimes spent years on these small carvings, they were in no rush and it was not unusual for five or six monks to be sat in a circle talking and whittling at the same time. Pon had decided to bring some of his 'ornaments' with him, thinking that maybe he could use these for trading. After seeing the reaction of the soldier on his mobile phone trade they maybe worth something he thought. He had brought along one more of his golden nuggets that he had completed and two more red stone ornaments, one blue stone and his unfinished gold nugget that he was now working on. It would give him something to do and occupy his mind on the journey.

Pon arrived at the stadium after four days of travelling. He knew Dam had a good lead. He hoped that Dam was the monk Taksin's friend had seen and would still be somewhere in the area and that someone would know him, it was all he had to go on.

He had watched a fight finish and followed the victor to the changing area. He was elated, when the fighter said he knew Dam.

Pon took out his ornaments from his rucksack, "I don't have money," he explained, "but I have these, you are welcome to them if you can tell me anything."

The fighter took the objects in his gauze-covered blood stained hands and stared at them. He noticed the two gold nuggets, one transformed into a statue of Buddha the other and slightly larger one, unfinished. He handed them back to Pon, but kept the 4 inch gold unfinished nugget.

"OK," he said "His name is Dam, he lives with an Andrew Towhee and a Spaniard."

He went on to tell Pon where they stayed, and directions of Caw Kong and the house. The fighter finished the conversation with a warning for Dam.

"Watch that Towhee, he is a bad man, very dangerous."

Pon thanked the fighter and left the stadium, leaving the fighter examining his new-found wealth.

Pon had gotten onto the road that the fighter had explained would take him to Caw Kong and Towhees house; he knew he would find Dam, and hoped he still had the relic. He wanted to kill this man to avenge his brothers, to satisfy his own demons that had been burning and eating into his very being for the past

week. He wanted this man to pay for the atrocity that ruined his life, 'he would,' he thought, 'kill him slowly and anyone that stood in his way.' Dam was going to die this night. He ran down the unlit, potholed road, turning from a jog into a sprint. Only 12 kilometres more, he thought.

This is all given ID cards, these stay with them for all their lives .On these cards are names, date of birth etc. They are used in everyday life for many things, opening bank accounts, renting apartments etc. and crossing borders into Cambodia or Burma They are carried at all times, and fined quite heavily, or imprisoned if caught without them.

There are some small villages in Thailand cut off from society, therefore don't have any need or use for ID cards, Salaburi being one.

Many Thai people cross over into Cambodia, to the East of Thailand or to Burma in the west, mainly for gambling as gambling in Thailand is illegal. Cambodia and Burma have capitalised on this exodus, and many Casinos have sprung up close to main border crossings These are very smartly built, run mainly by corrupt high ranking police and organised crime syndicates with American or European investors. Beggars as young as five years old walk around outside these casino's in the scorching heat in their droves, they hold up umbrellas, and follow incomers, shading them in order to get one or two Bahts. Some of the children even carry babies in shabby slings. These new-borns are usually brother or sister, given by the parents for extra sympathy in their attempt to look the neediest.

Poi pet on the Cambodian side and Aranyaprathet on the Thailand side are the main crossings, and by far the most visited border crossings, as they lead straight into the eastern heart of Thailand.



– Chapter Eight –

The underground storeroom was an unused wine cellar beneath Towhees bungalow. It was a vast, racked area full of weapons, ammunition and explosives, ranging from Beretta and Colt pistols to SAM surface to air missiles with launcher. Towhee sat at his small desk smiling like a Cheshire cat. He had just got off the phone to Mohammed and he felt great. All details had been finalised. Dam and Miguel were on their way with the relic to meet Abdul and get his million dollars. Towhee took a mouthful of his imported *Bushmills* Irish whisky, savouring the flavour of the smooth velvety amber fluid as it slipped down his throat.

‘Life is good,’ he thought.

His gloating was interrupted by his phone ringing, ‘What does that stupid Arab want now?’ He had not stopped phoning since being informed that the relic was in Towhee’s possession, the deal was finished from Towhee’s point of view, ‘just pay the money,’ he thought.

He was wrong, it was Kip.

“Hello, Mr Andrew,” Kip then went on to make small talk, asking about his health, his business etc. Towhee let him ramble on, he was in a good mood and nothing could upset him today, he stared at his racks

and drank his whisky while Kip rambled on, then he stopped sat up straight in his chair. “What?” he asked.

“Yes Mr Andrew, only came today, only eight years old needs a bit of a clean up, but she will squeal good sure,” said an excited Kip.

Towhee now concentrated on the conversation “Bring her straight over Kip.” said an excited Towhee.

“Yes Mr Andrew, straight away,”

Towhee finished his drink and went up a small flight of stairs, through a small door, which led into the living room of his bungalow. ‘Things can’t get any better than today,’ he thought.

Dam and Miguel were due to meet with Sheikh Mohammed Del Alaz’s most trusted aid, Abdul. The meeting was to take place in Pattaya, an area that Towhee knew well from his time living there. Towhee had arranged the meeting for 16th December, when the transaction would take place. Towhee hated Pattaya, he could not return, after he was deported from Thailand. Towhee was caught in bed with a twelve-year old boy. Towhee knew the police had set him up, but he had paid them too many bribes already, and was not paying any more. He disappeared over the Cambodian border vowing never to return. He had sent Dam and Miguel away that morning, the thirteenth, he wanted them in Pattaya for the fourteenth to give them time to set the meeting point, and give Miguel time to prepare for an extra little task he had assigned him.

Miguel and Dam had left early to make the eight hour drive from Phnom Penh to the border at Poi Pet. They took the Isuzu D-max and drove out of the Cambodian capital. They would get to the border that night and stay in one of the many hotels in and around

the border town. Miguel would walk across the border first thing the next morning. Dam would go across on the back of a 'load cart'.

Cambodians are allowed over the border to beg and market traders to sell their wares at Aranyaprathet, the Thailand-side market. The market was quite vast, selling everything very cheaply, clothes, ornaments. Most things, both legal and illegal, could be bought there. These traders would go across with a small cart, piled high with their wares many times higher than the cart, many people would push these barrows and some people sat on top to stop the load from falling off. Dam, having no papers, would have to pay one of the traders to let him travel on top of the load cart. If the police or immigration were to stop them, which rarely or never happened, they would just give them two dollars.

Dam and Miguel would meet in the market where a car that Towhee had pre-arranged from one of his old acquaintances would be waiting. They would then travel the four hours from Aranyaprathet to Pattaya, here they would have a two day wait, plenty of time to prepare.

Towhee was sitting behind his large teak desk. He had poured himself another glass of *Bushmills* and was awaiting the arrival of Kip and his night's entertainment. He played with the safe key hanging around his neck and thought about his new friend Mohammed, who had just made him more wealth, therefore more power. He was satisfied with how he managed to cross paths with the stupid Sheikh.

Mohammed Del Alaz was rich, obscenely rich, one of the richest men in the world. Not a ruthless or evil man, he had made his money from oil and like other

Sheikhs, enjoyed the trappings of the wealth that his liquid gold had provided. Mohammed lived with his family in Saudi Arabia. He had a large palace and servants to take care of his every whim. He was a collector and loved to collect artefacts from other religions. Mohammed's twisted train of thought was that if he possessed some artefact from other gods or prophets, on his death 'Allah' and the prophet, 'Mohammed,' would welcome him with open arms, as he would hold other religion's holy artefacts, making his god, Allah, superior to the others.

This strange way of thought had already cost him dearly. He had many artefacts of religious history. His prized possession was the 'Holy Grail' of Christ. He had paid two million dollars for the grail, from his now good friend Professor Julian Grimes. Mohammed had advertised over the Internet for artefacts and although had many replies, only two intrigued him enough to pursue. He had sent his advisors and experts out to check the authenticity of one of the claims, and to whether or not it really existed.

The other he knew about was in existence somewhere, that being the 'Holy Grail'. Professor Grimes flew out to Saudi and presented the Sheikh with the exact location of this long lost treasure, showing photocopies written in ancient text. The originals, he explained, were not allowed out of their original storage. Grimes laid out his evidence and convinced the Sheikh he could, with a small deposit for tools and bribes, get hold of the grail.

After a visit to a Cornish quarry, Grimes recovered a stone block suitable for his purpose. He arrived at the Sheikh's palace with the block which was to be x-rayed

immediately upon its arrival to verify the presence of the Holy Grail. The stone was then carbon dated and revealed its age as the good professor had stated. The Sheikh was advised to have the block vacuum sealed. Now in his private vault, lies the symbol that Christians have been searching so long to find.

It was of course an elaborate hoax. Professor Julian Grimes also known as, Mr John Crawford claimed he lived in Cambridge, England and was a tutor at Kings University. Crawford did in fact live in Cambridge. He, however, did not teach, he was an assistant curator at the university's museum. He was also a confidence trickster. Grimes photocopied old books and maps and obtained a rock from the museum, which was actually a building block from the late Tenth Century. He had it replaced with a block taken from a quarry after getting a local stonemason to sculpt it roughly into the same shape.

He then took some of his 'evidence' to Saudi and at Mohammed's palace convincingly told his story, showing unreadable and some partially damaged papers, explaining the missing chunks of the originals was the reason everybody was looking in the wrong place. He went on to explain, the 'Knights Templar', had actually found the 'grail' during the eleventh century and sealed it into a building block the same way as the mythical Excalibur was sealed in a rock. The knights then built it into a pillar within Glastonbury Abbey over nine hundred years ago and he knew, pointing to the evidence, the location, within the now just ruins of the abbey in the South West of England. Mohammed excitedly gave him instructions to obtain the grail. On his return to England, Grimes asked one of

the Cambridge art students to make him a wooden model based on what the student thought the grail might look like. Grimes then got the stonemason to cut a bung out of his original ancient stone. He then placed the model in the hollow, cemented the model in, cut the removed bung to make a top and sealed that in. The stonemason then scraped a minute hairline crack around the stone, so it looked as if the rock had been split in half to get the grail in and magically sealed. He set off a small explosion at the ruins that everyone blamed on a Methane gas build up, and a vagrant being clumsy with his matches. Then he obtained a copy of the article from the local press which he scanned and e-mailed to Mohammed, who he told to transfer the remainder of the money to pay off his accomplices.

A few weeks later he arrived at the Sheikh's palace rock in hand. Grimes claimed the police was hunting him as he had committed a grave crime. Because it was a holy treasure and therefore belonged to the crown, he would, if caught, be tried for treason, which is the only crime in England to still carry the death penalty. Grimes implored Mohammed never to mention him, or the Grail, and the Sheikh not wanting to get his good friend Professor Grimes into any trouble, locked the Grail away and agreed swearing his silence on the Q'uran and the prophet Mohammed.

Grimes had told Mohammed that he also knew the whereabouts of some missing parchments of the ²Gnostic gospels. Excited by this, Mohammed

² *Gnostic gospels are alleged documents written by other Disciples of Christ, containing the actual words of Christ. It is rumoured they also claim Mary Magdalene was married to and pregnant by Jesus and that a holy bloodline exists.*

commissioned his new and trusted friend to find this artefact.

“Spare no expense Julian,” he would say, “money no object.”

‘Grimes’ or Crawford explained they lay somewhere in a desert and he was going to head there straight away to give his fugitive status time to cool, stating he may be gone some time.

He was not lying about the desert, he was in a desert. The Nevada desert and to accurately pinpoint his location, Las Vegas.

Mohammed pleased with his acquisition, turned his attention to his next project. His advisors had taken many months, running into years, collecting proof and documentation to support the facts that indeed, such an artefact did exist. He recalled his information on his computer showing a photo of a hooded monk disappearing into an ancient temple.

Now after three years, Mohammed dialled the number and a voice at the other end answered in Cambodian.

“Hello, could I speak to Mr Towhee?”

Towhee reverted to English.

“Towhee speaking,”

Mohammed went on to introduce himself and mentioned he now wanted the Buddha’s relics. Towhee was a little taken aback, said “Price is still one million dollars.”

“Yes,” said Mohammed “No problem.”

“Ok I will obtain it for you and call you when I have it.”

Mohammed had obtained an ancient drawing of the box, so requested photographs first. Towhee put down the phone and shouted Dam. The photograph that Mohammed had, had been of Dam photographed at Ankor Wat an ancient Temple City in Cambodia. Built about 1100 ad, and now a major tourist attraction being the largest religious monument in the world. Towhee thought it added a bit of mystery to the whole thing. He received the call three weeks ago, now Towhee was only days away from adding more wealth to his already full pot, care of his friend and soon to be ex-friend Dam

A tap on the door was Towhees signal that Kip had arrived with his quarry, he went to the door, a smiling Kip was stood holding the hand of a small child of about eight years old. The girl had been sobbing and her dirty tears left black smudge marks around her cheeks. She wore a dirty faded floral dress, she looked up at the big Irish man as he opened the door. Gripped with fear she started sobbing again and was sharply checked by Kip who squeezed her hand.

“Good evening Mr Andrew, I trust she OK for you”

Towhee grabbed the girl and dragged her inside closing the door, telling Kip to wait on the porch, he would get a bonus tonight .A happy Kip went over to a table and sat down, he lit a cigarette. The door opened again. Towhee threw a packet of five King Edward cigars and a bottle of Samsong whisky at Kip, which he struggled to catch.

“Thank you, Mr Andrew,” Kip sniveled

And Towhee slammed the door shut, eager to get on with the night’s proceedings.

Towhee dragged the sobbing girl to his bedroom. She noticed the safe, which was open. Towhee saw her looking and took his key and locked it.

“Don’t look bitch,” he snapped in Cambodian and pulled her into the bedroom. Aroused to bursting point he pushed the youngster into the bathroom ‘shower’, he snapped and the girl ran into the shower room locking the door behind her. Towhee was agitated, he undressed and got onto his bed, thinking of how he was going to push himself into the tight little orifice and thrust when the girl screamed. That was the part that he loved the popping, and then the screaming .The more he thought, the more agitated he became.

“Hurry up! Hurry up!” he yelled, “Come on!” he repeated “or I’ll break down the fucking door.” The door slowly opened and the little girl came out.

“Come here, come here now.”

The terrified child moved over to Towhee who leapt up and ripped her dress off, grabbing her arm dragged her with him on the bed. The little girl was sobbing, which excited Towhee even more, he put his hand between her legs and felt a warm liquid hit his hand. He looked down and saw a stream of urine was coming out of the frightened young girl.

“Dirty little whore!” yelled Towhee in his broad Irish accent and threw her off the bed. “Clean it up and get back here.”

The girl ran back into the shower room and washed herself, while an angry but still aroused Towhee waited, he switched off the main light and turned on the bedside lamp.

“Come here, Come on!” screamed Towhee.

The door opened and the young girl looked at Towhee, then looked at the figure now standing in the shadows at the door. Towhee noticed the girl and looked over in the same direction. “What the fuck, Kip get out you little fucker.” hollered Towhee.

The figure moved forward into the light

“Who the fuck are you?” Towhee yelled and repeated in Cambodian.

The figure wore the same monks’ robe that Dam had made himself, complete with sword attached to a red sash. Pon, who had changed outside earlier into his Tinju robes, showed Towhee a picture of Dam.

“I am looking for this man, he has something that does not belong to him and I want it returned.” Pon spoke in Cambodian slowly so Towhee understood.

“He isn’t here, now get out.” Pon looked at the girl and she ran to the monk holding onto him.

“Please help me holy monk,” She pleaded and the monk held her to him. Towhee annoyed by this intrusion into his sordid world leapt out of his bed and rushed at Pon.

Pon turned around to shield the girl, removing his sword and sliding it across Towhees neck in one smooth rapid movement. Towhee stopped, a shocked expression came over his face. Pon calmly turned his back on Towhee and left the room with the girl. Towhee fell to his knees and slumped forward, his head thumped loudly against the floor, followed a few seconds later by the rest of his torso.

Pon had no feeling about killing, he was trained not to have. Vitthae and Somchay had told the monks, *‘If the time comes, remember we are not the judges of*

these 'duties', that is between them, and their god .We are only commissioned to arrange that appointment.'

Pon had arranged two appointments that night, Towhee was only the second life he had ever taken. The first he now had over his shoulders and was carrying a dead Kip, which he had dispatched with his Pitou minutes before, to join Towhees corpse. He laid the dead Kip on top of Towhees body and placed Towhees head on the top like a cherry on a cake.

The little girl had taken Towhees safe key, which had fallen off his neck, due to having no head to hold it on. She had opened the safe, her eyes widened as she took out bundles of crisp dollars, she explained to Pon who was looking for clues to the whereabouts of Dam, about money, it was only paper to him, but she explained what this paper was capable of doing. She had put back on her ripped dress. Pon turned to the now happy and relieved girl "You keep it," he said.

She split the bundle, "You take half, you will need it holy monk and beside there is enough for me to start on a great life. With this I can go home, my parents will be pleased, and let me stay." she said. A note of hope now in her voice.

Pon thought and accepted, he knew if money had that kind of power, it would be more useful than his ornaments. He found a photograph in a frame on Towhees desk it was the photograph of Dam going into Ankor Wat. Pon stared at the picture then placed it in his rucksack, at least now, he had confirmation and was on the right track, but was disheartened his trail had now gone cold, where would he find Dam and the holy relic? He had failed and although there were many papers on Towhee desk he could not understand them.

He would take them to Taksins friend, he thought maybe he can help but one more task to complete. He went back into Towhees bedroom were the two bodies lay.

He opened his jar of sunblaze powder, and poured a thin line over the centre of the bodies. He poured out of another container, a thin liquid that he mixed and spread over the powder, leaving a blob on the bodies that hardened to blue-white clay. He then took out another pot that contained gold, black, blue and white filings and sprinkled these in a circle around the bodies, this would, when the sunblaze ignited, react with the heat and direct the force straight up. He removed his simple but effective tinderbox, and went back to Towhees desk to look for some paper to light. As he grabbed a bundle of tissue paper, a loud ringing and vibrating sound came from the top of Towhees desk.

“It’s a mobile phone,” said the girl and handed the phone to Pon. He pressed the receive button, and a voice at the other end, a voice which Pon had not heard for over eight years answered, speaking Cambodian.

“Andrew, it’s Dam, we have arrived at Poi Pet just checking in.”

Pon looked down at the little girl.

“That man who brought you here, what’s his name?” he asked covering the mouthpiece “Kip,” replied the girl screwing up her face in disgust. Pon replied

“Dam it’s Kip, Andrew is showering.”

“Oh,” said Dam “you brought him another child have you?”

“Yes,” said Pon

“Are you OK Kip? You don’t sound your usual self.”

“Yes, fine,” replied Pon. “What’s your message?”

“Tell Andrew,” said Dam, “we are in Poi Pet, and we will check in tomorrow when we get across the border, before we leave for the Dolphin hotel in Pattaya.”

“Yes,” said Pon, “I will tell him.”

The phone clicked off and Pon stared at the phone. ‘Soon my friend, very soon,’ he placed the phone in his bag remembering to switch it off and asked the girl if she knew where Pattaya is? She didn’t, but he thought ‘Now I have another phone, I will call Taksin, he may know where Pattaya is, unless I can find out from someone else.’

He felt happy again and thanked Buddha for his continual help. With a prayer he blessed Towhee and Kips bodies and walked outside. Pon lit the tissue and tossed it through the window of Towhees bedroom. There was an instant whoosh! A blinding white light and intense heat. Then normality returned, leaving just a fine gold line around were two dead bodies lay only moments ago, although there was now a large hole in the roof of what once was Andrew Towhee’s bungalow. Pon and the little girl walked away into the hot dark night.



– Chapter Nine –

Cenat squeezed Vitchaes hand, “Are you OK old friend?”

Vitchae turned his head in Cenats direction, “Yes, I feel OK.”

The Royal Bangkok hospital is very modern and very smart. The rooms in the royal wing are the best in the country, it is the most expensive private hospital, catering to royalty and high-ranking government officials, although it was relatively small by hospital standards. It housed state of the art operating theatres and some of the countries (If not the worlds) top surgeons. Nurses rushed in and out to check Vitchaes vital signs every thirty minutes.

Wednesday 14th December 2005 was a day Vitchae and Cenat would remember for a very long time. In fact the events of the last five days would be unforgettable.

They had travelled for about twenty minutes in the helicopter and landed on the grounds of the Imperial Palace, Bangkok. The flight had been uneventful, which surprised Vitchae, he heard the roar of the engines and felt the aircraft move, he heard only a slight hum after an airman closed the door. And only felt a small bump on landing. ‘Not too bad, glad I’m blind,’ he thought, imagining the view if he wasn’t, birds flying past,

bumping into clouds, and maybe even crashing into the sun.

The S-92 was like a small hotel room, on the inside plush upholstery adorned the interior, a large seat raised higher than the others, here the King sat, two seats in the front for the guards that faced toward the rear. Four rows of three faced the cockpit for soldiers, airmen or the other members of the Royal family. Large intricate carvings, and gold leaf covered etching covered the sides, which was of a thick covered velour material, totally sound proof once the airman closed the side door.

The five soldiers who were in the village, mumbled about fearing they would be stuck in the jungle, and the six newly arrived soldiers quietly sniggered. Cenat and Taksin was talking, Vitthae listened, he was sat the other side of Cenat holding onto his friend's hand for dear life.

When they arrived at the Imperial Palace, they were escorted to the 'Temple of the Emerald Buddha'. Here they held the ceremony of enlightenment with the holy relic. Vitthae and Cenat felt strange, as they had not been here for many years. The last time Vitthae was there was when he was the Prime Master and he had not seen the temple since his sight failed. And although he still couldn't see, he still felt the awe, that holy atmosphere created, which sent a tingle down his spine. They both went into the temple and up to the statue of the Emerald Buddha, arm in arm they stood and prayed asking Buddha for guidance. They were then shown to the monks quarters and housed for the night.

The next morning the two monks ate, studied their scriptures and meditated. Late morning they were

summoned to the Royal residence. The King was in the stateroom, and stood around a medium sized table, with five men and one woman. Large sheets of paper were spread out around the table, the King asking a question, and one of the parties explaining something and pointing at the drawings, whereupon the King either nodded or shook his head.

The two elderly monks entered the large room and Cenat lead Vitchae over to the King, the party all gave them a respectful Wai. Cenat returned the Wai to the group and reverently Wai'd the King.

“I am truly sorry for the loss of your brothers, Khun Vitchae and Khun Cenat,” said the King.

Vitchae had grown up along side the King who was only 6 years his junior. Vitchae remembered seeing him as a boy. He came to the temple with his father and watched the ceremony. Vitchae himself was only on his second cycle as a novice monk (twelve years old). He had seen the King ascend to the throne in his early twenties and had blessed and chanted with the King when he was made Prime Master thirty years ago. Apart from the last four years, they had developed together, although with very different lifestyles. On the day of his birthday, the King would perform the ceremony with the monks, chant at the side of the Prime Master and then leave to perform his other royal duties. The monks would blend into the background and follow the King the whole day as his bodyguards, until all the Kings other duties were completed. At the stroke of midnight, when it was no longer his birthday, the monks would return to Pong-nam-rom, and home, until the next birthday a year later. The King would never speak to the monks that was not protocol. He was the ruler, the

living Buddha, and they were his servants and finest warriors. The King himself had noticed Vitchae for many years. The King never spoke to his warrior servants, but had often wondered what had happened to the old blind Prime Master. The King had noticed Vitchaes sight failing year by year, and then four years ago, Somchay was standing in the position of Vitchae. He assumed the old monk was dead.

The King beckoned them closer to the table. The six people around the table shuffled to make room for the monks so they could see the papers on the table. The smiling old face of the King put Cenat at ease, and the King asked him if this, pointing to a large aerial photo of the village laid on the table, was the village of Salaburi and surrounding area. Cenat had never seen the village from the air and stared at the photo, he could make out the Wat, and several things he started to recognise.

“Yes,” came his reply at which point the King ordered the six out of the room, gathering up all the papers and photographs from the table, the six bowed and left. When they had left the room the King and the two elderly monks went to sit on three chairs at the side of the room next to a large picture window which looked out onto the vast grounds of the royal palace. The King then explained his proposals. The two monks listened with great interest.

“We will draw up some plans, and you can go over them. Then return to the village and see what the villagers think,” said the King.

The King was like a shepherd and he wanted his lost sheep returning to the flock and into the

21st(Gregorian) century, The same thing he had done with the rest of his beloved country and people.

The King went on to explain, that he was getting old and coming to the end of his cycle of life .He would soon have to hand power over to his son *Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongorn* who, although now middle aged, was not a traditionalist. He liked all things modern and had no time for the past, so maybe now was time for the Tinju to step aside, maybe after this tragedy it was time to rethink the customs of the past. The King went on to explain as diplomatically as possible, how it was now in the modern world, the use of technology had outweighed the old ways. And the King was not prepared to let a tragedy that had just befallen them, happen again.

“There is too much greed in our world now,” he said.

Vitchae and Cenat sat silently and listened to this wise old King, they both had tears in their eyes but they both knew the King was right. That had also been Vitchaes train of thought for the last few days, he had mentioned to Cenat, that he knew the Tinju could, and probably should be restructured or finished in the old ways,

“And we are no longer needed my old friend,” he had said to Cenat.

“Our ways have not changed in centuries, perhaps it was a sign from the Lord Buddha that they moved on,” he said. And now the living Buddha had confirmed it, and although hard to hear, maybe it was time to accept it. Vitchae knew he was also close to the end of his life, but would embrace this challenge, and enter into this

strange new world with the people of the village, his flock.

The next three days were hectic for the two elderly monks, but they had more energy and strength than most people did in their twenties and they wanted to be consulted on everything.

The King had mostly left the decisions to them. They would take the ideas to the village. On the third day the King again returned to the discussions; he looked over plans, drawings and projections with the monks and the team of surveyors, architects and geologists, who had been in the room on the monks first visit and now worked closely with them. The King wanted to stay personally involved with the fate of his most loyal subjects. Vitichae had given his thoughts and ideas for the continuation and survival of the Tinju, but with many changes in their structure. The King agreed and plans were formulated, all were happy and pleased with the outcome. Vitichae had presented the King with the last ornament he had carved, he had finished it after he lost his sight and it was of great significance to him. The King had never seen anything cut and shaped with such precision on this four inch tall red stone. The King spent several moments admiring it before thanking Vitichae, he then gave it to the lady in the group who looked at the ornament, and with eyebrows raised looked at the smiling King. She held onto the ornament, then left the room. The King had promised that when the holy relic was returned, it would be placed with the Emerald Buddha, safe in the Imperial Palace for all, not just Royalty to enjoy and worship. Pon would be rewarded, in the way befitting the Kingdoms greatest warrior. There were no ifs about Pons success, as he

was on the side of right. On the evening of the third day, when business in the stateroom had concluded, only the two monks and the King remained. They wanted to get back to the village and relay the exciting news. The old King gently took the old monks arm.

“Khun Vitthae,” he said “You have faithfully served me through boy and man, now let your King try to repay you.”

The private hospital room door opened and a large Swiss man and a Thai man both wearing white coats entered. They went over to Vitthae’s bedside and the Thai doctor spoke.

“How are you master Vitthae?”

Then without waiting for a reply, he sat Vitthae up, a nurse who had followed them in pulled the backrest out and propped Vitthae in a sitting position.

Doctor Wansuk Tapakit and Doctor Fritz Hienbach had visited the Imperial Palace two evenings ago. The Swiss doctor being recognised as one the best at his field, Ophthalmology. They were summoned personally by the King and on their arrival, shown straight to the stateroom where the waiting and confused monks were sitting. The king asked if there was anything that could be done to help with the slightly older monk’s vision. Dr Hienbach looked into old monk’s eyes with an ophthalmoscope and mumbled about cataracts and a bit of retinal damage caused by the cataracts .He moved the scope around asking Dr Tapakit to translate. After ten minutes of examining Vitthae, he stood straight up looked at Dr Tapakit, and said in English with a strong Swiss accent, “OK book surgery for tomorrow afternoon, OK.”

The Thai doctor, who was used to this abrupt but brilliant eye surgeon, nodded.

“Have him prepped and ready for surgery at two o’clock sharp. OK.” continued Fritz

He then bowed at the King and strode out of the room.

The surgery had gone smoothly, it was a simple but effective procedure to remove the very severe and aged cataracts and laser repair the Retinal wall. Pressures bandages were applied overnight. The following morning doctor Tapakit cut the bandages that were wrapped around Vitchaes eyes, removed the gauze patches and stood back. Slowly Vitchae opened his eyes and slowly looked around the room, he became aware of someone else entering, but ignored this, he was in his own newly lit world and although he could only see blurred shapes, he knew they were people, he took hold of Cenat’s hand

“I can see again! Old friend I can see!

Cenat was laughing with joy. Vitchae looked around the room again and again, his vision still blurred, but that would get better assured Doctor Tapakit. The two doctors left the room “ready for discharge,” spoke the Swiss doctor to the nurse, and strode out of the room and on to his next patient, the small Thai doctor rushing behind him. Leaving the nurse with a happy Vitchae, who kept looking at everything, a happy Cenat, and the stranger.

“Hello, Master monks,” said the stranger.

They both looked around at him.

“I have some good news for you.” He looked at Vitchae.

“Well?” said Taksin “more good news.”

Taksin went on to tell them that Pon, had called him late the previous evening and he'd arranged for his friend, at the Thai consulate in Phnom Penh, to pick Pon up that morning, and now, Pon was on his way back to Thailand.

“Pon said his ‘duty’ has gone to Pattaya. He is in pursuit and is confident the holy relic will be returned in the next few days. My friend dropped him off and made sure he got on the aeroplane. He has just phoned confirming Pon is in the air and on his way to Pattaya.”

The two old monks looked at each other “Come on Vitthae,” said Cenat excitedly, “We have to get back to the village and make ready for our warriors return and start on our new mission.”

The two monks thanked Taksin, who had made arrangements for a helicopter to fly them to the village. Vitthae did not mind the prospect of a flight, he was confident the pilot could miss the sun again.

“Excuse me,” said Cenat to Taksin, “What is an aeroplane?”



– Chapter Ten –

Pon, was learning about aeroplanes and was now sat bolt upright clinging onto the armrest of a Boeing 737 on his way to Utapao airport in Thailand.

Pon had left Towhee's bungalow, he and the small girl had walked back to Phnom Penh. He had called Taksin en-route and explained what he had found out. Taksin had told him where Pattaya was, and explained that the quickest way would be to fly, he was a little confused, and Taksin explained that his friend would collect him and take him to the airport and catch an aeroplane

“What's an aeroplane?” enquired Pon.

Pon took the girl back to Phnom Penh, she then caught a bus. She thanked the monk and the tears that she now wept, were tears of joy. Pon went to a hotel recommended by Taksin and paid five dollars from his bundle, courtesy of Mr Andrew Towhee, he went to his room and meditated for several hours, finally sleeping on the floor next to the large bed.

The logistics of getting Pon to Pattaya by plane was difficult. Taksin discussed at lengths with his friend how they could do this. Pon had no papers, but his friend assured him, there wouldn't be much of a problem in Cambodia, but Taksin would have to

arrange for his arrival in Utapao. Taksin could mobilise armies, he would have little problems with immigration.

Pon was collected from his hotel at 14:00, his flight was due to leave at 15:30, he had changed back into his jeans and T-shirt and packed his belongings in his rucksack and spent the morning meditating and staring at the photograph that he'd brought from Towhee's bungalow. He thought about Towhee, he was the first white man he had ever seen and he decided that he did not like these foreigners. These people are strange he thought, did not act with honour or principle, maybe they are all the same, and hoped he would never meet another one. He found out he could remove the photo from the frame, this he did and then discarded the frame. He removed a small pen-like tool from his tool roll and spent the next few hours whittling one of his red coloured ornaments. He was going to add a small bird and because the fighter had taken his unfinished work, he would add to one of his others to pass a few hours. Towhee's phone had been constantly ringing since the early morning. Pon turned it off.

Taksin's friend arrived at 14:00. He was dressed in a smart immigration uniform. He took Pon in his car to the airport, about a twenty minute drive and gave Pon, two brown envelopes with, 'Diplomatic Papers' written across the front, one in Cambodian, and one in Thai, and officially stamped Royal Thai Consulate.

Phnom Penh International Airport is a very small airport, and very few aircraft actually take off or landed there, Pon saw a plane land when they drove to the airport, he became a little scared.

"Don't worry," smiled Taksin's friend, "safest and fastest way to travel."

Pon looked up at the sun it looked a bit low today and thought 'I hope they don't crash into it.'

They went into the airport together. Taksin's friend took Pon straight through to check-in where a Cambodian customs officer was waiting to greet them. Taksin's friend gave Pon strict instructions that once he left the terminal he should give this official one of the envelopes, the other envelope given to another official when he left Utapao, and told him a man in uniform would meet him there.

Pon was taken through the airport and the official was just waved through at the check-in. He just nodded at the staff and went straight through the x-ray and detectors which rang as Pon went through. Pon had covered his sword with paper, but you could easily recognise it was still a sword. He went straight through the departure lounge and on to a small supply vehicle on the tarmac.

"Ok," said the Cambodian holding out his hand, Pon gave him the envelope written in Cambodian. The man hurriedly folded and placed it in his pocket. Pon then sat on the little truck that drove to the waiting aeroplane. Nervously, Pon went up the small stairway and entered the fuselage. Pon was greeted by a smartly dressed Thai lady who led him to a seat at the rear of the plane. She could see Pon was anxious, so she reassured him by telling him he had the safest seat on the plane, aeroplanes never backed into mountains she chuckled, this bit of light hearted banter didn't help, Pon was terrified. She buckled him into the seat, and he stared out of the window not daring to move. He was on the plane alone for about thirty minutes, when a large bus pulled up and the other passengers started filing on

to the plane. Still nervous, he watched out of his window as the jet engines started to wind up. The plane started its taxi. 'This isn't too bad,' thought Pon, as the plane hurled down the runway, then suddenly it became airborne. Pon was fluent in Thai, Cambodian, Burmese and ancient Siamese language and he was screaming in all four at the top of his voice, "STOP! STOP!"

The plane touched down 90 minutes later at Utapao airport, Pon still clutching onto his armrest. He had spent the last 90 minutes staring straight-ahead, not letting go of his seat. The air stewardess had closed the window blind so he couldn't see outside. That didn't help, but at least he had stopped screaming. He felt a bump when they landed which made him jump. He was just about to scream again thinking they had hit the sun, when the air stewardess came and opened the blind "Look," she said, "we have landed."

An Immigration official got on the plane, he and Pon stayed there until the other passengers had disembarked, and he then led Pon off the plane and onto another small service vehicle that drove them the short distance to the small terminal. They stopped at the side of the terminal at a small hut. They entered through one door, went through a door opposite and straight outside the front of the airport. Pon handed the man the other envelope. The man smiled and went back inside the office.

Pon sat down under a tree and removed the map that Taksin's friend had given him of the Eastern seaboard, he noticed a straight road from Utapao to Sattahip and through to Pattaya. He had never read a map before, but a quick lesson in the airport car park by Taksin's friend, he thought easy, and he was right, but

the road, which was only about an inch on the map, was about 40kms He decided to walk.



– Chapter Eleven –

“Seven days, 168 hours, 10080 minutes.”

Tina Turner started belting out ‘*Simply the best,*’

“Seven days, 168min...” repeated Stu.

“Yes, alright matey, we know, now shut up and watch the show.” said an irritated Spock

“But Spock, we only have a week left.”

The dancers came on stage. Stu shut up and watched. The first one out was dressed in a sexy Tina Turner basque and large wig and started miming to the song. She was strutting about the stage like the real McCoy, but Thai version. Then, four scantily clad back-up dancers came out from behind the stage and joined ‘Tina’ in perfect sync. They all mimed along to the queen of pop. ‘Tina’ wound up for the big finish, her very attractive back up dancers whipped off their bikini tops revealing their breasts, all perfect, round and well proportioned. The crowds around the stage cheered and whistled.

“Nice tits,” mumbled Spock.

“Yeah, pity they are all blokes,” said Nick, who picked up his drink with his good hand, the one that wasn’t in a plaster cast, finished the last drop “Three more, lads?” he asked.

Nick had broken his arm in his tumble out of the window. He was taken to hospital and x rayed which revealed a small crack in his left Ulna, smaller of the two bones in the forearm, and a few bumps and bruises. They wanted to keep him overnight, but when he found out how much it would cost, he demanded to be put in a plaster cast and released. He was told to return before he went home and have the plaster split prior to his flight and then to have it removed in England six weeks later. That was five days ago.

He had forgiven Spock, who didn't even realise he had bumped the door into him, which resulted in Nick falling out of the window, but when Nick told him what had happened, he grovelled and begged forgiveness. Nick, of course, played on this even though he knew he was partly responsible because he never locked his door, He always did now. Nick was happy, he had phoned Luanne while he was at the hospital. Stu and Spock had gone to the hospital and stayed with him throughout the day listening to his grumbling and whinging. His mood changed when he arrived back to the hotel after being discharged. Luanne was in the reception with Dao and Moo. Nicks whinging stopped and he started hobbling and pulling pathetic pained looking expressions. Luanne came over to him and asked if he was OK and started fussing around him like an old mother hen and then they disappeared up to his room. Luanne had dumped her boyfriend when Nick had called her.

The poor man, a middle-aged Englishman, had been saving up for months, often at times with difficulty due to having to send Luanne money because her baby was sick. She said she needed ten thousand Baht a month,

which he gladly sent the love of his life. When the Englishman arrived, Luanne was waiting for him at his hotel, she hugged and kissed him and he was as happy as a sandboy. They went to bed and made love twice, he had not seen his love for many months and he was never unfaithful in England. He never went out anywhere, he had told her, he had no money to go out. Luanne had said it was the same for her, she never went anywhere, just stayed at home with her sick baby and had just arrived back from Udon Thani, North East Thailand, that morning to see him, she loved him and didn't care about his money. This was, of course, a load of old bollocks, but it was the Thai way.

Although many men fall for this nobody ever really gets hurt, a few broken hearts, but these are soon mended in this carefree land. They were making plans for his two-week stay when Nick phoned. Luanne rushed into the bathroom with the phone and told Nick not to call her. Then a pleading Nick who was, as he claimed, lying on his death bed, with the doctors giving him maybe only days left to live, he desperately needed her. She weighed up her options. Ten thousand Baht a month, or Nick. Nick was a Pattaya-wise foreigner, and she knew he was probably bullshitting her, she also knew he wouldn't give her any money.

But she also knew this new man was a stupid foreigner and would believe anything. She had known Nick a long time, she did like the 'cheap Charlie,' and maybe he would pay her something this time. She walked back into the room, the Englishman was laying on the bed smiling at her.

“Are you OK darling?” he enquired.

“No,” she sobbed. “My mama call me, baby really sick, I have to go back home, I will call you later.”

Thais have a basic health service, any treatment for a Thai person is almost free. They pay 30Baht a year for this service.

She picked up her handbag and left for the ‘Siam Sawasdee’ hotel, leaving the poor Englishman to wonder what had happened. He thought he would give her some more money when she contacts him.

It was getting late, Stu, Spock, and the girls went for something to eat. The lads had been with Nick at the hospital all day, much to the annoyance of Stu.

“You pushed the idiot out of the window, you stay.”

Spock pleaded “You’re my mate, I would for you.”

The guilt trip worked and the two had stomped around the hospital all day listening to Nick droning on about how much it was going to cost, how much his arm hurt and how it was all Spocks fault.

The next morning Stu and Spock decided to hire a motorbike and discover what else was to see around the eastern seaboard. They decided to try the Tiger Zoo at Sri Racha, about 40 minutes from Pattaya. They each set off on their Honda CBR 400cc, with Dao navigating on the back of Stu’s machine. They headed off on the Bangkok Road to the Zoo. The bikes were fast, ‘like shit off a shovel’, and they soon reached the Tiger Zoo which was so vast, they had to drive around it. The animals were kept in large open enclosure and looked contented.

The lads were feeling a bit uncomfortable. The engines of the bikes were hot and positioned in the wrong place, both Stu and Spock had to stop at a small cafe and while they ate ice cream, they packed their

now roasting testicles with bags of ice. They now understood what a boil-in-the-bag fish felt like from the fish's point of view. The zoo was busy, but the cafe where they were sitting was deserted. Strangely, people avoided that area which puzzled all four of them. The waitress in the cafe spoke to the two girls who looked up.

“What did she say?” Spock asked Moo.

“*Kookie Ling*,” replied Moo and she and Dao moved away.

“What?” said Stu.

The two girls started talking amongst themselves about the English translation. There was no need, a large liquefied brown blob landed on Stu's half finished ice cream, the two lads looked up and saw three or four monkeys scurrying around on wires in trees above their heads.

“Monkey shit,” shouted Moo.

The group arrived back at the hotel in the early evening. They decided that tomorrow they would try the ‘Million Year Stone Park and Crocodile Farm’, they would go by taxi.

They returned the bikes and spent that evening in Spock's room playing dominoes, which they had bought earlier, along with two bottles of Samsong whiskey, some orange juice for Dao and two bags of ice for their still throbbing, swollen and well cooked bollocks.

Million Year Stone Park is the largest crocodile farm in Thailand. It houses a stone that has been carbon dated to be over a million years old. There is also a large pond, which contains giant catfish and several tiger and bear enclosures. But the main attraction are crocodiles, there are thousands of beady eyes, peeping

out from an enormous lake. The four watched a show, a Thai man put his head in a large crocodile's mouth and doing what by most would be considered suicidal stunts. Stu, Spock Moo and Dao had their photographs taken sat on a croc, which eyed a rather nervous Spock up and down. The trainer had to remove the crocodile, as big Spock had told him if it moved again, he would be going home with fresh crocodile skin shoes. The croc must have understood this and shot off around the arena with an angry Thai in hot pursuit. They then went to a small restaurant, next to the show arena, and ordered four crocodile steaks.

“And make it snappy,” added Spock.

Stu groaned at his pathetic attempt at humour but Spock didn't care. He had seen a good show and was now eating the cast.

The next two days were the most relaxing of the holiday so far. Nick was feeling better, so they all went to a small island about forty minutes ferry ride from Pattaya called, Koh Larn. They caught the ten o'clock ferry. Nick was happy it only cost twenty Baht. They had a few beers on the chuggy old ferry, and arrived at the Koh Larn jetty, forty-odd minutes later. There was no beach were they docked, so they went and asked at the restaurant/resort on the jetty opposite. There they met the proprietor an Englishman called 'one eye Steve,' due to the fact he only had one eye and his loud, slightly crazy wife, 'Non'. He directed the lads to one of the four beaches, and said he would see them on their return. They hired a Baht bus for the day and went to Samae Beach. It was hot and sticky on the beach and they all put on sunblock, same factor as red lead. They

frolicked on the beach and Stu dragged a giggling Dao into the sea.

“Going for an aqua shag,” he proudly boasted, followed by Spock and Moo who were soon up to their shoulders in the water. Stu had Daos legs around his waist. He slid his hand between her legs and slipped her bikini to one side, she tugged at the front of his shorts releasing the animal from its slumber. He pressed himself forward entering a willing, and now familiar, moist world .He started slowly kissing her. They then heard rapid high pitched unfamiliar speech directly behind him. Dao looked over his shoulder and pulled herself closer and stood still with Stu still inside her .A black rubber ring floated past the couple with three young children and one old Japanese woman happily chatting and just drifting along looking at the couple engaging in their nuptials. The annoying Japanese drifted around between both the couples, much to the annoyance of a frustrated Stu and Spock, the two girls chuckling as the two lads asked the floating Japanese to go forth and multiply.

“Fuck off.”

The Japanese just smiled and nodded and continued their floating and chattering for thirty minutes, by which time the lads ardour had worn off. They straightened themselves up and got out of the water grumbling and went to where a laughing Nick and Luanne were sitting and had been watching the drama from their deck chairs.

They all decided to stay the night and went to one-eyed-Steve’s to book a room. They ate and sat on deck chairs on the pier of the restaurant. After six o’clock the island became deserted as the last ferry departed. Nick

mentioned his arm was sore and he went to bed with Luanne, leaving Stu, Dao, Spock, Moo and one-eyed-Steve sat talking. Steve suggested going to watch the sunset at the small beach only five minutes away, they thought this a good idea, so ordered two motorbike taxis and went to a small deserted beach. They sat down camera in hand and waited.

The sunset and view was breathtaking, they could see the tall towers and outlines of Pattaya clearly against the backdrop of the horizon. The sky blazed a golden glow and turned into a fiery blood red along the horizon as the sun slowly made its nightly descent, with the darkness drifting down to meet it. There were a few midnight blue clouds in the sky that just ambled along, with, it seemed, no particular place to go and no particular rush to get there. The darkness had won its nightly battle and the sun withdrew completely leaving a dark starless sky. The odd lighter grey-blue patch had remained, which made the sky look like a dark, cobalt blue quilt. Revealing the twinkling star like lights on the Pattaya horizon, for a few moments it took their breath away and then it was over.

The unlit beach was in darkness, apart from the odd glow of a star making its late appearance. After about ten minutes, Spock let out a long sigh followed moments later by Stu.

“What an awesome place,” said Stu

“Yeah,” agreed Spock in a Philly mood. Moo coughed and swallowed hard and Dao coughed and spat several times. A relaxed Spock looked over to the dark shadowy figure of Stu

“Dao, doesn’t swallow then mate?”

They all returned to one-eyed-Steve's, the girls went straight to their rooms for a Listerine gargle and sleep, the lads went to the restaurant. Steve and Non sat at the small jetty overhanging the ocean.

One-eyed-Steve had lived with his wife 'Non' on the island for four years.

His restaurant was situated directly opposite the jetty where the ferry stopped. You had to walk up another jetty, which was about fifty yards wide, the rooms for rent were on the right hand side, five in all, plus a large snooker hall. The resort was T-shaped with the restaurant being at the top. It was a fairly large open restaurant with just a roof, supporting beams and surrounded by the sea. It had a small bar in the centre and twenty tables around it. There was also an extra-uncovered overhang at the front approximately twenty meters long by five meters wide, here you could go fishing or just sit and relax.

Spock and Stu ordered a beer and joined the couple. A few hours later they were all spannered, the four sat around a table .Stu enquired about how Steve lost his eye, Steve explained he was drunk and fell off his motorbike.

"That's nothing," he said, "look at this," and pointed to a large scar on his shoulder "That's where I fell off the pier," he said pointing to the spot. Things then started to get like the scene in jaws when Hooper and Quint started comparing scars.

"Look at this one."

"Oh, that's nothing. I got that beat."

This went on for what seemed like hours. Stu and Spock thought they were there to judge who had the best scar between Steve and his wife. Every time one of

them showed a scar they told the story behind it, then they would point to the spot where it happened. Always at the restaurant and always spannered, which probably explained why they never had any customers staying the night. Stu recollected the time he spent in the Navy when he visited HMS Victory. Nelson's flagship and a brass plaque on the quarter deck which read: Nelson fell here: Stu had thought if these two had a plaque every time they had an accident, the floor would be worth a fortune in brass. Spock just thought, 'I know someone sleeping in one of the rooms who are as accident-prone.' Nicks ears must have been burning.

One-eye-Steve and his wife Non, who were now quite shit-faced, ran out of scars to show and looked to Stu and Spock to announce a winner. Stu mentioned that although Non had some very impressive scars, the majority had come from the same place, a hole in the kitchen floor, which went straight into the water or onto rocks when the tide was out. Non's exit from the restaurant wasn't as ambitious as Steve's, so Steve had in their opinion won. Non wasn't very happy about this and stormed off to bed. Stu and Spock thought this light-hearted banter was turning serious and imagined getting murdered in their sleep. They staggered back to their rooms and went to sleep.

The next morning they awoke and went for breakfast, they followed the girls to the restaurant, a smiling Non shouted.

"Good morning,"

Their heads were throbbing from the night before but not as much as Steve's shins. When they approached him, he was sitting down, and they noticed large scratches and dried blood. He had sealed his

victory by falling down the hole in the kitchen floor while making himself a late night snack.

“Not too bad, the tide was only just out,” he said.

They all had another day on the beach just relaxing and drinking, it was idyllic, they decided to try another island tour in the next few days, but to another island, as this one wasn't as safe they thought.

They caught the six pm ferry back to Pattaya and had a quiet night playing dominoes. Stu and Spock had paid the bar fine for Moo and Dao until the twenty fourth of December. That way they didn't have to keep going to happy world bar every night, and the girls could go and see Stu and Spock off at Bangkok airport when they left to go home. Charlie was happy, but didn't like the thought of his two big drinkers being loose in Pattaya, and some other bar taking his Bahts. Dao and Moo were ecstatic as they were having a good time and would have wages waiting for them.

Bar fines, are paid to every bar by customers who take girls out of a bar. The fine is usually about 200Baht per day. It is a system used at every bar in Thailand. The staff and bargirls, receive a small percentage of this fine, and a percentage from drinks bought them. Most bars also pay a small basic wage and the girls negotiate with their customers how much they want to spend for the night with them. But most of the new girls want a steady boyfriend and a lot of times are happy with the man paying just the bar fine. They know that if they are taken long time especially by the new and unwise to the Thai way, that there is every chance that they will be taken care of for a long time. So money is very rarely mentioned, they are, in their eyes and the customers, a girlfriend. This is the stage that if a

man takes them it usually ends in marriage. If not, they usually become the longer, more bar-wise ladies, cashiers or mamasans.

Now, with only one week left for Spock and Stu, the lads decided to have a 'boy's only' night out. They leave the girls in Spock's room watching TV, but they spent most of the time comparing notes and trophies. Dao with the mobile phone that Stu had bought her and the already telephone-owning Moo, had a gold bracelet, courtesy of Spock. Luanne said nothing, she had worked Pattaya and the bars for two years, and had thrown away, or given away more trophies than the two newcomers owned put together, and besides Nick never gave her anything. Luanne smiled at the two happy girls.

"Don't worry ladies," she said, "there is more to come."

The lads had gone out early, the plan was a few drinks and go and watch the Tina Turner ladyboy show for a laugh, they would go back early only if juiced. (But the best laid plans of mice and men.) They were watching the show, but they were spannered and rapidly entering shitfaced and it was only eight o'clock.

The '*katoeys*' ladyboys were all elegantly dressed, it was difficult to tell them from real women, especially when they danced and mimed expertly through Tina Turner, Diana Ross, and Barbara Streisand numbers. They finished their first set and background music started playing. A now shitfaced Spock turned to Nick.

"Where's the toilet, matey?"

Stu joined in "Yes, I want to go too,"

Nick pointed to the toilets, which were situated where all the ladyboys were standing talking, fixing their make up and adjusting todger position.

Stu looked at Spock.

“You have two hopes of me going there, BOB hope and NO hope.”

Spock agreed, deciding to wet their pants instead. Nick saved this embarrassment by suggesting they go outside, he pointed to an alley at the side of the Dolphin hotel, they could use the side of the hotel, it was a dark alley and besides he wanted to go too. They got off their seats and staggered toward the alley.



— *Chapter Twelve* —

Towhee had planned the meeting well. Always suspicious he had left no room for error. The meeting place was chosen by him in Pattaya, he knew the corrupt policemen there, even though he had left under a shadow, he knew forgiveness would come easy in the form of Baht notes. So he knew this was the place for the transaction. It was the easiest place to get away with anything from stealing a national treasure or even murder, at the right price. He had made his two henchmen drive across the border as there are no searches at the borders and no detectors, unlike airports; this was going to be essential for Miguel and his small ‘package’. He had chosen the hotel of one of his old acquaintances, The Dolphin, for the meeting. Towhee knew his friend paid the police to turn a blind eye to the happenings there. It was a favourite venue for a lot of underhanded activities from the street walking prostitutes. These are girls who could not work the bars, they would have had the reputation for stealing or abusing customers, so were blacklisted, therefore having to walk the streets for customers to mainly take back and rob. Mohammed wanted a neutral place to meet, and this, Towhee had told him was perfect. Towhee had planned for every contingency, except for his untimely death.

Dam and Miguel were getting worried, they had been constantly phoning Towhee and when there was no reply, they tried Kip, They had been trying for two days now and both phones seemed to be switched off. Very unlike Andrew, something must have happened, they both thought. They considered postponing, but they knew Abdul was arriving on the sixteenth, they didn't want to risk incurring Towhees wrath if his deal never went through, so they went ahead with the schedule. Miguel had booked a return flight for the seventeenth, he would find out more then. He then changed the venue for transfer of funds to his bank account in Gibraltar just in case something had happened to Towhee.

Everything was set, the second floor room they had set up for the inspection of the relic and transfer of funds. Miguels extra task was already set up and planned .The murder and disposal, of this now surplus to requirements Thai. They had booked Abdul at the Marriott Hotel and arranged a safety box for the relic. Abdul was to stay there one night and fly back the next day to Saudi with the holy box hidden in the base of a metal statue of the prophet Mohammed holding a copy of the Quran. The relic would be wrapped in a thin lead sheet that would give a hollow appearance if x-rayed. Dam and Miguel had the statue made on their arrival two days ago. Abdul's instructions were to carry this in his hand and place it on the shelf for small metal objects when he passed through the detectors. If the officials insisted it should go through the x-ray machine. Abdul would shout and wail at them about his religion, ramble on how it was against the Prophet Mohammed's will to have his effigy desecrated by modern science and

knowing the Thais, they would just let him pass through rather than get involved with arguing, it wasn't in their nature. But if it had to go through x-ray there should be no problem with the lead sheeting

They had returned the car Towhee had arranged for them at the border and hired an inconspicuous Toyota Vios to pick Abdul up from Bangkok International Airport. They gave false names to the uncaring Thai rental company.

They collected Abdul, a small chubby Arab from the airport at 17:30. He had a large suitcase, 'much too large for a one-night stay,' thought Dam.

They headed back from the airport. Miguel and Abdul were making small talk about Towhee and Mohammed and how long each had been working in their respective employ. Dam drove, as he could not understand English and therefore could not join in. They arrived at the Marriott Hotel and Abdul went to freshen up, Dam and Miguel waited in the reception, which was a nice change from hanging about in the seedy hotel where they had been staying two days since arriving.

All three then went to the Dolphin Hotel and up to the second floor, room 205. It was a very basic room. They sat down at a single, small table. Miguel had made it more basic by having the bed removed. The whole hotel had a musty urine smell, the rooms were particularly rank. Dam pulled open the large window at the side to let some of the smells from the street filter in. Abdul who was used to the high lifestyle his position granted him looked uncomfortable. He opened his suitcase and removed a Toshiba A8-P440 laptop and webcam then plugged in an antenna. He then busied

himself, making a connection. Dam removed the metal statue from a rucksack and unscrewed the base. The small jewel encrusted box was removed from its lead blanket and placed in front of Abdul. Dam was getting an odd feeling in the pit of his stomach, this man did not look like he was from a museum, covered in gold bracelets, large stoned rings and a gold watch, which was not a fake. No, definitely something not right. Miguel sat glancing at his watch and patting the small bulge by his rib cage. Walther PPK with silencer, his favourite gun. Dam had also something to pat, located on the same part of his body under his denim jacket.

A smiling face appeared on the computer screen as Abdul was removing more items from his suitcase.

“Hello,” said Mohammed his face beaming from a small insert that had opened up on the monitor. He and Abdul then had a conversation in Arabic, and reverted to English to speak with Miguel about Towhee.

“No problems,” said Miguel “Andrew had to go away on business, he has another artefact to look at in the jungle and wouldn’t be able to get a signal on his phone.”

“OK,” said the voice on the screen, “send him my regards.”

“I will get him to phone you on his return,” said the relieved Miguel, glad that the Arab had bought his story.

Abdul removed two enlarged A4 size photographs from his briefcase and studied them against the box. The photographs were of ancient pastel drawings one depicting a young smiling King Bumnalonkorn, sitting in the lotus position with the holy relic placed in his spread out hands, surrounded by fierce looking devil

headed warriors and armoured elephants in the background

The other photograph had been an enlarged segment of the first showing only the box. Abdul compared this against the box, grunted and started operating the machines and scraping small shavings off the box and placing it on various pads and sensors on his machines. “Won’t take a moment,” he said.

Lights flashed and noise emanated from the machines. When the machine had finished its diagnostics, which took only about ten minutes, he turned to the computer screen and announced to the smiling face of Mohammed.

“Yes, the relic is genuine.”

Mohammed beamed “Excellent! Let’s get on with the transfer.”

Dam had been staring at the pictures of the holy relic that Abdul had left lying on the table, ‘they are the first Tinju,’ he thought and a twinge of remorse cursed through his body.

Mohammed’s face on screen turned to one side as he spoke to someone next to him, a few moments later faced the front. He spoke to Abdul and then to Miguel.

“Transfer complete,” he said.

Abdul passed the computer to Miguel who spent five minutes typing in code words to his banks website and into his account. He pressed a key and let out a sigh of relief.

“A million dollars, I’m a rich little Spaniard, thanks to these stupid Arabs,” he spoke out loud to himself in Cambodian so the two Arabs wouldn’t understand, but Dam understood.

Dam shouted at Miguel in Cambodian.

“No! No, you are not robbing Andrew,” and Miguel shouted at Dam to shut his mouth or he was not going to see Andrew again, a heated exchange then took place between the two and Abdul reached in his pocket for a handkerchief. Dam knew he was being set up and as quick as a flash reached into his jacket and unsheathing his ‘Glave’, in one smooth flowing movement removed the top of Abduls skull. He grabbed for the box and snatched it up. Miguel had his PPK aimed at Dam and fired. The bullet entered Dams left shoulder as he threw the Glave at Miguel, which missed and stuck firmly in the wall behind the now determined Spaniard. Miguel aimed again.

Dam rolled backwards and tumbled out of the open window.

“*Merde! Shit!*” Shouted Miguel, as the face on the computer screen screeched and wailed in English and Arabic.



– Chapter Thirteen –

Three consecutive short, sharp, buzzing noises followed by the sound of three high stream jets of water hitting the wall and finally three long satisfied ‘ahhhhs’ signalled that Nick, Stu and Spock had made it to the alley at the side of the hotel and were relieving themselves of excess fluid, in order to make room for more beer.

A quiet thud, a groan, another louder thud and a yelp quickly followed.

Stu, who was leaning with one hand supporting himself against the wall turned to face Spock, “Did someone just fall on your head?”

Lazily, Spock turned his head and while wiping his now sodden hand down his shorts drunkenly replied, “Yes, matey, it would appear so,”

They both leaned back and turning their head to where Nick had been standing just moments earlier and looked down at a laid out Nick with what appeared to be, and was, a small Thai man laying prostrate across him.

Spock again glanced at his old friend Stu.

“I suppose I’ll get the blame for this, too.”

They both rapidly finished and went to assist the two fallen men. Spock picked up Dam who was conscious, but a bit shaken and confused. Stu bent over

to assist Nick. He noticed something shining on the floor next to Nick, so he picked up the object and slipped it in his pocket, then bent down again and asked Nick if he was OK.

“No, I am not OK,” said an indignant Nick who spat a white object into his hand. Spock and Stu helped the two to their feet. Nick had a large gash on the back of his head where he had hit it against the floor. Dam was groggy and mumbling in Thai, Spock and Stu couldn’t understand what the Thai was talking about, but noticed a large dark stain spreading over the shoulder of his jacket.

“Come on,” said Stu, and he supported Nick.

Spock carried the weak, but light, Dam, they headed out of the alley and around the side and into the nearest bar.

Miguel came rushing out of the hotel just as the four were about to turn the corner, still cursing with gun in hand. He stopped and stared at the group, taking aim and then lowering his arm as they disappeared around and into the bar.

The two injured men then sat down. The girls at the bar came over to help although avoiding the little Thai man after they had noticed he had blood coming from his shoulder. They guessed it was either a drug related knifing or shooting, either way they did not want any involvement and turned their attention to Nick. Now in the light, Spock and Stu now noticed that the dark stain on Dam’s jacket was blood. They looked at each other unsure of what to do. Then a rather anxious mamasan told them to get the injured men to hospital as soon as possible. She said that she would call the police and

informed them that Pattaya Bangkok Memorial Hospital was only a few Sois away. The girls were tending to Nick, they gently eased his todger back into his shorts and zipped up his fly, then proceeded to dab at the urine that covered the front of his shorts with some tissues. Nick took a clean tissue from one of the girls and wrapped up his front four ceramic crowned teeth that had been knocked out and that he had spat out earlier. He put the tissue wrapped package in his shirt pocket. He looked like a vampire with no front incisors. All that remained between his remaining canine teeth were small metal rods that the crowns should be stuck to.

To break the sombre mood Spock removed his top false plate and offered them to a rather unimpressed Nick.

“Here mate, you can use mine,” he smiled.

Nick just moaned about how much they had cost, and would cost to replace.

Miguel had thought about what to do next. He did not want to leave any loose ends, which is what Dam had now become. Although things hadn't gone to plan, his main fear was not of Dam talking to the Police, he wasn't scared of them; he was however, scared of Dam. Miguel knew once Dam had regained his strength he would come and hunt him down and he knew this assassin easily could kill him, ‘so I have to do it now,’ he thought. He had decided to walk up to the bar, shoot Dam in the head and in the ensuing panic, he would then run back down to the alley and into the Dolphin Hotel, where he would get another room and lie low until the dust settled. He had a million dollars, and he knew only a fraction of that could buy his way out of anything. ‘Yes,’ he thought, ‘that is a good plan.’

It was the last thought he ever had.

The mamasan had flagged down a Baht bus, and gave instructions to the driver. Spock carried Dam into the bus and laid him on one of the benches. Stu helped Nick, who was now complaining about feeling sick and dizzy.

‘So do I,’ thought Stu, ‘It’s called being spannered.’

While they were climbing into the bus, people had started to gather around them, looking at the ongoing activity. Nobody noticed that from the alley, a large, brilliant white plume shoot up into the night sky for an instant, and like a lightning flash was gone.

The Baht bus arrived at Pattaya Bangkok Memorial Hospital accident and emergency department, where Stu went inside, returning a few moments later with a nurse and ancillary staff. They all helped get the two injured men off the bus and into the casualty department. The casualty staff were very efficient, and while Stu and Spock were made to sit in a modern waiting room, the two injured men were taken behind some large swing doors into a treatment room, where a doctor was waiting to examine them.

After approximately thirty minutes, a doctor came out. He introduced himself and asked what had happened. He spoke very good English and Spock and Stu had no problem understanding, but they couldn’t be much help and only told the doctor what they had seen. The doctor then went on to explain that the Thai man, Dam, had a bullet in his shoulder that they would remove that night, and that he had called the emergency theatre team in.

Nick had a nasty laceration that they were in the process of suturing and he also had concussion. The doctor explained they would both be admitted to hospital. They wanted to observe Nick and he would probably be released the next day. The Thai would be treated for his gunshot wound and as nobody knew who he was, would be turned over to police custody. He also explained Stu and Spock would have to pay for two private rooms, as Dam never had any money on him and their friend kept passing out when money was mentioned.

Stu handed over 4000 Baht which they both thought the right thing to do. They felt sorry for the Thai and it would stop Nick whining so much when he was released.

“Oh, and by the way,” said the doctor. “Your friend asked me to give you these and asked you if you would keep them safe.”

He handed Stu the tissue paper containing Nick’s false teeth. Stu slipped them in his shirt pocket and they left the hospital and caught a bike taxi back to the hotel.

The girls had been having a good night laughing and joking about conquests, foreigners, food and shopping. They were spannered on the whisky and wine coolers the lads had left them. When Spock and Stu entered the room it went from a raucous laughter to silence.

“Where’s Nick?” slurred Luanne.

Spock explained a Thai man fell on his head, bounced off and landed on Nick and now he was in hospital and they would be keeping him overnight. The three girls burst out laughing again, this time joined by Spock and Stu.

The merriment died down after a few minutes and Luanne announced she had better go and check on Nick, she left the room still chuckling to herself the four remaining, sat down and planned what to do.

While they talked Stu put his hand in his pocket and pulled out the golden jewel encrusted box. They all stared at it for a moment and Dao asked, "What is it?"

Stu turned the box over and they all looked. "I don't know, there is a lid to it but it doesn't seem to open." said Stu.

He handed the box to Spock who looked at it then started pushing the rubies and sapphires which, because of age, were rounded and not faceted and polished.

"Maybe there's a catch somewhere?" Spock said and started pushing the stones and bits of the box. He pushed a ruby on the front of the box.

For the first time in 2000 years of being undisturbed the lid popped slightly open. Spock lifted the lid fully open and like a full vacuum cleaner bag, a small cloud of dust escaped. The four gazed at the contents of the box.

"It's a portable ashtray," exclaimed Stu.

The four teeth were in bad state of decay when they arrived in Siam 2000years ago. They had been kept in a simple clay pot for 500 years previously, before King Bunnalokorn had made the golden box. Now with time and the sudden introduction of air from the outside world, the teeth had disintegrated leaving only small hard ashes and dust, which crumbled under the large poking finger of Spock.

"Get your finger out of their mate and I'll give it a wash!" exclaimed Stu

Stu took the box and emptied out the remains of the Buddha's teeth into a small waste bin and rinsed the inside of the box under the tap. He repeated this a few times with liquid soap and tissue paper until it was ash free.

"There," he said, "I will give that to my mum and tell her it's a priceless relic."

"You are as tight fisted as Nick," said Spock. "Giving your mum a cheap portable ashtray." The two lads laughed and the girls joined in although not knowing what for. A thought had occurred to Stu and he took Nicks dentures out of his shirt pocket and placed them in the box still wrapped in tissue.

"There you go," he said "that'll keep them safe till Mr Moaner gets out of hospital."

He clicked the lid back shut and put the box in his bedside drawer.

They all talked again about a plan of action, coming up with a solution that they were all happy with.

"Right," said Stu, "so we are all agreed then, we leave for Koh Samet Island tomorrow morning."

"Too right," said Spock. "I am not getting stuck at a hospital all day again listening to Nick moaning. We can see him in a couple of days, give him time to get over it, besides,"

He went on. "We are on holiday and we only have 164 hours, that's less than ten thousand minutes remaining, and," continued Spock with his stern but still slurred voice, "we're going to another island, so girls, pack your Listerine."

They all retired for the night leaving the Listerine bottle a little emptier the next morning.



– *Chapter Fourteen* –

Normality and silence had returned to the hospital, after the earlier flurry of activity. Both Dam and Nick had been taken to their respective rooms adjacent to one another. The emergency theatre team had been scrambled and was en route. The on-call operating theatre staff were preparing for emergency surgery, x-rays of both Dam's shoulder and Nick's skull had been taken and processed. An hour and a half had elapsed, Dam had been given a premeditation of Omnopon and Scopolamine, which would not only relax him and relieve his pain, but would dry his secretions ready for the operation to remove the bullet.

He was drowsy mainly from the effects of the narcotic Omnopon. He felt no pain, but kept napping. He heard voices outside his room and a heated discussion between a doctor and a policeman, the police losing this round and was told to wait until Dam was stabilised before they would let him answer any questions or turn him over to police custody. Dam could faintly hear the conversation that seemed centred around a dead Arab, with the top part of his head removed. 'Miguel must have run away,' thought Dam, as he fell asleep again.

The room was quiet with the exception of a slow constant beep from his bitmap E.C.G monitor which showed his heart had an unusually slow beat per minute. The kind of Sinus Rhythm usually found in athletes and other extremely fit sportsmen.

Dam was sitting up in his bed. His shoulder had been pressure dressed to stem the flow of blood and a bandage placed around it to keep the dressing in place. The nurse who administered his pre-med had just left the room after taking his vital signs and writing them down on the chart at the bottom of the bed.

“Just have to wait for the surgery team to get ready, then we will get you down to theatre,” she had told him.

The pre-med had taken effect almost immediately and he felt drowsy and thirsty, but not in any pain, a sort of euphoric state. Hospitals at night can be a lonely, frightening place. Alone in a private ward, you just wait for the door to open, just so you know someone out there is still alive. With just a small bedside light for company, there is lots of time to think. Dam had thought a lot during the last hour or so, and now that he was alone once more it started the thought process again. He thought about the happy times in Salaburi and of how his hopes and dreams had been shattered, and his quest for vengeance. Andrew had given him that opportunity. He thought about Andrew and Miguel, but most of all his drowsy thoughts went back to Vitthae and the last conversation he had with the Prime Master. He recalled the old monk. Dam had pleaded with Vitthae to let him fulfil his destiny and become a warrior. He recalled the hurt he felt when rejected. But the worst pain of all was when the old man told him, the boy he had grown into a man with, Jinn, his beloved

brother, wasn't his brother. For that, Dam could not forgive. The heartbreak came washing over him again, spurred on by the face staring back at him from the bottom of his bed.

The figure was dressed in a Tinja monk's robe and had a sword held, but still sheathed in its right hand. Dam stared at Pon for several minutes and smiled.

"Have you come to send me on my last journey... brother?"

Pon stared at Dam then moved closer into the light at the side of Dam's bed. Pon too, had realised a connection with his 'duty' when he first met Banti, the old woman in the village. He had stared at the drawing and photograph many times, but now his suspicions were confirmed as he looked into the face of Dam and saw himself. The hate and lust for revenge still burned strong in Pon, this man must be sent on his journey and atone with Buddha for his sin against his warriors.

"Yes, Dam I have, where is the sacred relic?"

Dam closed his eyes again as the drug bit deeper and shaking himself awake spoke.

"I don't know, brother," and he briefly told Pon the story of how he grabbed it before he leapt out of the window, maybe it was in the alley. Pon had been hiding in the alley. He had seen Dam tumble from the window, he was going to climb up through the window when fate changed his course of action. He'd seen Stu and Spock assisting Dam and Nick, then taking them away and he had searched the alley after he had dispatched Miguel, but no sign of the relic, the foreigners must have it, either the '*Phra farang*', foreign monk, Spock, or his small assistant, Stu. His trail of thought was cut off by Dam asking, "Will you forgive me, my brother?"

Pon replied, “You know I cannot, only Buddha can do that.”

To which a calm and composed Dam replied, “I am ready to atone for my sin against my family, brother.”

Pon took his sword and flipped the lid on his sword handle and removed his pitou for the second time that evening.

Pon removed the bandage and dressing from the silent Dam’s shoulder, revealing a small hole. Dam put his arm around Pons neck, as Pon moved closer. “Pray for me my brother.” whispered Dam.

Pon remained silent as he pierced the myocardial muscle and felt a pop as the pitou pierced the left Arterial chamber. He felt the pressure of Dams heart as the blood forced against the pitou. He never engaged the blades and after a few seconds the pressure on the pitou ceased and Dam’s arm fell limply from Pons shoulder. He removed the pitou and just a trickle of blood came from the wound.

“You could never live as a warrior, but you died like one, my brother.”

Pon said a silent prayer for his brother’s safe journey to the afterlife and to make his peace with Buddha. Then as alarms and lights started to emanate from the monitors, Pon replaced the pads and bandage and left the room.

The hospital came alive again with nurses and medical staff converging on Dam’s room. Pon ducked into the shadows, his next step had to be: Find the giant white monk.

He silently entered Nick’s room, he saw Nick laying in his bed, the air-conditioner on full and Pon felt cold for the first time in his life.

Nicks sidelight was on, but he was asleep; his head with a large bandage, which looked like a thick white turban. By the side of the bed a lady slept with her head resting on the mattress, he drew his sword and replaced his pitou, and then silently made his way to the foot of the bed. He noticed charts that were written in Thai, he picked up a chart and noted the address Siam Sawasdee hotel, Soi Buchouw, He silently replaced the chart and eased slowly out of the room.

Nobody paid much attention to a monk as he made his way out of the hospital, it was natural for a monk to visit the sick and dying and there was too much other activity to pay much heed to him. He stood outside and looked up at the night sky. He thought as to what higher purpose was he left to survive, and his duty was his own brother. Was this a test by his god? He would surely continue until his duty had been concluded and the holy relics returned. He hoped his brother's journey to the afterlife would be swift.

He prayed for guidance and set off for the Sawasdee hotel, in the wrong direction.



Chapter Fifteen

Salaburi was a frenzy of activity. People had descended on the village like ‘wolves on the foal’. They were walking around with cameras, theodolites, clipboards and all sorts of electronic equipment measuring and probing the village and surrounding jungle.

Small Bell and Robinson R22 helicopters were buzzing around the sky like wasps, as they surveyed planned routes. The occasional transporter helicopter arrived with men, women and heavy machinery.

It had been this way since Vitthae, Cenat and Taksin had returned a few days ago, bringing with them the five men from the stateroom and the lady, who the King had given Vitthae’s ornament to.

It was mid afternoon when the large Sikorsky S92 from the Royal flight landed. As the large aircraft approached, the villagers gathered, waiting for another look at their King. The side door slid back and out stepped Vitthae, Cenat Taksin and the others, but no King.

Although disappointed they were happy to see the two monks, but unsure about the other strangers, who were unloading electronic equipment from the chopper.

The two monks and Taksin approached the remaining monks and Wai’d them. The monks noticed, as did the other villagers that Vitthae had walked unaided from the helicopter, straight towards the

standing monks and had addressed each one individually, looking directly at them. The villagers also noticed the look of surprise on the elder monk's faces, and the look of horror on one small nine-year-old monk who used to pull faces at the once blind master. A murmur sounded through the gathered villagers, which was confirmed as Vitthae faced the crowd and gave a long respectful Wai.

"Vitthae can see," a voice said, followed by a crescendo.

"Vitthae can see."

"The King has cured Vitthae."

They all bowed their heads and returned the respectful greeting. They were all jubilant, but not surprised the King had given back Vitthae's sight, after all, he could make rain, curing blindness was nothing for the great King.

Vitthae, Cenat and Taksin spoke with the village elders and family heads and arranged a meeting with them all for the next morning, giving the team of researchers time to do a bit of work and preparation. Cenat had asked the villagers to assist them in their preparation and would be able to discuss more in the morning.

The woman who had arrived with the team was the head of geology at the Bangkok Department of Agricultural and development. She gathered her belongings, and along with her two assistants and some equipment headed off into the hills and mountains with a local man to act as guide.

With the team and Taksin busying themselves with their preparations prior to meeting the villagers, Vitthae and Cenat, knew it was time for them to lay out the

plans for the Tinju survival. With heavy hearts, but positive for the outcome, joined the other six remaining elders in the temple.

It had been discussed that the Tinju would carry on as a separate order of monks but with some changes. They would still be a combatant force used in a case of emergency, but also now a ceremonial and display team. Similar to the Shaolin monks of China. But the assassination side of the training would cease. And all this knowledge would die with the remaining elders and hopefully, Pon.

The monks would not be chosen as a birthright, but positions in the order would be granted on merit, from volunteers, who wanted to continue in the life of a Buddhist monk. Most Thai boys are conscripted into a temple at a very young age, usually twelve years old. They have to serve a few years as a monk to learn Buddhism and the Buddhist way. It was the same as going to boarding school in the Western world. A few stay on, making it their lifetime calling. The best of these would be eligible for Tinju admittance. Because the few Tinju that remained were too old or too young.

Martial artists and the best Muay Thai fighters in the Kingdom would be brought in to support them. Until the trainee monks were competent enough to become instructors. These would be the new Tinju.

The seven remaining younger monks would be reunited and introduced to their families. Vitchae knew the identity of five of the families, but two of the boys were of Somchays time as Prime Master. These younger monks would be given the opportunity to stay with their families and continue with the Tinju. It would be their and their family's choice.

The other elders remained silent while Vitichae outlined these plans and Vitichae and Cenat sat in silent meditation awaiting the elders comments.

After several minutes one elder spoke. "When will this take effect, Master?"

"Immediately," said Vitichae, "his majesty has put the word out now amongst the other Wats, we should have a willing group in a couple of days."

"And when will the little ones be returned?" asked another elder.

"Again, immediately," said Vitichae, "and if you are in agreement we will start now."

"Well then, Master," said another smiling elder "Let's make it so." The other elders nodded their agreement.

That evening, the village was filled with joyous sounds as families were reunited with their sons. Families and friends from the village congregated in the meeting area at the side of the Wat, all bringing food and drink. 'Sato' and 'urban whisky' went down well with the villagers and the new arrivals. The monks went inside the Wat to meditate and pray.

Sato is a Thai moonshine made from rice, cloudy yellow in colour and tastes the same as Sake, its Japanese better know equivalent.

Urban whiskey or *Loa Khaw*, is fermented tree bark, dark amber in colour, and the more aged vintage jar, tastes similar to port or sherry and is regarded as a natural 'Viagra'. Both drinks are very potent, going from 'sober' to 'wankered' in four or five small glasses. Although Thais tend to greatly dilute their alcohol with water an ice.

The bleary eyed villagers gathered the next morning in front of a large table, on it lay plans, drawings, photographs and lap-top computers with 3-D images on the screen. The lady geologist and her team had returned the previous evening, but had gone again at first light.

Taksin was the first to speak followed by each one of the other five remaining specialists.

The proposal was to make a roadway to connect the village to Pong-nam-rom, they would have electricity and running water supplied to the village. The road would stop at Salaburi, it would wind its way to the village around the jungle and hills. They would lose virtually no jungle to construction and the surveyors would plan the best route to ensure this.

This would bring prosperity to the village whose crafts, carvings and jungle produce could be sold to make money and improve their lifestyle and bring them in line with the rest of the country. They had been shown and given brochures of cars and pick-ups, which amazed them. The pictures were soon ripped out of the brochures to be framed and hung in their home later. They could travel in and out of the village as they felt. They would all be given ID cards and therefore could find jobs and borrow money anywhere in Thailand. The King would personally provide four pick-up trucks, for them to transport their fruits and produce to the border market, the jungle herbs and medicinal remedies would be researched for the benefit of the world, and any profit from discoveries would be given to the village.

The villagers listened to all that was being said, looked at the images of what it could be like, on the simulations on the laptops and drawings.

Taksin then concluded by asking their opinion and decision to do this. It was Vitthae who reinforced Taksin's and their King's idea, by ending with, "But my beloved people, the decision is ours to make."

Silence descended, followed by murmuring amongst the villagers who were confused and apprehensive about any change to their lifestyle. But change had already taken place with the return of their young Tinju, and if the Tinju could change, so could they. A villager asked, "What do you think Master Vitthae?"

And slowly Vitthae thought and replied "Our King has thought about this and decided it will be good for us all, yes I agree with him, we must change to survive, and now it is that time for us."

Again silence, then the same villager who asked the first question spoke again.

"Where can I get one of these?" Holding up a picture of a gold coloured Toyota Vigo D4D. The villagers burst into roars of laughter and cheering, holding up the pictures they had removed from the now torn and discarded brochures.

"Me too,"

"Me too," came the shout from individual villagers. Vitthae turned and looked at Taksin. "I think that's agreed then Khun Taksin."

Smiling, Taksin picked up a digital satellite transmitter and dialled. When a voice answered Taksin spoke, "Your majesty, the village has wholeheartedly agreed."

The next few days brought men and equipment in their droves, followed by the arrival of small surveying helicopters that mapped the area between the village

and Pong-nam-rom. Everyone was either helping with feeding the newcomers or carrying equipment to and from the now familiar and no longer, monsters from the sky, helicopters.

The elder monks stayed in the Wat preparing for the arrival of the new Tinju, meditating and cleaning the weapons that would be used in time for ceremonies and demonstrations.

Vitchae and Cenat spent many hours together, mainly discussing Pon and they prayed he would be safe in fulfilling his 'duty', and the last duty of the Tinju. Vitchae had been troubled about sending this brave warrior monk to kill his brother and recover the holy relic. Which, although now no longer their charge it was still representative of the old and the new Tinju.

Vitchae still had one family left to visit, he went to the Wat and prayed, then went into the village.

The geologist returned to the village the next afternoon and headed straight for Taksin. She looked excited about something. She and her assistants laid out machines in front of a thoughtful looking Taksin. She spoke and every now and again either pointed at a screen or showed Taksin a graph or drawing, which he studied and nodded at the geologists. When the conversation was over Taksin thanked the geologist, who, still looking fit to burst even though she had told of her news, gathered up her equipment and headed back into the hills.

Taksin went to look for Vitchae. Cenat informed him he was in the village at the home of one of the monks families and when he mentioned as to whose home, Taksin respectfully left the news for now. Taksin mentioned to Cenat that he would see Vitchae later

before he had to depart for Bangkok that evening. He told Cenat with a large smile, “The village will be very, very prosperous.”

**THE KINGS RAIN*

This little known or publicised fact is true. King Bhumipol Adulyadej of Thailand can make rainfall. He invests a lot of money in agriculture and development and although Thailand can have a lot of rain during the rainy season some areas of Thailand can be dry if the season isn't too wet or long. With the Opium trade turned now by the King to fruit growing, these areas require more rain.

In 1956 the King formed the royal Rainmaking research and development project. Its task is to research into making artificial rain. They were successful and in 1969 the first artificial rain came down on the northern provinces of Thailand.

The process is relatively simple. Light aircraft find a suitable cloud high up in the atmosphere over an area that requires rain. The cloud is then sprayed with ‘seeding chemicals’ and the base of the cloud is then sprayed with liquid Nitrogen, ‘Dry ice’, which when mixed with the seeding chemicals to produce precipitation and lower the now rain filled cloud. As the cloud gets lower to the ground, same as a normal cloud it releases the rain.

So not only can they make rain, they can pretty much determine the area to receive the rain. King Bhumipol of Thailand holds the patent on this technique and also three other patents in agricultural innovations. This is one reason why he has the title ‘The Great’ and also one of the reasons why he is so well loved and

respected by his people. Although unbelievable, but very true.

*Any sceptics amongst you, just ask any Thai person, or research yourself on the World Wide Web about **THE KING OF THAILANDS RAIN.***



– Chapter Sixteen –

Chantaburi is a town situated on the Southern end of the eastern seaboard of Thailand, it is the main coloured Gemstone trading centre in the world. Dealing in both 'precious' and 'semi precious stones'. Precious being mainly Rubies and Sapphires with hardness of scale 9 - 9.5. Amethyst, Garnet and other semi-precious stones with hardness of 7 or less. The most valuable precious stone being diamond with a hardness of 10, and Emerald hardness 9, being the fourth of the world's only four precious stones. All other stones are classed as semi precious.

Diamond and Emeralds are not usually found traded at Chantaburi. Diamonds are mainly traded in Africa and Amsterdam. Emeralds are usually traded in the USA or Colombia.

Chantaburi and its neighbour Trat, used to have large deposits of Ruby and Blue sapphires. The mines, although long ago mined out, left a legacy of a highly lucrative trading centre. Millions of dollars change hands every day in exchange for precious Rubies and Blue, Green, Pink or Yellow sapphires that would be set in jewellery and worn by people all over the world. Chantaburi was a hive of activity on trading days and

boosted the Thai economy. Most Rubies now though, came from Africa or nearby Burma, Sapphires from Sri Lanka. Chantaburi has the reputation for having some of the worlds most skilful 'cutters' of stones. Mainly, it was raw dull stones arriving and being transformed into beautifully faceted gems. The Thai ruby is one of the best rubies in colour as it is Pigeon blood red with just a tint of a violet. The Thai blue sapphires are slightly darker than the light sky blue colour of Sri Lanka sapphires and are much sought after. Both the Thai ruby and sapphire are extremely rare.

Taksin had informed the King on his return from Salaburi, of the findings made by Miss Ratray Sesilin, the geologist and mineralogist with the group of specialists. She had done some laboratory tests on Vitchae's ornament and confirmed it was in fact a large unfaceted ruby. About 60carat in weight and 'inclusion' free making it very high quality.

Inclusions are small imperfections in gemstones. The more inclusions, the lesser value the stone. No inclusions, the stone is classed as 'flawless'.

Ratray had surveyed the area where the monks had usually found the stones for carving. She found a vein of ruby which she, as yet, could not determine the size, but where there is ruby, there is usually sapphire and sure enough with the village guides assistance, she had indeed found the sapphire vein deep within a cave. Taksin had informed the King that they were still investigating the size and route of the veins, but Ratray was convinced the veins would be large and bring prosperity to the village and it would only be a one-hour drive to Chantaburi with the new road. She had also found Rose Quartz deposits which usually meant gold, so maybe there was some of this precious mineral too?

She was buzzing when she told Taksin, she had never come across anything as exciting as this in all her life, and would continue in the area for several more days until a complete and thorough report could be made to the King. She had also found some small low grade diamond flakes in the stream at the foot of a large mountainous hill. The Tinju and villagers used these to

tip tools. She would investigate further but did not think this as significant as the other finds.

Taksin was sitting in his office at the Imperial Palace. The telephone had not stopped ringing since his return and he and the King were organising and co-ordinating the improvements and developments of Salaburi. The phone rang again and his secretary announced, "Major General Nalaphon Chinawat on the line khun Taksin."

Major General Chinawat was the chief of Police in Pattaya. The two exchanged morning greetings and pleasantries and Taksin enquired as to his call, "Have you any news from the investigation?"

The police chief told Taksin that the body of an Arab had been found with half his skull cut clean off by a sharp double bladed instrument that had been found embedded in the wall. They had fingerprinted the blade and the prints belonged to a young Thai man about 25 years of age who had been brought into Pattaya Bangkok Memorial Hospital with a bullet wound. He went on to explain the man had died in the night, rather suspiciously.

"They also found a computer in the room, it had been connected to another computer and they were trying to discover who it had been linked to. Also several pictures were found of what appears to be from your description, the object you are searching for."

Taksin leant forward, "Please go on Chief, have you any leads?"

"Sadly, no," said the chief, "It appears we have hit a dead end, there was blood near the window, so we assume the Thai lad jumped out. We have reports of three foreigners taking him to hospital, one is still in

there, but he is a little confused and we don't know where the other two are. We went to their hotel, the reception said they had left with two girls early in the morning, the girl's mobile phones are switched off."

Nalaphon continued, "It appears that somebody else had been in the room, there was more than just the young Thai and the dead Arab. The reception told my officers the Thai man had checked in a few days ago with another foreign man, who they recognised as a friend of a Mr Andrew Towhee, a very unsavoury character, who had been deported some years ago. But they found no trace of this other man anywhere. They did find a scorched area and a slight gold outline on the floor of the alley at the side of the hotel, but he wasn't sure of its significance, but no harm in mentioning it."

Taksin thought as he leant back in his seat. He thanked the police chief and advised him at this stage to monitor the situation and continue with investigations.

But who are these foreigners? And who is this other man? He decided, at this stage just to wait and see what developed. He would inform the King and see what action they should take, if any. He only hoped the sacred relic had not already left the country and hoped the young warrior was safe, and would soon contact him.



– Chapter Seventeen –

Spock, Stu, Dao and Moo were on their way to Koh Samet. A small island, nature and marine reserve on the eastern seaboard. They had not booked, they just caught the 09:30 bus to Rayong and hoped for the best. The lads ordered the girls to turn off their mobiles and leave them off. The bus would take three hours from Pattaya to Rayong followed by an hour on the ferry to Samet.

‘Koh’ precedes all islands names

Whilst they were on the bus the girls had been trying to teach Spock and Stu some Thai language, but without much success. Thais like foreigners to learn a little, but not too much of their language as it gives them the edge whilst taking about them. The lads weren’t really interested. They had the basics:

Sawasdee krap, Hello.

Tow Lai krap? How much.

Hung nam ti nay krap? Where is the toilet and *Aw bia sing, koat song krap*. Two bottles of Singha beer please.

Krap being the polite ending to a sentence for a male and *Kah* polite ending for female.

They figured they knew these essentials, all they needed to know and besides their ladies spoke English,

although not good, they could be understood. They were chatting and laughing, happy to be getting away together for a few days. They looked at the other passengers who were a mixture of foreign and Thai .Stu pointed to a bald Thai man in T-shirt and jeans.

“Look Spock your Thai brother, he is as bald as a ‘Bell End’ too.”

Spock chuckled “Yeah, he is the economy size.”

They arrived at Rayong jetty and purchased their tickets for the ferry. They then went to one of the many desks around the ticket booth and booked two bungalow style rooms at the ‘Malibu Beach resort’, which looked reasonable and was situated on the beach. Island prices are in general more expensive than the mainland. They walked around the small market and bought some essentials. Stu and Spock bought masks and snorkels. They embarked the small ferry, some thirty minutes later.

“Look Spock your economy size brothers got on, he looks like he has a sword tied to his rucksack under that cloth, ready to chop off your useless head.”

Spock took this comment with as much dignity as he could and gave Stu a short, sharp, clip around the ear.

Pon had never seen the sea close up and had never been on a boat, but he had conquered the sky, so the water should be easy he thought. The old ferry pulled out of the harbour and headed towards Samet. Pon felt a little scared the first few minutes but the laughter that was coming from the giant white monk and his companions, for some reason put him at ease.

They arrived on Samet and caught a Tuk-Tuk to Malibu Beach resort, they passed Pon on the way.

“Your brother looks lost Spock,” mentioned Stu. Then noticing Pon follow in the same direction continued, “no, it’s OK he is coming the same way,”

Tuk-Tuk is a small covered vehicle with a motorbike engine and handlebars. The more common taxi in Thailand although not in Pattaya.

They arrived 15 minutes later at the Malibu Beach resort, a large single storey resort with fifty rooms, swimming pool, restaurant, small mini mart, and on the beach front. They checked in and changed into their swimming gear and went onto the hot golden sand. The girls had bought some fruit from the market, had taken some ice from the restaurant and were happy munching on some dull yellow coloured fruit that gave off a pungent aroma.

“What’s that?” asked Spock

“Durian,” explained Moo “You try *alloey*, tasty.”

Spock pulled a chunk out and sniffed at it

“Smells like crap,” and took a large bite, then spat it out “Tastes like crap too.”

The girls ranted about him wasting food. He picked up the slightly chewed lump of Durian washed the sand off with some bottled water and offered it back to the girls.

Durian. A large round knobbly/spiked green Fruit about the size of a large Watermelon and resembles a large medieval mace. Its flesh is dull yellow segments containing large seeds. It has a pungent aroma and is banned from most hotels in Thailand many displaying stickers in their lobbies, same as a non smoking sign

with a round circle and a line through a picture of a durian, which is considered by most foreigners to be the vilest of fruits. It is a favourite amongst Thais who look forward to the Durian season, which occurs three times a year.

They had a lazy afternoon relaxing and looking out at the clear blue still water of the South China Sea. The beach and resort were quite busy, many people were on the beach and by the pool.

That evening they ate, showered and took a stroll along the beach. Malibu beach was not large, but other beaches were easily accessible from there. It was a pretty central location and they found small beaches with small resorts and some beach bars owned by both Thais and Europeans. They stopped at 'Inga's bar,' with small bamboo sides and thatched dried banana leaf roof. Inga the owner was from Norway, an amenable chap who got talking to the four and never seemed to want to stop. They ordered some cocktails as Inga told them that they are the best on Samet,

"Try the Long Island ice tea, highly recommended."

His small haggard looking wife mixed the cocktail and although the lads had seen Inga's wife put in at least seven spirits, they assured Dao there was very little alcohol content and besides it had a cocktail umbrella which meant low alcohol content. She believed this and drank it down like water and ordered another. Inga had told them he'd had the bar several years and high season was good and kept him through the low season. He said he lived out the back in a small bungalow, which when the lads investigated round the back on one of their voyages of toilet discovery, there

was a shabby run down shack. Which when Stu enquired, was his bungalow behind the dogs kennel. Inga went and spoke to other customers.

They moved along the beach, stopping at several more bars and bought shellfish off the many large half oil-drum barbecues .The freshest seafood they had ever tasted.

They returned to the resort at about midnight, carrying a well wankered Dao. They put her to bed and Spock and Moo staggered to their room.

Most Islands in Thailand are jungle covered rocky outcrops or mountains The larger tourist islands have been developed to a stage where very little jungle remains, just sporadic spots. Large islands such as Phuket and Samui have been modernised and any spare piece of land has been turned into hotels, resorts or other buildings to attract the hoards of foreign visitors and their money. The smaller islands have remained relatively unscathed. The tourist developments only being around the flat areas around beaches, leaving the harder to develop hillsides relatively untouched and still prime lush jungle.

It was here, in familiar terrain, overlooking Malibu Beach resort where Pon had made himself a small shelter in order to observe the four intended targets.

He had gathered some edible roots and tree snakes that he ate raw, as he did not want to alert anyone to his presence by a fire. He had noticed the fish in the crystal clear water from the boat, but these were unfamiliar and not the same he caught in the shallow streams surrounding Salaburi. He therefore decided not to catch

or eat the sea fish. He used the illumination from the resort and noticed the four depart. He had meditated and continued with his carving. He was going to make a move that night, but when he saw the four return, one lady appeared sick, so he decided it would be wrong to do anything now. Besides he would need her to translate for him, in order to get the relic, before dispatching them to their respective gods. He had thought Spock to be a *Phra farang Kaw*, foreign white monk, because of his shaven head and hoped that Buddha would forgive him for killing the monk but he had the relic, of that he was sure.

The next morning the four awoke around eleven am. They ate breakfast and went down to the beach, it was a hot and sunny day. Dao had a hangover and was busy blaming Stu and Spock for feeling unwell and not believing their excuse of, “She probably ate a bad prawn.”

The lads wanted to go snorkelling and got their masks and snorkels, but had to pluck up courage. The previous night while talking to Inga at his bar, they mentioned about sharks in the ocean. Inga had told them “Yes there are sharks, mainly Leopard Sharks but they were harmless to humans as they are only bottom feeders and feed on small crustaceans.”

This had panicked the lads a little as the words Leopard and Shark in the same creatures name didn't sound harmless to them.

They eventually plucked up the courage to go beyond their ankles mid afternoon. After spending the day chilling out, the girls went to their room to watch television, leaving the two brave explorers.

Spock and Stu entered the warm clear water, the sound of the *Jaws* theme-tune in their heads. They swam out over the coral. It was low tide and they were only about two meters deep, but as they saw what the undersea kingdom had to offer, they soon forgot their fear. Large longhorn and fire corals littered the sea bed, soft and fan corals all swaying with the current. The reef was alive with sea life, schools of neon blue tetra and butterfly fish were all around them. They kept on pointing out to each other different species, large brightly coloured trigger fish swam past, as they glided away on their search for food. A large Crown of Thorn starfish lazily caressed the hard coral, while taking its lunch out of the living rock. They were gently gliding around an outcrop of green algae covered rocks but didn't notice the crouched figure on the rocks watching their every move. The two lads loved every minute. They were looking at a cute-faced, small, box puffer fish when there was a loud splash in the water close to them. Their first and only thoughts, 'Shark!!' they put their heads out of the water and thrashed their way toward the beach. They got a short way and stood up on the sand and looked back at the rocks. They noticed thrashing arms and legs and a body that kept disappearing under the water, only to return to the surface and thrash some more.

"Look," said Stu "someone's drowning."

Pon had never learned to swim, the streams around the village were so shallow, nobody swam and now he was learning the hard way. He had slipped off the rocks and into the sea and was thrashing in panic, arms and legs slapping the water in an unsuccessful attempt to keep afloat. He was swallowing seawater and felt it

going into his already weakened lungs. After a few minutes and totally exhausted he stopped thrashing and sank beneath the surface. He felt tranquil, everything was still and silent under the water. He knew he would soon be in Nirvana and was ready to meet his Buddha, for guidance on the journey to beyond. He was awaiting the arrival of darkness, when he felt a tug on his T-shirt and was aware of being lifted to the surface. He broke the surface and started coughing and spluttering as water was expelled. He was being dragged backwards toward the shore.

Spock carried Pon to the beach and placed him on the sand. Whilst on all fours Pon coughed, spluttered, belched and vomited out seawater, he was exhausted. After a few minutes he rolled onto his back and looked into the smiling faces of Stu and Spock. He was confused and unprepared, he could not fight, he had no weapons and he was an easy target. He rolled onto his front, and got weakly to his feet, then ran off into the nearby jungle. Stu waved sarcastically and said, “Yes! Well don’t mention it, no thanks required.”

Spock responded, “What a rude little shit. Gives bald people a bad name.”

Pon got to his shelter and collapsed still coughing, his lungs felt on fire.

A few hours had passed. Dao and Moo had joined the lads on the beach and they had been snorkelling again, but now decided it was time to shower, change, eat, shag, and go out. They went to Stu’s room to leave the snorkelling gear there. They entered the room. A familiar face dressed in monks’ robes and holding a sword pointed at them, now stood with his back against

the wall. Shocked they moved forward and the monk cut the air with the sword.

“Where is the sacred relic?” Pon snarled, in Thai.

Dao and Moo couldn't understand what the relic was, and became scared and confused. Stu was angry and confused. Spock was just angry with someone pointing a blade at him. He threw his mask and snorkel at Pon, who quickly slashed the mask clean in half, but not quick enough to return to his guard and received a bone crunching left hook from Spock, that could have felled a horse. Stunned and rattled to the bone, Pon dropped his sword. Spock shocked at not knocking this little man out, grabbed him by the throat and lifted him against the wall. Pon was dazed and he tried to shake the effect of the blow off. Stu told Dao and Moo to ask him what he wanted and Spock released his chokehold slightly to allow the monk to reply. Pon was planning a way to reach his Glave, when Moo asked him, he croakily replied and Dao and Moo understood. “The little box belongs to him, and he wants it back,” said Dao

Stu thought for a moment and replied, “The portable ashtray? Why didn't he just ask?”

Dao relayed the message and Pon fell silent, deep in thought. He thought about the events of the past week, of how he had lost his brother monks and killed his own brother and now these two white men. Driven by his lust for revenge and the return of the holy relic to restore the honour of the Tinju, surely it could not be as easy as just to ask. He looked at the serious face of Stu, and the frightened and confused faces of Dao and Moo, and glanced to his side and look at the giant monk, these were not the same as the white men he had

already dispatched. They had saved his life and he owed them that. He quietly replied, "Have you got the holy relic and could I have it?"

Dao repeated this to Stu who said, "Tell him I found it, it is safe in Pattaya, and of course if it meant so much to him he could have it with pleasure."

Pon could not understand this, he was confused, and could not think of his next course of action, he was a Tinju warrior, but he was also a man who lived for peace and harmony, but he had slipped off his path to enlightenment. He was first and foremost a Buddhist monk, who now unexplainably, non-Buddhists had jogged back into returning to his path. He never expected this after everything that had happened, what do I do? He thought.

Spock eased his grip on Pon. Pon just looked startled at the four, not knowing what to do next, he nervously started laughing. The hurt, misery anguish, and lust for revenge had been building up like a pressure cooker and now with his thoughts conflicting, the only release valve was laughter. Spock looked at the laughing monk and smiled putting his arm around Pon's shoulders and looking deep into the small monks eyes said, "You my small friend, are a nutcase."

To which Stu started laughing, making Pon laugh louder. Spock joined in followed by the girls. Spock picked up Pon's sword tapped him on the head with the handle and gave it back to him, which kept the laughter going, and although nobody in the room really knew what they were laughing about, it felt good and continued for several minutes.

When the laughter had died down, they let Pon sit on the bed and he briefly told his story via Dao and

Moo. And although their English wasn't good, the two lads got the gist and noticed the two girls look sheepish every time the contents of the box was mentioned. They had to lie when asked if the box had been tampered with, this brought a smirk from Stu and Spock.

“Well at least they have new teeth now, last another 2000 years easy,” said Spock.

This bought more laughter to Stu, Spock and Pon who never had a clue what they said, but laughed anyway, which bought quick scowls from the girls. Pon was careful not to mention the demise of the previous duties including his brother.

After Pon had related the story. Stu and Spock told of their plan to spend two more nights on the island and return to Pattaya. They assured Pon that the relic was perfectly safe and Pon could stay with them until they returned to Pattaya. Pon reluctantly agreed not wanting to spoil their holiday and besides he could learn more about these strange foreigners.

Spock went to the mini-mart and returned with a large bottle of Sangthip Thai whisky, four glasses and a wine cooler for Dao. He poured the whisky out and asked Moo to tell Pon it was an English tradition when new friendships are made. Pon had never tried alcohol before and the first taste came sharp to the back of his throat .By the third glass he had got quite a liking for this new liquid, by the fourth glass he was wankered and fell fast asleep. Spock and Stu booked him a room and carried him to his bedroom. It was only seven o'clock. The four got changed and went to Ingas for another night on the Island. Pon woke up once during

the night and rolled onto the floor and fell straight back to sleep.

The next day there came a tap on Stu's door. Stu opened the door to a very angry looking security guard and a sheepish looking Pon, who had woken up alone and thought he had been duped. He had been running around, swishing his sword and causing mayhem. The resort staff eventually subdued Pon, who told them that he had been put in a room by his friends, and calmed down when they took him to Stu's room. Stu brought Pon into the room, after Pon had blessed the staff and apologised. Stu didn't think he had slept that long but it was five o'clock by his watch, so he left Dao and Pon in the bedroom and showered and dressed. He wanted to do a bit more snorkelling, so he would get Spock and grab a bite to eat first. He walked into the bedroom. Pon and Dao were watching television. Dao was showing Pon how to work the TV remote controller, and Pon was happily flicking through the Thai channels.

"Come on," said Stu to Dao who was still naked with just a sheet wrapped around her "We'll go eat and grab the last of the sun before it gets dark."

Dao smiled

"It's five o'clock in the morning stupid man."

Pon, the assassin, who could easily kill a man in the blink of an eye and whose fighting skills could on a good day take out a small army, was now being led along by his ear, placed firmly between the finger and thumb of a very irate small fat Englishman and placed in his room. Stu sat him on the bed turned on his TV, gave him the remote and his watch and pointed to ten o'clock, "Come back to room then,"

He spoke and made gestures, in the hope that Pon would understand.

Stu closed the door and went back to his room. Dao was lying naked on the bed, smiling. 'That's a bit of luck,' thought Stu, 'she appears to have accidentally left her legs open.'

They all had fun during the day including Pon. He was an amusing little chap under all that seriousness. Stu and Spock taught him to snorkel in the shallows, after hiring two more sets of snorkelling gear. He was scared at first, but the two lads held onto him and he was quite marvelled with everything he experienced. He brought the rest of his meagre belongings to his room. Stu and Spock taught him a few traditions, like the normal English greeting of placing your hand into a fist and displaying the middle finger. This was fun watching him perform this greeting especially at Ingas', but they received a telling off from the girls, who told Pon it was a joke and not a good thing to do. They ate at the barbecues and Stu and Spock thought Pon would finish the contents of a small ocean; he tried everything that was being cooked, and ate it all, bones, shells everything. He drank a couple of beers, after he was informed this is a harmless liquid, but after being put straight by the girls stayed off it after the first few.

They all had a good time on the island with their new friend who was a source of friendly mockery. The next day, Stu and Spock decided that when they returned to Pattaya, Pon had to stay the night as it was time, and indeed their duty, to get him 'laid'.

They all caught the two o'clock boat the next afternoon and headed back on the bus to Pattaya. Pon had turned on Towhee's phone and rang Taksin.

Taksin had told Pon of the investigation and Pon confirmed that the relic would be in his possession soon. Taksin had told him about the two suspect foreigners who had vanished, but the third that had been discharged from hospital and would be able to lead the police to the other two. Pon had realised this was Spock and Stu they were referring to, and told Taksin he had everything under control and asked him to inform the Pattaya police to back off from the investigation as it was all in order.

He lastly informed Taksin that he was confident he would have the relic and be ready to return to Bangkok the following morning. Taksin told Pon he would travel to Pattaya that night and wait for his call. Pon thanked him and turned off the phone.

Buddhist monks devote themselves to the teaching of Buddha. Both male and female monks are taught to be distraction free, hence why both sexes shave their heads, as grooming is a distraction. Tinju, a male-only order, knew nothing else until now. Tinju monks had no time for women, all their time is taken up with work and teachings, Women are a distraction and never enter into their lives.

So what they've never had, they never missed. Pon having spent time in the company of two very attractive ladies and whose scent was different. He had suddenly and without warning developed a new and exciting sensation when he was near Dao and Moo, that is why he told Taksin the 'next morning'. He wanted to spend the night in the company of his new brothers and learn more about women, for the first time in his life. 'He was horny'.



– Chapter Eighteen –

It was twilight when they arrived back at the Sawasdee hotel .The girls had switched on their mobile phones whilst on the bus and spoke to Luanne, who told them the police were searching for them. Nick, as usual, had been moaning for the last few days because they had disappeared. The girls told Stu and Spock about the police, which was overheard by Pon. He looked at Spock, Stu and the girls, smiled and said, “*Mai me banhaa.*” No problem.

He informed the girls he had already sorted out the police. Stu and Spock realised they knew nothing about this funny little monk, maybe they would gain better knowledge in the next few days. Which they sadly knew was all they had left.

Nick and Luanne were waiting in the lobby. Dao and Moo went straight over to Luanne and started talking rapidly in Thai. Stu, Spock and Pon went over to sit down next to Nick and get the moaning out of the way. Nick had altered since they had first met him. Now he had a plaster cast, a bald patch with a small gauze dressing taped to his head covering ten silk sutures and no front incisor teeth. The lads assured this gummy vampire his teeth were sort of safe. Nick continually moaned how much his teeth would cost to replace how much they cost to buy and how expensive

his treatment had been. Pon, not being able to understand the conversation went to join the ladies. After he left the table, Nick asked who he was, to which the lads joked, “He is a trained assassin and now on bodyguard duty for us, so they could do anything.”

They did not realise they were right about the first part, until Nick mentioned that the Thai man they had taken to hospital had died and the police were now looking for them.

Stu and Spock a little shaken up by this news called Dao over and told her. She just nodded and said, “I know, Pon already told us that he was in the alley when his brother, who was trying to retrieve the holy relic from the two very bad foreigners who stole it, jumped from the window. That’s how he knew, you and Spock must have found it.”

“What about his brother?” asked a concerned Stu.

“His brother,” Dao went on, “was a brave warrior, which is why Pon needs the ashtr...relic to restore order and in memory of his brother.”

Pon had told the girls only a small white lie.

The lads accepted this and assumed that Dam had died from his bullet wound. They thought best not to think about it too much, and as the police were no longer involved it must be true.

Dao had returned to the girl’s table and Pon spoke to her. She then came back over to where the three boys was sitting and asked, “Could Pon see the relic?”

Spock thought fast

“I have an idea,” he said.

They fetched Pon over to the table and said Spock, the great white monk would bring down the relic. But Pon replied he would rather receive it in the room for a

private ceremony and would go to the toilet and change into his monk's robes. He had been wearing his jeans and T-shirt the last couple of days, so he went to the downstairs toilet to change.

"Quick Spock," said Stu.

They both took the lift to the third floor and Stu took the box from his bedside drawer and sprung open the lid. Spock came from the lift with a plastic cup with some sand, which he had taken from the ashtray outside the elevator. They placed some sand around the tissue paper that contained Nicks crowns, shook out the excess into the sink and snapped shut the lid. They took the remaining sand in the cup and put it back in bin outside the elevator. Then causally sat on the bed with the box on the bedside table after shaking it to make sure it sounded and felt similar to before.

Public places such as airports, shopping malls, and hotels in Thailand, have small conical metal bins. Rubbish goes in the main section, on top is a dish like container filled with sand for cigarette stubs, as there is no smoking in elevators, they all have at least one of these on every floor to allow people to extinguish their cigarettes or cigars before getting into the lift.

Approximately ten minutes later Pon, Dao and Moo came to the room. Pon dressed in his monks robes and carried his sheathed sword on his red sash. He solemnly entered the room and caught a glimpse of the holy relic that was slightly dented from the fall. He spoke to Moo who asked Spock if he could hold the box while Pon prayed. Spock picked up the box and presented it to Pon, who knelt down and took some essence sticks that

he had obtained from the hotel reception and lit them. Wafting the wisps of scented smoke around the room, he chanted his mantra. The girls stood in silent prayer. Stu sat on the bed smirking at a large Spock bending down like the pope, with the golden box in his hand and a stupid looking smile. Stu took a few photographs of this to finish off his film, and to give him something to do to stop him bursting out laughing.

Most houses and business have small decorated shelves hung on the wall, these usually contain a statue of significance, Buddha or a King, fruit and drink for offering to Buddha, they also have a sand filled container for incense sticks. Every night, usually at six o'clock they light the incense sticks and pray for continued good luck with their lives or business. This is an essential part of a Thai life, and is carried out daily.

Pons ceremony took about fifteen minutes and when he had finished, he took the holy box and carefully wrapped it in a silk cloth and placed it in his robe pouch. He then turned around for a quick blessing to the bowing girls, and smiled. He mentioned something to Dao, who scowled at him and spoke to Stu, "He wants to go out now."

Stu booked Pon a room on the same floor. Pon was a little worried about the relic that had cost him so much of his life. Stu told him the girls were staying in the room, so he would be OK to leave it with them till they got back.

Pon showered, neatly and ceremoniously folded his robe and put his Glave on top for protection, then went to Stu's room and handed the bundle to Dao, who

placed it in the wardrobe. Stu and Spock returned from the mini mart, and stocked the girls up for the night indoors.

Nick, Spock, Stu and Pon went into the hot sticky night air.

“First on the agenda,” said Spock “We’ll buy Pon some clothes, he has been wearing those same jeans and T-shirt for three days now. Then,” he continued “I think Soi 6 is a good place to start, on the mission to get the mad monk laid.”

It was a good night, the entertainment mainly provided by a mumbling shy Pon. Although the language barrier was a bit of a problem they overcame this with gestures. Pon translating through the many lady muggers who like before had swarmed onto the lads. The Thai ladies were not that receptive to Pon and although he never mentioned the fact he was a monk, just the fact he was a Thai man, the ladies knew they wouldn’t receive any money from him. This problem was soon overcome when Spock and Stu offered a rather buxom lady 1000Baht to take care of their friend and work colleague. Pon and the lady disappeared into a room above the bar, returning several minutes later, a glazed look on the face of Pon and a smiling lady who had just made the quickest 1000 Baht she had made for a long time.

They took Pon for a ‘soapy’ at Sabaiiland and by the end of the night he was ‘one of the lads’. They had him drinking beer again; informing him that Heineken beer contained no alcohol unlike the Singha on the island. He fell for this and was spannered and working his way to shitfaced when the lads decided they had

enough laughs for one night and returned to the girls at one o'clock.

An embarrassed looking Pon went to Stu's room avoiding the girl's eyes and trying to act sober. He bowed and took his robes back to his room, where he slept that night on the bed. He had already been on three that night, so he thought he might as well sleep on a fourth and with a satisfied grin on his face he fell into a blissful sleep. For twenty-nine years this little Tinju warrior had devoted his life unselfishly to his cause of wisdom and courage, following the path to enlightenment. It had taken two men from a strange country with their strange non-religious habits, three days to lead him astray and he was enjoying every minute.

The other three went to Stu's room. Nick took Luanne back to his room, she was spannered, as were the other two girls. Stu had suggested a game of dominoes, but Dao who was nicely spannered and feeling in a romantic mood, gave Stu a long lingering kiss and started rubbing his todger with her hand over his shorts, then she whispered, "You sure you want to play dominoes?" and nibbled his earlobe.

Spock and Moo were quickly shoved out the door and the door firmly and shut behind them. Moo looked at Spock and smiled

"You want boom boom,"

Spock looked at Moo, "Shame not too," he said, and they rushed to their room and closed the door.



– Chapter Nineteen –

A loud sawing noise was emanating from Stu's room, followed by a ladies voice

“You snoring again.”

Then silence. This had been going on for the last few hours. It started again but was stopped by a loud rap on the door. Stu got out of bed and put a towel around his waist, he opened the door to two armed, uniformed soldiers. Stu sleepily looked at the soldiers, whose angry, expressionless faces stared at Stu. Behind the two soldiers stood a gentleman dressed in a smart white uniform with gold braid and next to him ‘the mad monk, Pon’.

“What do you want?” asked a still sleepy Stu.

The smartly dressed man in white who spoke good English asked, “May we come in please?”

Stu asked them to wait and closed the door. He went inside his room opened the curtains and windows, told Dao, then re-opened the door and invited the party in. The two guards stayed outside and Taksin and Pon entered the room. Pon, who was behind Taksin, got a slight clip around his ear as he entered from Stu, which made him chuckle. Taksin wai'd Dao who was sat up on the bed with the sheet covering her naked body. She clumsily, trying to hold the sheet in situ, returned the greeting. Stu removed his clothes from two of the chairs

in the room, and asked them to sit. Taksin introduced himself, and when he mentioned he was a representative from the King, Dao opened her mouth wide with shock and awe. Taksin went on to explain the significance of the relic and express his gratitude for all their assistance in the recovery of the sacred relic.

Pon asked Stu to get Spock. Stu left the three in the room and walked past the guards who saluted him and he went to Spock's room. He rapped on Spock's door and a sleepy eyed Moo opened the door. Spock was still festering in his bed when Stu told him about the events of the last few minutes. Spock slipped on his shorts and Moo wrapped a towel around herself and they went to Stu's room, the guards saluting the party as they entered. Spock could not resist the opportunity and looked the guards up and down as to inspect them, he then returned the salute and announced they should stand at ease and carry on. Not understanding a word he was saying the guards remained stone-faced and Spock joined the others in the room. Taksin and Pon wai'd the new entries and Moo gracefully returned the greeting while Spock made a clumsy attempt at this simple manoeuvre.

Taksin thanked them again for their assistance and gave them both his business card, just in case they needed to contact him. He told them the relic would be taken to the Imperial Palace, they could visit as his special guests if they had time. He said he and Pon would now be going to Bangkok and thanked them both again, he rose from his chair and wai'd the girls first, then the lads, who again clumsily returned the gesture. Pon spoke something to Taksin who wai'd the monk and left the room. He heard a small slapping sound, as

Spock gave Pon a clip around the ear. But Taksin never looked back and exited the room and closed the door.

Pon faced the four and through Dao and Moo thanked them for everything, he considered Spock and Stu his brothers, and the girls, his sisters, a great honour for the four.

Pon then reached into his cloth bag and brought out a gold 'ornament' which he gave to Dao.

"For you my sister," he announced.

Dao took the ornament and wai'd Pon He then brought out the blue ornament and gave it to Moo who did the same. He then brought out the two remaining red stone ornaments and gave one to Stu and one to Spock. Stu smiled at Pon and shook his hand, he had a lump in his throat and could feel tears well up in his eyes, as he liked this funny little monk. Spock grabbed Pon and picked him up squeezed him gently and replaced him on the floor. Pon smiled and went into his bag again and brought out the wad of dollars he had shared with the small girl in Cambodia. He gave the wad to a startled Spock.

"He had money all this time, the tight-fisted little sod kept that quiet," said a smiling Spock. They all smiled at Pon who bowed and walked over to the door. He turned and spoke in slow pigeon English

"Good bye my friends," He then held up two clenched fists and extended the middle fingers on both and pointed them at Stu and Spock. Smiling, he turned and walked out of the door leaving the four stunned at this cheeky little monk. Dao broke the silence by clipping both Stu and Spock around their ears.

"Your fault, you teach monk no good."

They all stared at their gifts. Dao knew she had gold and could not wait to show Luanne and brag it was from the King. Moo looked at hers not knowing what to make of it. The lads stared at theirs, noting the skilled workmanship of the carving they both felt sad at the little monks departure, but something made them feel they would see him again.

“Oh well,” said Stu, “I will give this to my mum, tell her it’s a real ruby and worth a fortune.”

“You will as well,” said Spock, knowing his friend and how he always told his mum small *Porky pies*, lies about gifts.

In this case Stu was perfectly correct, it was a ruby 67-carat un-faceted flawless piece of ruby and it was worth a fortune.

The four looked at the wad of dollars that Spock had laid out on the bed.

“What are we going to do with this?” asked Spock.

Dao counted the hundred dollar bills, two thousand six hundred dollars.

“I know,” said Spock, “remember that article we read in the local newspaper the ‘Pattaya today’, Stu had remembered and they mentioned the idea to the girls who agreed and pecked the boys on the cheek.

“You both ‘*jai dee*,’ good heart,” said Moo, and Dao agreed.

Spock and Stu were now in the good books again with the girls, and all four decided to go eat breakfast and go to ‘Pattaya Park’ a water theme park and recreation centre. Nick came banging on the door. He had seen Pon leaving with some soldiers.

“What happened?” said an agitated Nick.

Stu spoke.

“The King wanted his best assassin back, he had to go on another secret assignment.”

“Bullshit,” said Nick “Have you still got my teeth.”

“Not exactly,” said Spock, “but don’t worry, they’re safe.”

The two lads laughed and the two girls looked at each other with a worried expression on their face and quickly changed the subject.

“Is Luanne awake?” asked Moo “We want to show her something.”



– Chapter Twenty –

There was the aura of majesty and reverence within the Temple of the Emerald Buddha at the Imperial Palace. A bamboo scaffold had been erected around the golden coloured Buddha, which smiled warmly down at the three kneeling figures, chanting.

After one hour of chanting and prayer, a monk left the other two and with a small glass case in his hand slowly ascended the scaffold until he reached the head of the fifty-foot statue. The monk slowly and reverently slotted the four rods on the base of the glass case into the four newly drilled holes on the head, the glass box slid into place. The monk stood back and looked at his task. He stared at the contents of the glass case and bowed to the small jewel encrusted box inside. He glanced at the large green emerald next to the holy relic. The two treasures would remain together until the end of time.

The monk looked down at the two figures that remained kneeling below and he felt honoured, that this was his reward for returning the holy relic and he was the one who would site this most holiest of relics in its final resting place.

The two figures looked up at Pon and the holy relic. The light shone through a small skylight and hit the new addition making the gemstones and gold box give off a radiant glow. Throwing light all the colours of the

spectrum around the top of the statue's head, giving the statue a 'halo' and leaving all in the room thinking Buddha himself was giving his blessing on this holy ceremony.

Pon climbed down from the scaffold and joined Taksin and the great Thai King, all three stared at the wondrous light show going on above their heads. They all felt in awe of the spectacle and continued in silent prayer for another hour.

They left the Temple and Taksin escorted Pon to the monk's quarters to cleanse himself, he was to join Taksin and the King in the stateroom when he had finished. He could then be brought up to date with the happenings within Salaburi, and more importantly the Tinju.

Pon washed and ate with the palace monks. When he finished, he made his way across the vast grounds of the Royal palace and was shown into the stateroom by two guards.

Taksin, the King and Crown Prince Maja Vijiralongorn were sitting, waiting, when he entered. He bowed at the party, and the King asked him to take a seat in a large armchair. On a table lay plans and pictures and 3D images on computer screens, copies of the ones in Salaburi.

The King enquired about his journey to recover the holy treasure and Pon gave his account in full to the King, whose face sometimes portrayed a look of shock and horror, but knew to a Tinju it was all part of his training. Now he would give Pon the next part of his reward. Pon never mentioned the events of the night before although he smiled when his mind raced back to them.

The King and Taksin informed Pon of the work being carried out in Salaburi, the original plan to transport fruit and medicines to markets had been greatly enhanced by the discovery of large mineral deposits found in the nearby area. Salaburi would be the most significant mining area in Thailand for minerals. Prospects for the future of Salaburi were excellent and the village would be wealthy and develop into a small, modern town with hospitals, schools, and gemstone laboratories. Thailand would once again have its own ruby and sapphire mines, the envy of the world. The town would still be fairly self sufficient with all this wealth. The King felt that only few outsiders would come into the village, and with only minimal disruption to the surrounding jungle, as they were going to use a new mining technique that the King had been investing in developing.

He then told Pon about the plans for the new Tinju. The King told Pon that all the elders had agreed. All but one of the young monks had returned to the Tinju to carry on their calling. New monks and instructors had already arrived, they were just waiting on their head instructor and new 'Prime Master, Pon'.

The King proposed that Pon should continue as a Tinju, but as the Prime Master. He could split his duties and help Taksin as the royal bodyguard to his son the Crown Prince. That would mean travelling around the world with the prince, who was now, envoy and representative of Thailand and its monarchy. When the Crown Prince ascended the throne, Pon would then become the Kings bodyguard and choose others from the new Tinju order to assist him.

Taksin would for now remain as the Chief of the Palace Guards, until the King either died or abdicated, at which time Taksin would step down and hand over to Pon, and his new order. But Taksin would be allowed to carry on living at the Imperial palace with his family indefinitely.

Pon would also be given a residence at the palace befitting his new rank if he chose to accept.

“This,” continued the King “would also be for your family.”

Pon looked confused by the Kings last comment, but let it pass as he had some plans of his own. He thought the King could offer him guidance and wisdom on his decision.

Pon thanked the King for his gracious proposal and told the King of his thoughts. The three listened to Pon as he relayed his thoughts and ideas and the reasons behind them. After thirty minutes the room went quiet as the King thought about what he had been told. He thanked the monk for his honesty and would grant his wish, but first he wanted Pon to return to the village and discuss the matter with Vitthae and the other elders before making his decision final. Pon rose and bowed at the party, left the room and returned for the last time to the monk’s quarters. Leaving the King, the Crown prince and Taksin chatting amongst themselves. Taksin got on his Sat scan portable phone and rang Khun Penmark, the chief surveyor in the village and gave him a message for Vitthae. Their warrior would return to the village first thing the next morning.

A white Bell jet Ranger helicopter was waiting on the palace helicopter pad the next morning. Its rotors on idle, waiting for its passenger who was standing outside

away from the rotors, the constant waving of the pilot for him to board being ignored. Pon was afraid to get on the helicopter and had to be gently pushed by the aircrew and seated in one of the four passenger seats. An airman strapped Pon into his seat. With constant reassurance the monk started to relax until the pilot opened the throttle and the gentle idle turned into a large roar. The airman closed the door and all that was heard was a gentle hum and the yells of their passenger. Once airborne, Pon relaxed a little, the airman sat next to him and engaged in conversations about the village and his home and the airman's family. The helicopter flew around Pong-nam-rom and the start of the meeting point. Pon had relaxed a little, as they were not as high as the aeroplane and he could clearly see the land. The pilot banked the aircraft and the airman pointed out to Pon the large build up of heavy machinery, bulldozers, road-rollers and cranes.

The helicopter levelled off and the airman explained they are taking the route the road would take to their village. Ten minutes later they flew over the village. The pilot did a circuit of the village and Pon noticed the amount of activity going on below. They flew over the Wat and came to a hover. A large crowd had gathered at the meeting area and the pilot hovered and lowered the collective, the helicopter slowly descended with only a slight bump as it touched town. The pilot disengaged the engines and the rotors turned to a slow idle swing, and then stopped.

The airman slipped off Pons safety belt for him and opened the door.

Pon stepped off the jet Rangers low fuselage to the sound of a massive cheer from the gathering crowd. He

was overwhelmed and gratefully wai'd and bowed to the people. He looked around, there was a small group walking toward him. It was the elder monks and four people walking with Vitichae at the front of the group. Pon noticed Vitichae was walking straight toward him with no one guiding him and looking straight at Pon's face. Is it possible? thought Pon, he walked forward and the party met about twenty yards from the helicopter. They all stopped, Pon recognised the tearful old women with Vitichae, it was Banti, his mother, and the man and two women with him must be his father and two sisters. The party wai'd Pon and he returned the wai. The old women could contain her excitement no longer and went and hugged Pon, the tears had now turned into a wail and uncontrollable sobbing and she never wanted to let go. His father and two sisters joined in and hugged their new prodigal son and brother. Everyone was in tears including Pon. After a few moments of constant chattering and hugging and still holding on to Pon they let Vitichae speak.

“Welcome home, Prime Master, there is a lot to tell you, but now enjoy this moment with your family and we can meet up later.”

“Master?” asked Pon “has your sight returned?”

“Yes, Pon,” said a smiling Vitichae “it was the Kings doing.”

‘That explained a lot,’ thought Pon, ‘after all he could make rain.’

The newly created family was led to the temple. It seemed the most relevant venue for a miracle. The family chatted, cried and prayed for a few hours then Pon discussed his plans, he wanted to get their thoughts

before he talked to Vitthae, after all a family should make plans together.

He never mentioned Dam. He thought best the old lady should continue to think her brave younger son perished in the jungle eight years ago, no point in muddying his memory, he had, after all the evil, repented and done the just thing in the end. And beside, Banti had thought she had lost both her sons, now her son had turned out to be the bravest of warriors of the Tinju, let her enjoy her moment and every moment from now on.

Pon and his family left the temple after a few hours. Pon's father having to pry Banti off her son.

Smiling the father said, "Don't worry woman, he isn't going anywhere,"

And the family went home leaving Pon.

Pon walked into the monk's quarters and to Vitthae's room. The old master was sitting with Cenat and beckoned Pon to join them and he sat on the floor with them and prayed together thanking Buddha for his protection and wisdom.

Vitthae outlined the plans for the village to Pon and then led him through to the arena where the temporary instructors, who were in turn being advised by the remaining elders, put the new monks through their paces. They saw Pon and stopped what they were doing and facing him, gave a long respectful wai. They remained bowed until Pon returned the gesture and asked them to raise their heads. One of the young monks who had known Pon as his teacher spoke.

"Welcome back, master,"

The rest of the students echoed the sentiment. Pon thanked them and told them he would be honoured to be

their teacher, and looked forward to instructing them on the way of the new Tinju, and they should look forward to the day when they achieved the honour of wearing the red sash and title 'Warrior'.

Pons heart felt heavy, was he making the right decision? He turned to Vitichae.

"Master," he said, "I have something to discuss with you."

"All in good time, Prime Master," said Vitichae. "Lets look around the village and see what is happening."

Vitichae, Pon and Cenat left the arena and the monks went back to their training. After all Pon must have been through, Vitichae knew what Pon wanted to discuss, but nevertheless wanted to show Pon everything and try out his new role as Prime Master first. They walked around the village and Vitichae introduced him to all the new arrivals, telling him what they did. "This is Khun Kitwat, he is in charge of the electric supply," he then pointed at a newly erected wooden hut and overhanging lights, "look we have a generator, and power. We now have electric lights in some of our houses. Your family has it already. Have you ever seen a television?"

The old master rambled on excitedly for the rest of the day and most of the evening. He introduced Pon to Ratray

"This is the lady who found out that our ornaments are valuable precious stones."

Vitichae was trying to convince Pon and himself, that this was a great move forward, and convince Pon to stay as he felt he already knew what Pon wanted and was trying to avoid the subject.

Eventually, when there were no more people to meet, Pon turned to Vitthae as they sat inside the Wat.

“Master,” said Pon “I think now is time for our discussion, I would like your wisdom on a decision that I feel I must make.”

A reluctant Vitthae looked at Cenat, who rose and suggested he should leave.

“No, master Cenat, don’t leave, I would like your thoughts on this too!” exclaimed Pon.

Cenat returned to a sitting position on the floor. Pon stared at the statue of Buddha and recalled the fateful day when all he could see of his god and his brother monks was surrounded by deadly smoke, he slowly inhaled looking for spiritual guidance.

“What is it Prime Master?” enquired Vitthae and he put his hand on Pon shoulder

“What is troubling you?”



– Chapter Twenty-One –

That dreaded day had sprung upon them, a day they would hate and had been counting down to. It was the day they had to go back to the place that only a few short weeks ago they fondly called home, was now referred to as that freezing cold depressing shithole, England.

Friday 23rd December 2005, had arrived, and in Spock and Stu's opinion all too quick. Sentiment not shared by their new friend Nick, who thought it could not have come quick enough, he was running out of pain free extremities and running out of money, in his constant forking out for hospital bills. Their flight was at 3 pm and with the time zone difference they would arrive in England later the same evening. They had booked a taxi for 11am to take them to the airport in plenty of time to check in. They woke up early and slowly and silently started to pack, joined by Dao and Moo, who had moved several items into the room that they had called home for a few weeks.

It was a sombre air in both rooms as they slowly folded their belongings and packed them into their suitcases, each item held a memory of the last few amazing weeks that had changed their lives. They had never been so happy or contented and knew, with the exception of Chunky, nobody would believe their tales. They had been told by one friend prior to leaving and

later by Nick, not to try to explain Thailand, as nobody believes you. It is unknown by the British, and what they don't know, don't believe or accept. At the time Stu and Spock thought their friend was talking rubbish, but now weren't so sure. It certainly wasn't normal to go out in England and have a great time, surrounded by beautiful oriental woman who took the greatest of care, and could take them home. Eat delicious food any time day or night. Drink anytime day or night, have a sixteen-day party and stay in a four star hotel, all costing very little. They were used to going out, getting spannered, buying loud obnoxious drunken slappers drinks in loud obnoxious places, going back to their cold flats with a bag of cold food alone and have no change from a hundred pounds. Twenty-pounds of that spent on taxis, which they accepted as normal. It was all they knew. Here they were spending less than fifty pounds a day and getting so much more.

"Mate," said Stu, as he made his way into Spocks room "I think we will get Chunky a packet of digestive biscuits and she can listen to our tales. She is a good listener and it will only cost us a packet of biscuits."

To which Spock replied, "I had forgotten about that stupid dog, all she will get is my foot up her arse."

There was a love hate relationship between Spock and Chunky, but deep down the big gentle giant had a soft spot for the old dog. Many a time she would trot upstairs to Stu's flat with a mouthful of chocolate, Spock following accusing her of pinching it off his table. "Likely story," Stu used to say "you never leave chocolate uneaten long enough to reach your table."

Spock had also been seen holding a drunken man by the throat and shaking him for kicking Chunky, who

was sitting outside the salon minding her own business .Yes this gentle giant had a soft spot, although he would never admit it.

They all went for breakfast at their new favourite spot. The Yorkshire rose, a small restaurant, which did a full English breakfast, better than any they'd ever tasted in Cleethorpes.

Nick had booked later that day to have some temporary plastic crowns put on and when he got home he would try the NHS to change for ceramic. He ate soup.

They ate breakfast and returned to the hotel to pay and get their belongings. Dao and Moo were going to the airport to see the two lads off. Stu and Spock had given the girls ten thousand Baht each the night before, to take care for a while. The grateful girls had given them their treat in return, neither of the two lads had a seed left between them.

Stu and Spock stood at the reception waiting for their bill. The hotel manager came to the desk and bowed to the pair.

“You two, do not have to pay, already taken care of and we look forward to seeing you again soon.”

The two lads looked at each other, a confused look came over them. Then Spock said,” on must have something to do with this, the little shit.”

Stu agreed.

“I hope someday we run into him again, he was an amusing little chap.”

They again signed Nicks' plaster cast and asked, “Who's going to take care of you now?”

Nick withheld speaking his thoughts.

They waited in the courtyard of the hotel and a large white chauffeur driven car drove into the car park. The chauffeur exited the car and spoke to the waiting group and in broken English asked, “Mr. Stuart Wilson and Mr. Peter Harris.”

“That’s us,” said Spock and Stu, “but we ordered a taxi.”

The driver spoke to the two girls and they said with a quake in their voices

“From the King.”

Stu and Spock put their bags in the boot and asked the driver if they could bring along Dao and Moo and then return them to Pattaya, he bowed and said, “of course,”

Nick watched the lads as they got in the car. Dao and Moo were talking to a now envious Luanne. Spock and Stu shook Nick’s good hand and got in the car, telling him to take care. The car exited the courtyard, Stu asked him to make a quick stop off en route to which the driver happily agreed. The four sat in the back of the plush vehicle, they felt like royalty and laughed and joked with the girls and royally waved out behind the darkened windows, and at the people walking down the road “peasants,” joked Stu.

Nick and Luanne went to the edge of the courtyard to wave them off. Luanne went back inside and Nick stood and watched, as the car slowly made its way along the road and headed off. Nick was making sure these two, who he was sure had jinxed him, were going. He leant out into the road, one last wave he thought and through grated teeth smiled and thought, “Thank god for that they’ve finally gone.”

A passing Baht bus then hit him.

The side of the bus hit him hard on the right shoulder and spun him around like an atomic slinky into the courtyard, landing on his right shoulder, which thudded and snapped on the hard stone floor.

Dao was still looking out the back window when she saw Nick getting hit, the Baht bus didn't stop, they never do, just speed up and get away.

"Baht bus hit Nick," she said, the others looked back and saw nothing.

"Stupid women, speak English, what do you mean?" said Stu, then followed a short sharp slap from Dao around Stu's head.

The car drove out of Pattaya towards Bangkok. After ten minutes they pulled into a drive in Banglamung town, a sign above the drive read '*Baan Jinjay*' the car pulled up at a small building in front of many large single storey buildings that resembled a tatty resort. All four got out and went into a type of office. A large German priest was sat behind a desk, with a Thai woman dressed as a Christian nun sat opposite him discussing something. The discussion ceased as the four walked in and Stu placed an envelope in front of the priest. The four then turned, walked out of the office and got back into the car. The flabbergasted priest looked in the envelope and showed the nun, they both smiled and looked out of the window as the large car reversed out. They tipped the money onto the desk and stared.

"There must be a few thousand dollars here," said the priest. The sign on the wall behind him read '*Baan Jinjay, Pattaya orphanage*'.

The journey to Bangkok airport along the motorway was swift and the mood in the car was solemn and

silent. Although Stu did mention the answer to the question on the first page:

The name of the couple who got married was Mr and Mrs Not, so the two boys are Not brothers.

Moo had done this routine a few times seeing men off, but never in this style, and never with the feeling she had felt being with Spock. It was Dao's first time and she felt strange, although she and Stu had only been together a short time, she could not imagine being with anyone else other than Stu. That will pass explained Moo in Thai, once they have gone and you go back to the bar. Stu and Spock were gutted by it all, and mostly just held onto the girls. They wanted to take them home with them, but knew getting a visa was virtually impossible, many people in Pattaya who constantly moaned, had told them about this fact.

Thais require a visa to enter any country outside South East Asia. It is a well-known fact the United Kingdom is one of the most difficult to obtain. Most embassies just stamp the visa as routine. But for UK it is a strict interview with copies of guarantees and bank statements and funds available for the person's stay. The Thais also have to have a reason to return, Business, property etc. and a healthy bank account. Even then it is not guaranteed that they will obtain a visa, even just for a short holiday and marriage to a Thai does not guarantee a visa which can be a long process hindered by non-descript Grey suited jobsworths. Although costing England nothing for the Thais to visit, as they have guarantors funding them. They seem to rather favour the immigrants who milk the system, in the country. The reason usually given is 'maybe they won't come back'. Which seems a

ludicrous argument, as usually once a Thai has visited UK, they cannot wait to return to Thailand. It also costs 2700 Baht to apply for a visa, this is paid whether you get a visa or not, so by refusing visas, the British government get another 2700 Baht for every re-application

The car came to a halt outside the doors of terminal 1 at Don Muang international airport and the chauffeur removed Stu's and Spock's bags. They went inside the airport, accompanied by the girls, and checked in.

They all stood holding onto their respective partners for the last time and made arrangements to phone regularly. Stu had already made plans in his mind, that he would book another flight as soon as he got home. Dao and Moo said they would wait for them. The lads knew that meant they would still be working the bar and sleeping with strangers, but knew when they came back to Thailand, the girls would finish with who they were with and go with them. This, although hard to accept, is the Thai way. Bar girls have to earn money and the only way is to go with foreigners. Stu and Spock both offered to send money to them, but unlike most girls turned them down.

"I will wait for you," said Dao and Stu assured her she would not be waiting long.

"And next time you come back with me," he said. "I never want to be without you, and 'Duengdao Wilson' has such a nice ring to it." They both laughed and with one last hug Dao and Moo walked away and towards the door. Stu and Spock watched them and waved as the two girls exited.

There is always a sombre feeling in the departure lounge at the Bangkok international airport, many of the

leaving tourists stay with their holiday companions until the end not wanting to let go. It must be the saddest place in the whole world.

Both Stu and Spock had lumps in their throats and felt like bursting into tears, but they are Northern English and that was not the done thing. They turned and walked into the departure lounge. Their lives would, or could never be the same.



— Chapter Twenty-Two —

A lone figure stood in the palace temple in front of the fifty foot gold statue, previously named the ‘Emerald Buddha’ and now known as the ‘Temple of the Sacred Light’. Here was someone else whose life had changed over the past few weeks. Now Pon was staring at the two holy relics positioned side by side on top of the statue’s head. The scaffold had been removed and the temple was silent. He knew in a short matter of time, the afternoon sun would shine directly through the skylight. For about two hours a day, a dramatic and fantastic display of dancing, spectral lights would surround the top of the statue as the two life time neighbours would bounce sunlight off each other, giving it a holy bright aura.

The temple was due to re-open to the public the next day after a ceremony by the palace monks and new and old Tinju, who were on their way to Bangkok. It was Vitchae who would perform and lead the ceremony. The whole Royal family would attend and it would be an awesome spectacle. Pilgrims would flock from all over the Kingdom and pack out the temple. People from around the world would be able to gaze upon, the new wonder of the world, the ‘Buddha’s light’.

Pon would have his hands full with his new position. His thoughts turned to the quick transformation in his life, he knew it would take time

for him to adjust. His new family was already in his large quarters in the palace grounds. He had discussed his ideas with Vitichae and Cenat. Although his life long ambition was to become a Prime Master, he never thought himself worthy at this stage and after committing several sins, he'd decided he wanted breast implants and to become a ladyboy.

Only joking. He wanted to accept the Kings offer as bodyguard to the Crown Prince. He would instruct and guide the new monks on the path of enlightenment and ways of the Tinju, but not as the Prime Master, he thought he wasn't yet wise enough to undertake this role.

He had spent long hours discussing this with Vitichae.

They had decided, Pon should take up his new role and relocate with his new family to the palace, his mother and father would be given paid duties around the palace and his two sisters would attend education classes and university, if they attained the grades. The family was thrilled, it was a dream for them, they had never left the village their entire lives, let alone on a helicopter and never imagined living alongside the King.

Pon would travel back to the village when his palace commitments allowed him for education and warrior training for the new Tinju. He would choose a worthy assistant, this he would do as a 'warrior'. But on return to the palace, although still a devoted disciple of the lord Buddha, which he would always remain on the path to enlightenment, he would revert to his new role and title. 'Defender of the Monarch.' Everybody seemed pleased with the outcome.

Pon thought back to only a few days ago, when he had told Vitchae, of the more private part of his journey and his decision to step down as Prime Master. He expected Vitchae to be angry with him for breaking his vow of celibacy, but all Vitchae said was with a twinkle in his eye “What was it like?” And, “tell me more about foreigners,” bringing a shocked look to Cenat.

Maybe his old friend and master had accepted this new order and life change too readily, he thought.

Things would take time to adjust. Pon would take time, his life, as the lives of his fellow surviving brothers had changed in such a short space of time, and hoped he would be found worthy of the trust and duty now bestowed upon him. He stared up at the ever-smiling face of the statue.

He felt a little uncomfortable in his new uniform, gone was his monks robes, replaced by a smart white uniform, his new attire whilst at his palace duty. A smart white tunic and trousers, his epaulets displaying the royal heraldic crest and shiny golden buttons again with the crest on them. His red sash had been embroidered with a golden border delicately and skilfully sewn with traditional Thai emblems, which bordered both sides of the sash. At the clipped base his sword, regally hung.

Pon thought about his new family and the love they had shown him that would be unwavering. He also thought about his new friends Spock, Stu, Dao and Moo and hoped it would not be the end of a friendship that had taught him the most valuable lesson of all .The most effective weapon he had in his arsenal was, ‘laughter’.

The sun had now hit the skylight. The light show was taking on its first rays and emitting its opening performance. Pon stared as the lights gained in brilliance until the halo had completely surrounded the Statues head. He prayed at this spectacle and he could imagine how the throbbing masses would witness this and feel the same tingling excitement he did being touched by ‘The light of god.’

He spoke out aloud.

“Thank you my Buddha for allowing me the privilege to serve you.”

He looked up shielding his eyes and just for a second thought the light had made a small vortex, a swirling opening directly to the holy relic and he could clearly see the golden box containing the Holy Relics.

Nicholas Godfrey of Brightons’ expensive ceramic false teeth.

He turned and walked towards the door of the temple and out into the hot sticky Bangkok air.

For now,

HIS DUTY WAS CONCLUDED



– EPILOGUE –

Spring had at last arrived, releasing the grip from the fingers of a long cold winter in England .It was a mild spring morning. The birds were singing in the trees. The lambs were jumping and frolicking in the fields. Fish are leaping in the babbling brooks and there was a euphoric feeling abound in sunny old Blighty. It was a good day to be alive. Everything was happy. People were happy, the animals were happy. The plants and trees were happy and Nick was happy as he sat in the departure lounge of Gatwick airport.

He has a satisfied smirk written on his face. ‘Bimen airways, Bangladesh airlines’, never in a million years he thought, and Gatwick airport no chance, too far for them. He took a long gulp from his pint of lager, remembering the pain from his arm, his mouth, his head, his backside, and finally his broken clavicle. He ran his tongue over his new crowned teeth. ‘Last holiday cost me a fortune, and most of it I spent in bloody hospital,’ he thought, ‘not again, no sir.’ He planned to fly to Bangkok, on a very inexpensive return flight with Bimen. He would go to Pattaya and if THEY weren’t there he would stay. If THEY where, he would head to the now re-developed Phuket. He had left instructions with his sister, if they call again to say he had gone to London working. He was feeling pleased with himself and moved his stool and legs closer underneath the small table and took another gulp of his lager.

Nick was passing time waiting for his flight to be announced and just watching the world go by, people from all walks of life and all nationalities. He took another swig from his glass, now only a quarter full. He held his glass to his lips he felt an icy chill course through him, he looked over the rim of his glass and saw two figures walking towards him. Fear gripped him like cold steel. He stood bolt upright, hit his knees on the bottom of the small but heavy table, instinctively fell forward dropping his glass and hitting his head and mouth with full force on the edge of the table. Dazed he fell to the floor rolled onto his back. He had a throbbing pain in his mouth and nose, he could taste his own blood. He spat out a lump of blood, mucous and new crowns. He looked up in pained surprised at the ceiling of the departure lounge. Two heads popped into his range of vision and looked straight down at him.

“Mate, that looks painful,” said Spock.

“Just lay there and well get you some help,” joined in Stu.

Just for the time being.

THE END

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