



Buddha's Tooth

A Thailand Adventure



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-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 Peter Harris (Spock). Three unattached, English, horny, mid thirty-year-old lads on holiday, as they almost battle against 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, located 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 women 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 always will, remain a mystery to the Western world. So, unless you like stories about buffaloes, please read on and enjoy *Siam Storm*, an absolute must read survival guide for anyone travelling to 'The Land of Smiles'.

Korþ kbun krap

(Thank you)

Moreover, if you want something to do after reading this epic. Think about this puzzle:

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

If you are stumped, the answer is revealed in Chapter 21.



-Prologue-

The ancient stage is set. The delicate scent of jasmine, lotus blossom and other oriental fragrances drifts soothingly through the warm candlelit main hall of the *Wat*, the temple. Inside are highly trained *Chang*, elephant warrior monks of the *Tinju* order, kneeling with their foreheads touching the marble floor, arms extended in front of them. They are deep in meditation and await the moment, like crouching lions waiting for the scent of their prey.

Situated in dense jungle and surrounded by jungle-encased mountains, this *Wat* was said to be around 2000 years old and built by monks in *Salaburi*, which was a remote village, just a short distance away from the small south eastern Thai/Cambodian border town of *Pong-Nam-Rom*. The *Wat* was small by temple standards, with gleaming domes and arches, covered in gold leaf and it had skilfully carved statues that depicted Buddha's journey through life, both as a prince and a pauper.

The *Wat* was built against a mountain to the rear of the village. The meticulously maintained *Wat* had a large door at the front, a small door at the rear, and a door at the side leading to a meditation room. The exterior of this small, windowless room, had mosaic tiles formed into murals that depicted a nobleman on a horse, smiling down upon a poor, decrepit individual. It was believed this was the moment when Prince *Siddhartha Gautama* decided to give up his earthly possessions and begin his journey to enlightenment, eventually becoming known as 'Buddha' and entering *Nirvana*, heaven, whilst still alive.

Inside the meditation room was; an embalmed corpse laid out on a stone slab, a foetus in a glass jar, preserved in a clear liquid made from the bark of a local tree, and a skeleton. The monks entered this room for intense meditation on the journey through life and to reflect on birth, death, and the afterlife. Cut into one wall was an entrance with a small tunnel, which led to a large cave, and a heavy golden gate that covered the cave's mouth.

One hooded monk stood guard on either side of the gate. Each carried a small bow and quiver filled with menacing arrows. The handles of their sheathed swords sparkled, even through the dim light. This cave housed the teachings of the Lord Buddha and the *Wat's* most valuable possession...four Pre-molars, wisdom teeth of the Holy Buddha, kept in a golden box, about the size of a matchbox and adorned with rubies and sapphires from the nearby mines of Chantaburi.

The inner chamber of the main temple was basic, with large, smooth marble pillars set on either side of a three-metre wide aisle. Small mats were placed on the marble floor to the side of the aisle for the monks to pray, receive teachings, and meditate. Outside the main temple was the monk's living quarters and large arenas where they would learn fighting skills, both with and without weapons. Although the weapons were ancient, in trained Tinju hands they proved to be as deadly as any modern-day weapon. Handed down from generation to generation, the monks' skills as great warriors, in all forms of combat were legendary. The early kings of Siam, which has been known as Thailand since 11 May 1949, used Tinju monks as bodyguards and assassins throughout the centuries.

Due to inhospitable terrain, humidity, and many biting insects, the approach to the village was difficult. With no roads or visible tracks, the only people with the knowledge to find their way were the villagers and monks. Through this anonymity, the village and *Wat* remained unhindered for millennia. Using

knowledge passed down through the ages, they farmed the land, tended their cattle, and survived on medicines provided by the many trees and plants found in the surrounding forest. They were totally self-sufficient and had no need for the trappings or indulgences of the outside world that had long since forgotten them.

The monks, all males, were chosen before birth. When a Tinju monk died, the next first-born son of a villager became his replacement. It was believed that he was the reincarnation of the deceased Tinju. At just one day old, the infant was 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 boy's family it was a great honour to have a son who was Tinju because they were known for their great wisdom and kindness in their search for enlightenment. They were born Tinju and died Tinju.

There were currently 75 monks. The youngest was two years old, and the eldest was 86. For the monks of the Tinju order, it was their credo to guard the sacred relic. Active duty started at the age of ten, and continued throughout their lives until they were around 70 years old. They retired from active service and, except for the 'Prime Master', lived the remainder of their lives as elder monks, undertaking teaching and guidance for the young monks.

A Siamese trader and emissary to the King, acquired the holy remnants of Prince Siddhartha Gautama over 500 years after his death, about the same time Christ was born. At the time, it was widely believed that any ruler who worshipped the relics of Buddha would be given the power to command and rule wisely. The trader brought the relics to Siam from China after searching for 20 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 lives. After many months of fierce gladiatorial competitions, 50 of the country's best warriors were chosen, along with 25 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 monks were created. Their role was to guard the holy relics and every year, on the King's birthday, to escort the relic to the Imperial Palace so that the King could ask for continued wisdom to rule.

The King chose a site in the heart of a jungle. He named it *Salaburi* and brought in artisans from all over the Kingdom to build the *Wat*. Taking 12 years to construct, it was built next to a cave in one of the nearby mountain and was made secure with gates and booby traps. The boxed relics were then placed into a small gold statue of Buddha. The key was given to one holy man, who was then given the title Prime Master.' 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 came in to take care of the new monks and made up the population of *Salaburi* village. A new civilisation was created, cut off from the outside world and it developed with its own culture.

Apart from the King, his Chief of the Palace Guards, the head of the *Temple of the Emerald Buddha at the Imperial Palace, and the Tinju, nobody else is aware of the existence of the holy relic. The Chief of the Palace Guards had the responsibility of transporting the Tinju to and from the palace. Large army transports would be driven to Pong-Nam-Rom. The monk's would be waiting, and get into the vehicles, and proceed to the Imperial Palace in Bangkok. The monks would then

disembark and enter the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, forming rows on either side of the aisle.

The Prime Master would walk over to the Emerald Buddha, remove the golden box from his robe, and place it at the foot of the Buddha. He would then pray alone 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 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 at their *Salaburi Wat*, 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 fifth of December.

Khun Somchay had been Prime Master of the Tinju for four years. Now 58 years of age, he had the strength of a lion and the speed of a striking snake. His mentor, the former Prime Master, *Khun Vitchae*, 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, with only one nominated as Prime Master. Although *Somchay* was not the eldest Master, his merit and courage had convinced his peers that he was the right man for the job.

Somchay now stood in front of the large golden statue of Buddha, situated at the rear of the Tinju temple. The statue, approximately 20' tall, was of the Buddha sitting in a cross-legged lotus position with open hands and smiling face as he

looked down at everyone below. In the statue's hands lay the small matchbox-sized 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, chanted a prayer for enlightenment, wisdom and courage. His chanting continued for several minutes, and then he fell silent.

The two hooded monks who stood on either side of the statue lit more of the heavily-scented essence sticks, positioned around the statue in small sand traps. This took several minutes and, as small wisps of smoke started emanating from the sticks, the air started to fill with a fragrant, earthy aroma. After all 30 sticks were lit. Somchay took the small box from the statue'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 and looked at the holy box and, in a singular crescendo, praised the Lord Buddha so loudly that it seemed to resonate in Nirvana. This carried on for several minutes, all in perfect tone, perfect pitch, and perfect unison.

Somchay was first to notice 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 a hunting or prey, animal. The fragrant aroma of the incense had been replaced by something that he'd come across before. It was similar to the sweet, nutty smell given off by the cakes at the village bakery. . . . almonds. However, he knew this was not cake. It was something more modern and, his senses told him, far more sinister. The wispy curls of smoke now turned into large plumes. Somchay shouted out and clasped the box to his body. The other monks were now on their feet, hurrying toward Somchay. The hooded monk, standing to the right of the statue, thought he saw the monk to his left side 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

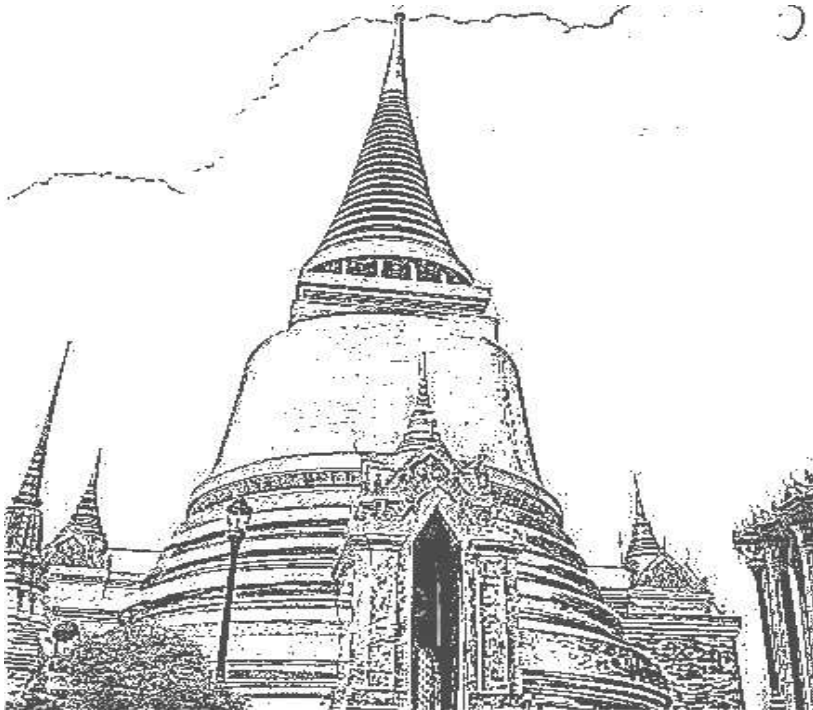
against the statue, and the holy box tumbled from of his hand. He looked up at the smiling face of Buddha, the last face he was to see in this life. The smoke filled the temple and, as each monk collapsed with confusion etched upon their faces, surrendered to this mortal coil and dispatched to their nirvana.

One figure still standing was a hooded monk, who quietly walked through the smoke to the lifeless body of the dead Prime Master. He bent down, 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, or writhing and convulsing on the marble floor. One monk, in particular, 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 where, once outside, he removed his S-16 respirator and took a gulp of fresh air. He removed his robes, stood in his camouflage under garment, and picked up the remainder of the cyanide flares. "*I do not want to leave any evidence,*" he thought. He bundled up his robe into a crude rucksack and tied that, along with his deadly evidence to his back. He took a last deep breath and ran off toward the jungle.

The back door of the temple was left ajar, and a faint cough was followed by a dull thud, as the other hooded monk came stumbling 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'd 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, he filled his lungs with air. Still wheezing, he bent over and vomited. He turned his head and caught a glimpse of a figure running into the distance and then disappearing into the jungle. He collapsed, unconscious.

***The 'Emerald Buddha'** is a large gold coloured statue of a sitting Buddha approximately 50 feet high. On its head is a carved 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.

TEMPLE OF THE EMERALD BUDDHA



– Chapter One –

The silence was broken by a high-pitched screech, followed by several beeps. A hand came out from under a small bundle of blankets and slapped the top of the alarm clock. Mumbling, the sound of breaking wind and the grating of a scrotum being scratched signalled that 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, *‘but never mind as this time tomorrow I will be basking in the sunshine’*. He looked over to an armchair, where a white bundle of fur lay with its eyes open, staring at Stu as he switched on the light.

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

Stu had moved back to Cleethorpes, a small northern English coastal town, and had been living there in a flat above a hair salon for four years. Although born and raised there, he had moved away when he was 17 and joined the Royal Navy. After 14 years he’d left the navy, and spent the next several years moving around the country before deciding to return to Cleethorpes and set up a furniture business. Stu purchased a cheap dilapidated shop house and fixed it up so that it was habitable. He rented out the shop to a hairdresser, and a downstairs flat behind the shop he had leased to his friend. Stu lived upstairs with his old white boxer dog, ‘Chunky’.

Although he’d had several women in his life they had never stayed with him long; 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, she had thought she was in for an easy life. Poor, misguided animal.

Chunky was well known for her stupidity and affection, by both the neighbours and local fire department, which had been called out on many occasions to free her head from the many railings and other obstacles that she had managed to become 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 short but stocky, with a well-formed beer gut. He would be the perfect weight for his height, if he was six foot 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 looks that only a mother could love. Not a rich man but never short of money, he had worked hard for what he had earned, and had the reputation of being thrifty; *'as tight as a duck's arse in water,'* to be more accurate.

His friend Spock lived in Stu's downstairs flat. The two had been friends since childhood and had always kept in contact throughout the years, sharing many drunken adventures whenever Stu was in town. This included having his neighbourhood closed off by armed police, looking for a crazed man in a checked shirt waving a shotgun around. This was actually a shitfaced Stu, who had borrowed Spock's air rifle with

its telescopic sights to look for a comet, which was supposed to have been easily viewed in the northeast night sky. Due to the fact that Stu didn't know which direction was northeast, he went outside and searched the sky using the rifle's sights, but to no avail, so he gave up, went inside and drank some more. Within ten minutes the street was swarming with armed police searching for a crazy man waving a gun around.

Spock had recently finished a relationship with his long-time girlfriend, who had decided after ten years together that 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 found a cheap flight on the Internet to Bangkok and Pattaya and, after finding out they were in Thailand, advertised as the 'Land of Smiles', the two had booked 15 nights, flying from Manchester on 7th December. They met several local lads who had already been to Pattaya and, after they had told them what to expect, they decided they had made the right decision.

Stu had a hot shower, pulled on his jeans and a 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 knew that 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 a muffled reply and continued, "I'll be up there in ten minutes. What time are you taking the dog and what time's the taxi coming?"

Spock, whose real name is Peter Harris, and was a similar age to Stu, is a giant of a man with a large build and shaven head, making him resemble a large primate. He had earned his nickname at school because of his unusually large ears. Although not pointed, his lugs bore an uncanny resemblance to those of Star Trek's resident Vulcan, so he had been nick-named 'Spock'. The name had stayed with him all his life and even he sometimes forgot that his real name was Peter. He loved his newly single life, loved the parties, and loved his work as a hygiene engineer. (Dustbin man.)

Spock 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 that produced a blue flame as methane met spark. 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 'bouncer' several years ago. So, his other favourite trick was to remove his denture's, which he would then drop into some poor innocent drinker's pint of beer and 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'. Severely spannered, Spock decided to put his dentures into a girls drink. In went the false 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 for Spock. The false gnashers were passed along, Spock ran around and tried unsuccessfully to find out who had them, the restaurant's patrons were in hilarious uproar. The dentures were eventually found buried in a half-eaten bowl of Bombay mix and 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 two-some were now on their way. Chunky had been taken to her new residence for the next 16 days and the

lads were on the 12:40 train to Manchester airport. They weren't 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 got as far as Scunthorpe, a small industrial town 20 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 finish this off,” said Spock and continued “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 aeroplane, they met Nick, who was in the seat next to Spock and, as luck would have it, was travelling to Pattaya. Nick was staying three weeks, as he did not want to be in England over Christmas. He chuckled and told them that he would have a better Christmas in Pattaya. Nick stayed 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 merchandise. He gave Spock and Stu some information about 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 their questions.

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

Nick was a typical 'Jack the Lad'. Fairly tall and lean, he spoke with a cockney accent, which he explained he had picked up after spending many years in London working on construction sites.

'*Too 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 easier, 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 available rooms, even during high season. ('High Season' in Thailand runs from November until March) This eased both their minds.

The 12 hour flight brought them to Bangkok's Don Muang International Airport at the local time of 16:50, and once 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 luggage, cleared customs and headed into the main airport building. They felt grimy and weary, but Nick said that it would soon pass when they arrived in Pattaya. Stu and Spock stopped at a currency exchange kiosk and converted £100's worth of traveller's cheques into Thai *Baht*, at the exchange rate of 72 *Baht* to the pound. They made their way to the sliding exit doors, Stu and Spock took in the sights, namely the beautiful olive skinned women who were walking around the airport, and they giggled like two naughty schoolboys.

It was the same when they were ten years old and their classmate, Mary Tate, lifted her skirt and pulled down her knickers behind the school bike shed, she gave the two embarrassed young lads 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 and

Stu glanced at each other, they then both looked straight ahead and in unison spoke,

“Well Thailand, we’re here.”

They took another pace forward and the automatic doors silently slid open and they all stepped out of the cool air-conditioned airport building into the warm night.

Spock and Stu faced each other and together hollered,

“Fuck me! It’s hot.”

– Chapter Two –

There was an eerie, surreal aura in the village of *Salaburi*. The villagers wandered around aimlessly, gathering, and constructing, although in a state of 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 just wandered about aimlessly.

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 determined that he was still alive. Then he noticed that the rear door of the temple was open. He approached the door and was met by an unusual aroma. He put his robe over his nose and mouth and entered. In the main hall, the smoke had almost cleared. *Cenat* gagged when he saw his comrades and family lying dead on the floor, their features and bodies contorted. He saw the body of the Prime Master leaning against the statue of Buddha. Feeling a little giddy and, devoid of rational thought, he left the temple and went outside to tend 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* as he gave lessons to the young monks on the teachings of Buddha. *Vitthae*, the former Prime Master, at 86 was the oldest monk. While his sight was completely gone, his mind was still razor sharp. *Vitthae* liked to sit in on the lessons of the youngsters, who ages ranged from 2 - 9 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 to Bangkok. The door of the classroom burst open. Cenat stumbled in with Pon over his shoulder. Cenat put the unconscious Pon down 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 slipped in and out of consciousness and was too weak to tell them much. They put him on a small sleeping mat where the monks tended him and administering medicinal herbs. Several hours passed, Cenat had been treated for shock, and when he regained his faculties, relayed what he had witnessed in the temple and about the dead monks. Their first reactions were utter shock and horror, followed by disbelief, and then anger. Vitchae told them that they have 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 the following day and relay what had happened. The wise King would decide what to do.

Cenat, the youngest of the older monks, was chosen to make the trek through the jungle. It usually took 12 to 14 hours, but he had not made the journey for many years. Now 74, the prospect was daunting, but Cenat took up the challenge with enthusiasm.

The journey through the jungle was arduous for the old man. With no compass or navigational aids and no tracks or roads to follow, he relied on his memory and knowledge of the terrain.

The trek took 16 hours. He arrived at the meeting point at 07:30. Even though his most recent 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 had been expecting the monks. The monks would eat and, in return, bless the food stall before being driven away in large army transport trucks. The arrival of a single monk confused them, but the stall owners never asked questions.

Three large UNIMOG army trucks that came to a halt by the lone monk stood on a circular patch of earth alongside the road. The Chief of the Palace Guard, who always came along for 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 had finished. Although it held no official army rank, because the duties were only at the palace, the position came with the power to mobilise the entire Thai army, if necessary to protect the King.

Khun Taksin Sawalsdee was a retired army Lieutenant Colonel and had held the chiefs title for eight years. It was an enviable position and he and his family loved living at the palace and enjoyed the trappings of power which came along with the job.

Taksin listened to Cenat intently and formulated 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 phoned the nearest army garrison in Pong-Nam-Rom. That used to be his old infantry command and the commander was a good friend and excellent soldier. His request to send five of his best infantry soldiers to his position was immediately granted. He strode over to the second troop carrier and spoke to a lieutenant sitting in the passenger seat. The lieutenant got on his radio and gave an order to the other troop carriers. The large vehicles then turned 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 eyes that he could only interpret as pure rage. Taksin explained that 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 note-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 that most of the monks would never have seen a phone, let alone knows how to use one, but it seemed to be the 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 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, so 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 jungle proved to be gruelling for the young soldiers. They were trained in tropical forests and had done many combat simulations in different terrains, but nothing had prepared them for this. It was now dark and the moon was hidden by the dense tree canopy. 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 .45mm service handguns 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 and 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, knelt down and said.

“Okay. 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 appeared 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 and, as they ate 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, he peeled back the leaves to reveal a foul smelling paste, which he told them to rub 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, 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 long way to go.”

“How long?” asked one weary soldier.

“Oh, we are well over halfway,” replied Cenat as he turned and walked ahead.

Pon had now regained consciousness, although 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. Pon had 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 had flared up and given off a strange aroma, and how he’d filtered some of the gas with his tunic, before running out. Then he fell silent, stared at the ceiling, and whispered,

“I am ashamed master. I have to retrieve the holy relic and avenge my brothers,” he then lapsed into a deep sleep.

Vitthae was confused and considered *‘How was somebody able to get amongst the Tinju unnoticed and wipe out the most diligent warriors in the kingdom? Moreover, 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 a few villagers knew this.’*

He reached down and touched the forehead of the sleeping Pon. Resting his hand on Pon’s head, he looked down towards Pon

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 out 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 18 hours to trek through the hostile terrain and they were tired, hungry and sore. Cenat took them straight to the monk’s quarters that 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. His old bones ached and his body cried out for rest, nevertheless he 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 sat beside the sleeping Pon on his thin mattress, his eyes 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.

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 was concluded so now go to 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 surveyed the room. Two of the younger monks sat in deep 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 were already busy fetching large brittle blue rocks and what appeared to be white charcoal. The monks crushed this to powder and mixed it with other powders and a thick and sticky amber liquid. The soldiers, not quite sure what 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 were laid out in a line, along the back of the *Wat*, each wrapped in a type of cloth that gave off a pungent odour, which made the soldiers gag. Fifty-eight bodies had been recovered from the temple while 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 seen the 5mm puncture-mark the dead monk had at the back of his neck and knew the cause of it.

“You know what this means,” said Vitchae to the elders. They 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. It would pierce the base of the skull and go into the medulla oblongata, the part of the brain that 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, devastatingly efficient weapon. It was exclusively a Tinju weapon, and their preferred method to dispatch their duties off to the afterlife. So Vitichae not only knew how the perpetrator got in, he also thought he knew who it was. 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 felt that he had to see his brothers off on their last journey.

A long marble altar stood about four feet off the ground in the centre of the area. On the altar lay fifty-nine of the canoe-type containers, all lined with hammered gold obtained from within the mountains. Each canoe contained a body swathed in a hessian cloth and coated with pungent paste. They had been 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 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 about the substance covering the bodies, he just said it is called ‘*wharm lorn*’ (sunblaze).

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

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 a split second then, - whoosh! - A column of white light as bright and as hot as the sun shot into the night sky. It was over in an instance. The silence and blackness of the night returned.

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

Pon now felt stronger. He had been given medicinal herbs and King Cobra liver and had regained most of his strength. It had been five days since the terrible event took place and he knew that if he wanted to catch the culprit, and avenge his brothers, he would have to leave soon, although he did not yet know whom he was chasing. At Cenat’s suggestion, he had traded with one of the soldier, a gold nugget with the Buddha’s image intricately carved on it, for his mobile phone. 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, a handle wrapped with cotton, making it the same thickness as the blades. This could be used like a dagger to slash or stab and could be thrown and would cut through the air like a disc, it was very deadly and extremely 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 that contained his *Pitou*.

Pon meditated. He had listened to Vitichae telling him of his suspicions, but as the old master had told him, it was only his doubts and he had no firm proof. Pon was confused and unable to understand why anyone would do this, although in the next few minutes he would learn as to the 'whom'.

Vitichae entered and went over to Pon and he was accompanied by an old woman from the village. Pon was shocked as villagers, especially women, were not allowed in there. '*It must be important*' he thought. Vitichae introduced the woman as *Banti Meesilli*. Pon recognised her from his morning pilgrimages around the village, when he and the other monks would go to acquire food, a ritual to learn humility. The villagers always happy to give food in return for a blessing.

The pair sat down in front of Pon and Vitichae 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 tropical forest. 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 Banti was unsure which monk was her son, as only the Prime Master and a few elder monks knew from which family the monks were taken. She went on to explain that her youngest son became close with 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 clear resin covered charcoal drawing of her youngest son.

"This is him. This was my beloved Dam. He was 17 at the time this was sketched," said the old woman, tears flowing from her sad old eyes. Vitchae and the old woman stood up, and she Wai-ed them both, and with great sadness spoke.

"With Jinn being murdered in the temple, means that now I have lost both my sons. Please find who is responsible. I beg you."

Banti left the room, leaving her drawing with Pon, who had a strange feeling about this woman.

Once Banti left, Pon looked at Vitchae.

"Master, I don't understand. What has this woman's dead son to do with this?"

Vitchae explained.

"Her son went into the jungle and never returned. His disappearance was an enigma, it was presumed he had been killed by a tiger, but these timid animals avoided any contact with us" Vitchae paused and solemnly continued "Dam has been the only person in *Salaburi* unaccounted for during my lifetime. I knew young Dam and he was a strong boy and extremely well taught in the way of the Tinju and I spoke to him two days prior to his disappearance. Our conversation did not end well. . . . He is the, who, of that I am certain."

Pon thought for a moment. He remembered this lad who always hung around the temple and trained with them. He

remembered thinking at the time, why was a villager allowed so much freedom around the holy temple?

Pon knew Jinn, they were almost the same age and he 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 I pray that Buddha will guide and 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 or wooden huts they'd expected. What a revelation.

Pattaya also had the same effect, as the taxi drove along 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 seven pounds sterling. They made their way to their rooms 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, a sort of portable bidet that fired a strong jet of water up your jaxey '*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 then go out."

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

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

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

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

The lads paid the 10 baht bus fare and went into the first bar, which was on the corner of the Soi. The women sitting outside leapt up, surrounded them and dragged them inside, in the nicest possible way.

The inside of the bar was very 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 the flavour, but a lot stronger than most European beers.

The sound of other people in the bar 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, scantily clad woman, followed by two equally scantily dressed women. One woman

sat next to Nick, the other two ladies sat either side of Stu and Spock, who sat close together, like two Catholic nuns at a rugby team party. They had a mortal fear of being stitched up with a *katoey*, ladyboy. They had heard the stories from their mates at home who had been to Thailand and allegedly 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 advised. This had played on their mind, even 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’d acted the same.

“No mate, not exactly,” he mused. He then leaned over and said something to the lady 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 woman then spent the next few moments convincing them that she was indeed a woman. 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 approving of the oral dexterity of his temporary, but amenable new friend.

“Yeaah!” replied a chilled out Spock looking down at his own small 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 women jumping off their seats and screaming at them to come into their bars and informing them that they were 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,” said Nick. “We don’t sleep alone in Thailand.”

Soi 8 buzzed with life. Music blared out from the many open-air bars with every bar trying to out-volume the others. Only a musical cacophony could be heard, one bar played the *Eagles*, one bar playing the *Scorpions*. However, that only contributed to the lively atmosphere of Soi 8. Girls screeched at passing customers to ‘come inside please’. The occasional bell rang at various bars, much to the delight of the women who worked there, as it was the signal that they would be getting a free drink. Lights flashed. Street vendors walked around selling everything from chewing gum to fake watches, and they went from bar to bar, looking for any drunken, gullible foreigner, egged on by the girls to “buy me this darling.” The customer would be promised undying, everlasting love. At least until his money ran out.

The atmosphere of 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 that he wasn't peeking at the girls. No matter who was there, the tourist was always treated the same, after all, they were paying and the Thai slogan is always 'money number one.'

The lads positioned themselves at one of Nick's regular bars. He said hello to *Wan*, the *mamasan*, 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 women who promptly went to a large freezer and removed two small packages. They went over to Stu and Spock, popped open a '*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, so the *pah-yen* provided a welcome relief.

Three bottles of ice-cold beer were 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 women enquired, where they came from, how long they planned to stay

and did they have ladies yet? The women seemed to show more interest when the two lads said they did not have ladies. However, they became disappointed when the woman with Spock asked,

“I go with you sexy man?”

Spock towered over the woman but she was still undaunted. Spock, not quite fully grasping what she'd meant 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 their stools and went over to talk to another older foreigner who had been sitting at the opposite side of the bar, much to the merriment of Nick who had been ear wiggling in on this exchange.

After the girls buggered off, 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*'.

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 now attracted several more women around him and along with Stu, they looked liked a couple of cats who had gotten the cream.

Nick decided that he could do that and didn't want these new upstarts 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, strained his bowels

and distorted his facial muscles for extra power, making him appear like a clay gargoyle. He felt the twinges of pressure, and a short blue flame rushed out from his sphincter, which was followed by a yellow fire, which rapidly increased in size around his now burning shorts.

Stu turned and faced 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, apart from the odd sporadic chortle from Stu and Spock. Nick stood next to them at the bar, with a bag of ice held to his rear end by a small motherly girl. He occasionally winced as the bag moved position to give the woman’s arm a rest.

Several more beers were consumed, and they approached a ‘spannered’ state. Although the tiredness had worn off, the lads thought that they’d had too much excitement for one night and presumed Nick would want to go back to the hotel.

On the contrary and, according to Nick, the night had just got started. The girl who 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 20 Baht tip, which she gratefully accepted. “That’s not a lot for a tip,” said Stu. The mamasan spoke.

“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.

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. They bought some food at one of the many barbecue stands en-route, and walked along happily chomping 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 food in their stomach, they steadily sobered up, and getting their second wind and having fun, walking among 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 a woman, who weighed approximately eight stones, trying to move a 20 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 were 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 for an hour before the bars officially closed at one o’clock.

“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 who, although slightly older than the other women 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 stunner 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,” said Spock, “there’s nothing like being forward.” Spock and Stu giggled nervously.

“We’re okay, thanks,” replied Stu.

The conversation ebbed and Stu started looking around at the previously ignored girls sat around the bar. They all seemed sensibly dressed, some in jeans, blouses, and some wearing dresses. Compared with Soi’s six and eight, 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* book 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, and only worked in the bar for 3 weeks. Do you want me to have her come over and sit with you?”

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

“Are you sure?” she asked again.

“Yes, I’m sure, thanks anyway, but I think we leaving”

Stu took note of the sign behind the bar. ‘HAPPY WORLD BAR’. The lads left the bar, 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 woman shouted.

“Hello” to Nick who boasted, “I’ve done her. Sturdy old tug, but a good shag.”

A sexy young woman 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 had five chrome poles set at its centre at varying 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 drinking several glasses of draft *Singha* and watching the acrobatics of the ever-alternating ladies of the pole, they felt renewed vigour in 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, only give them 500.

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 that Stu did not appear to be his usual cheerful self, although he looked at the chrome pole molesters, his mind seemed to be elsewhere. However, he just put this down to tiredness and hoped that his old mate would be ok tomorrow. Spannered and rapidly moving toward shitfaced, they just bumbled 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 it was time they moved on before the bars closed. They walked into a 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, they'd reached 'wankered' stage. Spock attempted to speak to the woman 'Nick had done' who had now gone from a 'sturdy old tug' to a raving beauty in Spock's drunken mind. Nick drooled over another woman 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, should they become separated

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

"*Men!*" She exclaimed.

Spock, not understanding that this meant 'bad smell', thought it meant good morning in Thai, and returned the greeting, much to

the confusion of *Lek*. He'd remembered that this was the 'sturdy old tug that Nick had previously done, but she now appeared a lot less attractive than she did the previous night. He could not recall having sex, which he thought better off not remembered. He then recollected something about Stu just disappearing. He pulled on his jeans, walked out of his room and banged on the door of the adjacent room.

"Stu! Are you okay 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 lay naked on the bed and Spock noticed that she had a few stretch marks around the abdomen. Because he could not recall having sex the previous night, he decided that it would be a great shame to allow the twinge, he now felt from his todger, go to waste. He took out his condoms from the 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, and his mouth was as dry as the bottom of a bird-cage and, confused, he looked around and became aware that 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 had happened the previous 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, '*that can't be right,*' he thought. He then became aware of something in the bed beside 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, at the pert breasts, with small pink-brown nipples, like 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 now, even though Nick’s words of wisdom still rang in his ears: ‘*Don’t fall in love with the girls*’.

He knew where he had seen her, but could not recall when, or how, she had ended up being there. He was ‘wankered’ last night for sure, and 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 eyes, looked at Stu, smiled and spoke.

“Good morning, *pompui*.”

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 give 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 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*, meaning black, and now 25 years-old, sat 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 headed east towards 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 had managed to hitch a ride from a passing Cambodian market trader. The trader, surprised at seeing a monk in the middle of nowhere, especially one whose robes were in the Thai, Buddhist colour, gave *Damn* a lift.

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 12 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 earlier. Dam's life was good. He had money in his pocket, ate well, drank well, had transport and, many women. He was far better off than most of his countrymen and all he had to do was the occasional 'favour' for his good friend Andrew, and besides, most of the people that he'd killed deserved it. He was pleased when Andrew had given this 'favour' to perform, and happy that after telling Andrew about the holy relic many years ago, his guardian had found a buyer, who stated that he owned a museum, so it would benefit all mankind. This he thought, must be a 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 aloud. 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 '*mam*', mother, had told him at an early age that his older brother had been taken to be a Tinju. Although sad that he would be raised as an only son, he had his two slightly older sisters.

Dam was a small child and had a darker complexion compared to the other villagers, hence his nickname. An inquisitive child who 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, explore, and discover secret little places around the temple. One day when Dam was seven years old, he had been exploring the small mountainous hills at the side of the temple. 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 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, scrambling, and stumbling back up the rocks. This cave had now become his nemesis.

Dam was determined to become 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 the young determined Dam. Several years later, whilst on one of his jaunts to the temple, he had been mimicking some young monk's moves with kendo sticks, he became aware of someone behind him, and he spun around and faced a smiling monk, who looked around 14 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 to be his brother.

Many years passed and, although it was not usually allowed for monks to associate so closely with villagers, but Vitthae, the Prime Master, had noticed the friendship develop between Dam and Jinn, but wasn't unduly concerned. Dam was a likeable lad and made the monks laugh with his comical antics. Jinn taught Dam everything that he had learned, about hand-to-hand combat and weapons. 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. He thought that one day he would become 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 were taught how to fold

steel and mix with locally mined black iron ore, this when mixed with other metals became a strong pliable material that could be easily folded and shaped. It was from this metal that they made their 'Glave's' and 'sword's'. The weapons were given to the novice monks at ten years old, an age when they were considered ready to be able to undertake the great journey, and to meet the living Buddha. These weapons were the monk's responsibility and stayed with them for life. They were given unsharpened and undecorated, and 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 filled with combat, fitness training, meditation and spiritual learning. Dam enjoyed every painful minute and he and Jinn became inseparable.

Jinn reached his 17th birthday and now at the age eligible to take the 'trial of the warrior'.

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

The trial consisted of several stages. First, a Master would trek toward Pong-Nam-Rom. He would be given a two-hour head start, which for a fit Master would take about 11 hours. The novice would then have to chase after him. When, or if, he caught up, he would then 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 20kms. 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-take the test the next day, and every day after, until he succeeded. When the novice was successful, he would return to the village and, armed with his sword, he would have to navigate an assault course, chopping several obstacles on the way, from a watermelon, 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. 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.

It was the first day of Jinn's trial. 'Khun Lignet' had gone into the tropical forest two hours previously, the other monks lined up in the combat area, and stood in silent prayer. Vitchae was stood with Jinn, his hand on the young monk's head as he chanted for strength for Jinn. He then removed his hand and announced.

"Let the trial begin".

Jinn Wai-ed the 'Prime Master', and took off into the jungle. He had 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 gone by and Dam was anxious. He had seen Jinn catch, and fight, Lignet and return to complete the assault course, but he knew he could not go into the jungle with Jinn for his last trial, as that was forbidden. Dam paced 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-ed' 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, and placed it over the bowed head of Jinn. He then took Jinn's sword, Glave, Bow and Pitou, and placed them on his outstretch arms.

“You have 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 went by 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 50 years, which was one time to dispatch a rather nasty Japanese General, which was a duty ‘concluded’ by a young, Vitichae. It had been something that they all had to know, and be 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 a Pitou was used for; he taught him how to use one. This he did in secret, not knowing if he was allowed to so or not, but he did not see any harm, this was his after all, his baby brother.

Jinn undertook guard duty outside the cave that housed the holy relic, and during his watch Dam would always sneak around to the cave and wait near Jinn. 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 approached his 17th 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 13 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, especially his beloved brother Jinn.

On the day of his 17th birthday, he excitedly got dressed and ran over to the *Wat*. The monks had been in their morning meditation, so 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 had been praying in front of the statue of the smiling Buddha, when the young warrior and his familiar companion approached and he turned to face the boys.

“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 that a Tinju monk had to be chosen, and could not be earned, it was a birthright handed down through millennia from the time of the first Tinju monks and it could not be changed by man. . . . any man. Dam listened, his head thudded, all emotion had gone and the words that now came out of Vitthae’s mouth were just a garbled incoherent blur, he no longer paid any attention and was deep in his own thoughts, his own world, and his own depression. Vitthae never mentioned

the sacred relic, and he had hoped that Jinn would not have told Dam about this. He was wrong.

Vitchae concluded by saying,

“I am sorry young Dam, but we are always here for you, your life can still be with us, and that will not change.”

Dam got to his feet and Wai-ed the old Master and walked outside.

“Dam, Dam!”

Called out Jinn, but he was ignored as the young villager strode purposefully home.

Over the next few days, Dam wasn't seen around the temple area, or the village. Jinn had been restricted to the temple, but not as a punishment. Vitchae had realised the relationship between Dam and Jinn had to ease. He had blamed himself for letting it go on for so 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 homemade bow. Banti, his mother, concerned about his well-being asked.

“Are you okay my son?”

To which Dam replied

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

He *sniff-kissed his mother on the forehead...She never saw her son again.

Dam had stayed in the jungle just walking, hunting and sleeping, but mainly thinking. He knew that nobody had ever left the village before, and he thought that he would return once his head had cleared. 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 that he had entered into Cambodia and was in unfamiliar terrain. Eventually, he came upon a road, this confused him, he had never seen a road before, let alone this strange monster, which now headed toward him. He crouched back into the jungle as the monster roared passed him and then it came to a stop. An old man got out of the car and went over to where the now petrified Dam cowered. The man spoke to Dam in Cambodian, a language he was familiar. He had learnt this with Jinn, along with Thai and their usual dialect, ancient Siamese. The old man took Dam over to his car.

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

Dam tried to answer the old man's questions, but he wasn't sure exactly where he was heading. The old man offered him shelter at his home in Phnom Penh, and Dam gratefully accepted. They drove North East toward the capital, an eight-hour journey. Dam was in wonderment by this strange machine.

The old man and his wife took care of Dam for almost a year and he soon adjusted to life in Phnom Penh, although he missed Jinn, his parents and his old lifestyle, he knew he would not return, as his confusion had now turned to anger, which was directed at the arrogant Tinju. Dam was a skilled artisan, but his real strengths lay in his fighting abilities, and he'd entered, and won, many bare-fist street fights, which although not strictly legal, a blind eye was turned. These contests were brutal and often resulted in the death of a fighter, but Dam was good, he was Tinju trained and although he was small, his speed and strength were unseen before by any of his opponents. The fighters were not paid much, about five dollars per fight. However, a lot of money could be made from gambling at these fixtures. Dam earned a fearful reputation and his fights were always well attended, he was a dynamic ruthless fighter. It was at one of these fights that he gained the attention of Andrew

Towhee, a well-known arms dealer from Ireland, who now lived in Cambodia.

Towhee had watched Dam fight on several occasions and wanted this kid as his property; he knew that he could make a lot of money from this young warrior. Towhee went with Dam to see the old man who took care of him and gave him \$100 and reassured the old man that he would take care of Dam and moved him into his bungalow, in Caw Kong

The relationship between Towhee and Dam became like father and son. Towhee was in his early fifties and he had no family, his only companion, a weasely looking Spaniard named Miguel.

Towhee was an arms dealer and he bought purloined weapons and ammunition from Cambodia and Vietnam for very little money, and then sold them 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 father's 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 herd many times around Ireland and taking up-front payments, he then slaughtered the cattle and stuck on a phoney 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, £2,000,000 richer. He then 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 belonged to him and not Miguel's. He eventually left Spain in the late eighties, due to the developing relations between the European communities. Moreover, the fact the IRA had nothing better to do, and as they no longer killed the British, they put Towhee on their shit list.

Therefore, with a few £'s of the farmer's money as reward, they decided to hunt Towhee, who fled and made his way to Thailand accompanied by Miguel, where he set up an export business for arms and ammunition.

He stayed in Thailand for five years, until police got wind of his operation and their bribes became a constant annoyance to Towhee. Towhee and Miguel 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 exited he became. He had chosen to settle in Caw Kong, which is only a kilometre away from the notorious K11, which was a small community located 11kilometres outside of 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 a new, young, lost waif would wander into the village, he would go to Towhees house with the frightened youngster in tow. He would be let in by Miguel and given some money, usually \$10.

“Tell Mr. Andrew, Kip is his good friend and will take good care of him” Kip always said

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 then be pushed out of the door where Kip would be waiting, lifted onto the back of his motorbike and driven away in tears, shock written on their young faces.

This was where Dam had lived now for seven years. He started as Towhees fighter, and entered into many fights, which he always won and, always damaged or killed his opponents. He was ruthless, and his fearsome reputation soon grew, he was driven by hate.

After three or four years he had out lived his usefulness to Towhee, as nobody would fight him, he was too good, and no fights meant no gambling, therefore 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 ambushed him brandishing pistols and daggers.

Dam sent them to the afterlife with lightning speed and then 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 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, sat down, and told Towhee his previously untold story about his life in *Salaburi*, his training and the holy remnants. Dam had 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 sights became familiar as night closed 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 kept some clothes. Although now he never fought 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'd 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 until I get home,'* he thought and laughed at himself because he had prepared and planned for everything, except a change of civilian clothes.

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

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

Miguel let Dam in and paid the taxi. Towhee was sitting behind his large *'mystat,'* teak desk, "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, and produced the small golden jewel encrusted box and placed it down in front of Towhee.

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

"Okay," he said to Dam and Miguel, "it looks like you two will be 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 would be waiting for this.”

“Dam, go and freshen up, we will go celebrate.”

“Okay, Andrew.” Dam said.

Dam knew that Towhees celebration meant that he would be going to K11 to bring back a child and, while Towhee would be satisfying his sick lust, he and Miguel would be waiting and listening. He decided that once he had got back from K11, he would slip away on his motorbike to ‘The heart of Darkness,’ a large nightclub in Phnom Penh. He would have money in his pocket and, if ‘Fitta’ was there, he would give her a night she wouldn’t forget in a hurry. He walked over to his room, went inside and 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 creating. He unfolded his bundle, hung up his homemade robe, washed the dried blood and spinal fluid off his Pitou, and replaced it on its stand. He took out his folded S-16 respirator, having already dumped the filter into the jungle, a long way from the village, and put it in a drawer. He looked down at the table, which had several sheets of a brown cardboard material placed on it along with several containers that contained various coloured powders, and jars containing syrupy solutions.

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

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

Getting to the village unnoticed had been easy, he had spent weeks preparing, planning and making cyanide flares, something Jinn had taught him.

He recalled how one day Jinn, now a new warrior, had spoken to him.

“Look at this my brother,” Jinn said, and produced 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 that 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 when the monks were given leisure time, or meditating time, as it was the hottest part of the day. On the rock Jinn had laid out; two small round clay containers, a Scelet root, an Aroona root and several small rolled conical shaped object, resembling a cigar. Jinn unrolled the cigar-shaped objects out into sheets, which was yellow-brown sandalwood, which resembled oily marzipan.

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

“Not exactly,” replied Jinn.

He then explained that the contents of the jars were crushed graphite and sulphur. He poured this powder in the centre of the laid out sheet, and squeezed the mixed roots syrupy juices over the powder, which instantly hardened. He then tightly rolled the sheet, like a hand-rolled cigarette and put the object in the sun to bake dry. Jinn sat down with Dam and informed him that it was a *Pai-non*’ sleeping stick. However, he did not fully understand what they were used for

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

Although when Jinn found out exactly what the sticks were used for, he never mentioned it to Dam again. However, there was no need to as Dam later figured it out and, improved on the stick by the addition of graphite 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, as buying essence sticks from monks was considered lucky, which was the 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 stick and it gave off a pleasant fragrant aroma. The heat would then hit the mix and the aroma would change slightly, although remain pleasant and the victim would be unaware that they were slowly being 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 become paralysed, lungs, heart, and finally, brain. The same effect as Thiopentone, used as an anaesthetic 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 for a very unpleasant death. Nevertheless, sometimes requested by the ruler if he did not like someone. If too little skeet roots, 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 resembled the monk's deadly 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 secret cave until nearer the time. He went around the rocks to the mouth of the cave, making sure he made no noise and waited behind an outcrop of rocks. He saw Somchay, the Prime Master, come from the small hatchway of the meditation room and approached the guards, who bowed their heads on his arrival. He 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. Like a leaping panther, Dam launched himself silently at the remaining monk, placed his hand over his mouth and inserted his Pitou into the base of the guard's skull, engaged 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 within the cave, therefore he had plenty of time. He removed the dead monk's bow and placed it on his shoulder. He had rehearsed this many times and it had gone to plan, he only hoped that his size would not be noticed. However, he thought it would be alright as they would all have their heads bowed. The Prime Master and the other 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. Dam had gone unnoticed and easily replaced the harmless aromatic incense sticks.

Now back home in Caw Kong, he wallowed in his success.

'That was easy,' thought Dam, now 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 either too old, or too young. The Tinju were finished.'* He had annihilated them, and they would not have a clue. He sniffed the air and said aloud. "Ah smells good, the sweet smell of success".

His gloating was short lived, as a bellowing Towhee interrupted his thoughts.

"Dam, Miguel, come here!" Towhee hollered.

Miguel and Dam went into the living room. Towhee had a beaming smile on his face.

"Good news?" asked Miguel."

"Perfect," said Towhee. "I e-mailed the photos off to the Sheikh, who got back to me straight away. He was extremely

keen to get the relic and is sending out his aide, Abdul Rasid and you will go to 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 prior, so that will give you five days for your hair to grow back.”

Towhee and Miguel both laughed. Dam felt some stubble that had grown back on his head, and joined in the laughter.

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

***Sniff-kiss,** 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. Westerners affectionately know this as a ‘sniffkiss’. Now, with western influences they tend to kiss more the western way, but usually only in westernised tourist towns and cities such as Pattaya.

– Chapter Five –

The village of *Salaburi* was like a ghost town. The villagers, had remained in their wooden stilted houses, and the monks had 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. It was usually full of the noise of birds and insects. 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 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 the lotus position. He pondered in his dark world about the events of the past few days and his time as a Prime Master. He considered that he should have handled the situation with Dam a lot better. He remembered at the time he may have been a little sharp with the lad, but he had problems of his own as his sight started 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'* he thought, *'why can't they earn a place in the scheme of things? 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, men did, and he recalled the comment he had made to Dam about no man being able to change this, which might have been presumptuous, and maybe now, man will have to change the Tinju, who in effect were now finished.

The silence was suddenly and violently broken. The tops of the trees shook and swayed, with clouds of dust being thrown up in large whirlwinds of rotor wash. 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, and the noise diminished slightly and the giant rotor blades came to a slow idle and then stopped.

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 walked 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, whilst 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 is a large helicopter used by the Thai air force 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 Thai royal standards skilfully crafted and a high glazed wax that made it sparkle like a new pin in the sunlight.

The side door slid opened 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 arched 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. The 11 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 ten 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 Vitthae to Taksin, who noticed that 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 clothing, 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 wire rimmed spectacles.

A gasp went around the now gathered villagers and 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 78 year-old King, currently the world's longest reigning monarch.

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 and 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 hoping for another glimpse at their beloved King. They discussed the atrocity that had happened. The King and Vitthae discussed the next stage. The King laid out his thoughts and plans and asked Vitthae and Cenat to accompany him to Bangkok to talk more, and formulate a mutually beneficial plan, although fearful of getting into the sky monster, they readily accepted.

They emerged from the *Wat* and headed toward the helicopter. Vitthae 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, which included the five in the village, much to their relief.

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

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

Cenat looked shocked,

“Pon?” he asked

“Yes,” said Taksin. “He called me during the early hours from a mobile phone. I do not give out my number. Only a few

people know it, you being one of them, although I am not sure that Pon understood. It became hard to hear him, because I think he was talking through the earpiece.”

The large helicopter’s rotors threw up swirling clouds of dust and debris, which sent the villagers into a panic, and drowned 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 that might get blown into the intake. It was all clear, so he gently raised the collective and the big bird rose off the ground. The pilot, using his rudder pedals aimed the helicopter at a clump of trees in the jungle, and pushed the cyclic stick forward. The nose of the helicopter dipped, moved forward, accelerated and gaining speed and height, cleared the jungle canopy and disappeared out of view.

– Chapter Six –

Nick had a restless night. He had bought back the woman he had drooled over at the bar in front of Champion a-go-go. He had managed to wangle a ‘freebee’ after he drunkenly argued with the mamasan he left alone, without paying the bar fine. He accompanied Spock and Lek and, as the three walked 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 mototaxi and went to their hotel and up to their rooms. Nick’s interest in Von had waned, she was fairly old and unattractive, and he did not 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, stormed out and slammed. He showered, the cold water felt good on his now resting sphincter. He felt between his butt cheeks, the hairs had been scorched off and he could feel blisters had started to form, ‘*This will sting*,’ he thought. He was right, and he spent the night tossing and turning in bed, at times he went and administered ice to this rather sore area. Nick had eventually nodded off around daybreak. A loud hammering thump on the door, woke him up.

“Are you awake 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 okay”,

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, which Spock found 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’d woken Stu well over an hour ago, and had just spoke to him again through the door, but he said that he was in the middle of doing something and mentioned that he was on his ‘vinegar stroke’ so had told him to go away.

Spock enquired about Von, and Nick told him that he’d paid her and sent her away, although not mentioning he only paid 20Baht. Nick enquired about Lek, 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 Spock,

“And will you?” enquired Nick.

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

Nick laughed and said.

“You’re learning mate, there are 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, they had seen Dao at the bar reading, but hadn’t paid much attention to her. So, thought Spock, *‘that’s where the little bugger disappeared to and that’s why he acted so strange, the daft twat has gone and fallen in love.’* He looked at his long time friend who beamed from ear to ear.

“What happened?’ asked Spock.

Stu explained he had no idea, and he went on to give details of how 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 remembered, was when he woke up next to Dao. Then, after he came around a bit, they showered together, and made mad passionate love, Dao spoke a little English, but the words she would use to 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 of 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 they would see 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 and told her that 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 6:30 pm and had started to get dark. 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 they ate on the plane the previous day, apart from the street barbecue, which Stu had thought had given him rather loose stools, the shits.

Now fed, they changed into their new clothes 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 already missed Dao, it had been almost 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 were about 50 bars in a covered area, many with live music. The lads settled in one bar that had a band, which consisted of three Thais who blasted 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 happy bar girls, en-masse behind, and in front of the many bars. Every time Stu or Spock took out a pair of breasts out from a giggling girl's bra, they would buy them a drink. Nick, they noticed however, kept his hands well away from his wallet. Having a great time, they soon 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 felt his methane supply bubbling, and gave 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.

The people looked puzzled and went back to their conversation and drinks. Spock looked bemused and shocked. Stu got off his stool and went over to his large friend

“What happened mate... and what is that awful smell?”

Then Stu 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, and tried to keep a straight face as he continued,

“And make Spocks a size XXL, he has shit in his.”

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

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

‘Never trust a fart in Thailand’

Now getting quite late, the now spannered lads headed for the Happy World bar, Spock in his new shorts, he had changed and cleaned up in the toilets, *‘best five Babt I’ve spent,’* he thought, the cost for using some public conveniences

While they waited for Spock, Stu noticed a hotel, with a large sign that read ‘Sabaiiland body massage’. It was on a corner of Soi 2, which made it look a little out of place.

“What’s that?” he asked Nick.

With a smirk, Nick informed him that it was a ‘soapy massage 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, fetched them drinks over and then she went to sit next to Stu.

“What happened last night?” Stu asked Dao.

“You don’t remember?” said Dao smiling.

“No,” said Stu “All I know is that I got you,” and pecked Dao on the forehead.

“Better you don’t remember stupid man.” she said and smiled.

Dao was 22 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 went to the tourist area, where 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 would have several foreign men sending money, which they shared with their friends and, maybe current Thai boyfriend. This is again, the Thai way. Western society consider this as degrading and believe they are forced into this life, and are being exploited, and yes, probably some were. Nevertheless, as most bargirls will tell you, they earn good money, can take care of their family, party every night, get a shag, and get paid for it, and to a Thai, sex is just another bodily function. However, they will not go with a man if they don’t like him, it was their choice. The girls all stick together, and have many excuses why they cannot go with a particular man. When the girls first come to work the bar, until they have a few '*farang*,' foreigners under their belt, they were usually shy, until they learned the ropes from the more experienced girls and the ‘mamasan’, so at this stage, they have not been corrupted or brainwashed, so sometimes, the lucky ones will be whisked off and get married a foreigner. This happened quite frequently, a

Thai wife, is a loving, loyal and usually beautiful partner. Not all Thai girls are bar girls, they are the minority, most are usually the same as the western women, homemakers, doctors, students, teacher's etc. However, 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 was an old German man. Mamasan had told her that the older they are, the better.

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

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

Kurt looked about 80 years-old, and appeared a lot older than her granddad. By the time they left the bar, Kurt was well wankered. They got back to the room and, as mamasan had told her, he went off into a loud snoring slumber. The old man awoke in the morning, gave Dao 1000 Baht, which would have been two weeks' salary in her village, picking rice. She showered and left, '*easy money*,' she thought, and 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 with a nice smile.

He'd left the bar with his friends but returned later and made a terrible noise that Charlie said was a foreign song 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 had been played earlier, *Wonderful tonight*. Stu twirled and serenaded Dao for 10 minutes, before he'd collapsed into a chair, and 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. Dao 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, 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 started to sober up a 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 along with him, pointed at her and slurred.

"You're lovely," a stupid drunken grin then came over his face. He got out of the shower flopped onto his bed and promptly fell asleep, still drooling.

The next day they awoke, and 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 wearing makeup and 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, although 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 as 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 decided to head off to a go-go in Soi 7 and search for the lucky woman who was going to get a damn good rattling that night. Spock knew what kind he wanted for that evening and she would have to be sturdy, he was in the mood. Stu had asked Nick if they were going to see that place, 'Sabailand'. 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, and he pulled out a small thin serrated leg.

"How did that get there?" He said, once again he was wanked, 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 sleepless night. He'd lost Spock in 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 that 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 mentioned that Dao wanted to go to her room as her friend had returned from her home village and she wanted to see her; which would give the lads a chance to go to Sabaiiland and take a look.

Dao's friend, Moo, had not been home, she had been with her 'boyfriend'. Moo had come to work in the bar with Dao. 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, spoke 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 trophies and gifts Moo had acquired this time, gold and mobile phones being the preferred items.

Although Moo was not beautiful unlike 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 to Sabaiiland and entered the swish looking hotel. Stu and Spock had been 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 set out around the floor area, and a large flat window on the other side. Behind this window sat very elegantly dressed Thai women, about 20 in all. It looked like a giant fishtank. The lads sat down and ordered a coffee. All the

women wore small badges with numbers written on, and Nick explained,

“These are the err...masseuses,” he smirked.

A smartly dressed looking Thai man came over to their table.

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

“Hang on, matey,” said Spock “we’re just looking,”

The man backed away.

The lads spent several more minutes observing the women. Spock had noticed a large woman 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 pair 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 woman 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'd never imagined Thais come in XXL sizes too. The woman 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 and noticed that she had done a pleasurable 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 Spock 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. The woman and Spock both got dressed and made their way back to the reception to where Nick and a smiling Stu waited. Stu had finished about two minutes earlier, and he giggled and cooed like a schoolboy. Spock sat down and looked at Nick.

“Did you enjoy your first soapy?” Nick asked with a smirk.

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

They made their way back to the Sawasdee hotel, and popped into a few bars on the way back for an afternoon libation. They arrived back at the hotel early evening and felt squeaky-clean.

Luanne arrived at the hotel earlier and had been 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 up to his room. Nick was like a dog that 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 sat behind the bar playing Connect-Four with her friend, Moo, and two men sat 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 woman cheekily stuck out her tongue, and smiled again.

Stu and Dao talked, while looking goopy eyed at each other, Spock had just concluded 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, and agreed on it being a fine looking timepiece.

“It looked 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 as if 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 four fingers. She could see Spock looking confused so she repeated 1-2-3-5, Spock thought, “Bless her she is trying,” and said.

“No it’s 1-2-3-4-5”.

Moo held the watch up in front of Spock and exasperated, said

“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 has 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, knocked and walked in. Nick and Luanne were in bed watching TV. Spock asked Nick if he was Okay and he told them about his watch. He left the room with Luanne moaning to Nick about locking his door.

Spock returned to his room, Moo was taking a shower. Spock had brought some whisky at the mini-mart on the way home and poured himself and Moo a glass,

‘The bloody woman drinks like a fish,’ he thought, remembering she’d kept up with him at the Happy World bar. Moo finished and told him to go take a shower, which he did, mainly to get some cold water on his worn out todger.

He finished showering and got onto the bed, where a naked, smiling Moo was eagerly 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 wanted a 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 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 sat up and watched a movie and drank her whisky. Spock looked at Moo, *'she was cute'* he thought, and *'wow! What a great 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 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, and then they fell asleep holding one another. Morning came and Luanne got up and dressed, she had to go to meet her other boyfriend, who was due in later that day.

Thai women were good organisers regarding the visits of boyfriends, so they wouldn't clash, sometimes though, an 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 away 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. Moreover, 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. 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 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. A loud rap on the door, followed by Spock bursting in with a big grin on his face, violently interrupted Nick's thoughts

“Morning matey”

Stu, Dao and Moo were sat on the bed in Stu's room. Moo had been 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 long tuft of hair, and he liked either a nice bush, or nothing, she was to have nothing, and off came the tuft. Stu and Doa laughed, but Moo said she didn't like it because it itched.

Spock entered the room and joined the other three and 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 had not seen his old friend so happy and contented in many years and, as Spock and Moo went on, he felt like he was watching a comedy. Stu knew Spock had become, like him, smitten..

Dao went to the balcony to hang out the towels when she noticed a commotion down below.

“Come look!” she said.

The three joined her on the balcony and noticed people gathering around a white Toyota Hiace van used as an ambulance. With its back door open, a nurse dressed in a white uniform, escorted a hobbling male figure up to the vehicle. The man appeared to be supporting his arm gingerly and, as he got to the rear door of the ambulance, stopped, looked up at the balcony and gave Spock a contemptuous glare.

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

– Chapter Seven –

The brightly lit stadium was full to capacity with people shouting, and large amounts of money changed hands .as Cambodians and Thais, jumped up and down on small tatty wooden benches in order to get a better view of their fighter. They cheered every time the man, who they had bet on, scored a punch on his opponent. Two fighters stood in the centre of a makeshift ring lined with sand, which was splattered in blood. Their hands were covered with a gauze material that blood had seeped through at the knuckles. Both their faces were swollen and bloody as they punched and kicked each other in a ferocious frenzy, with each one trying to kill or maim the other; it was brutal and the crowd loved every moment.

One fighter landed an elbow to the side of his opponent's temple, which stunned the other fighter and allowed blow after blow to be thrown against the now defenceless man's head, he was finished him off with a viscous roundhouse kick. The crowd went wild, some cheered some booed, and yelled 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 and chopped at the back of the fallen fighter's neck, to ensure he would not get up; he then stood over the fallen fighter, and waved to the raucous crowd, who had now lost interest.

Two men, dressed in shabby jeans and T-shirts came and dragged the fallen fighter out of the ring and to the back of the stadium. He wasn't dead and would recover and live to fight

another day, he was one of the lucky ones. Two more fighters made their way into the ring and stood at the ring-side while the sand got raked over. The victor walked around the audience trying to get a tip from the crowd of people, he had put on a good show and this they were allowed to do in order 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 victorious 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 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.

“I want to find this man,” said Pon, in Cambodian, showing him the charcoal drawing of Dam. “Do you know him?”

The fighter looked at the picture and recognised a young Dam, whom 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 on several occasions.

“Yes,” said the fighter and, not asking the reason behind Pons search enquired. “How much money 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, took the mobile phone from his bag, and switched it on. It peeped into life. He checked that it had a signal and dialled the number on the card given to him by Cenat. A sleepy sounding Taksin answered

“Hello,”

“Hello’ said Pon, “My name is Pon and I am....”

“Hello” again said Taksin, unable to hear a response.

Pon, realising Taksin couldn’t hear him tried to call again.

Fortunately one of the stall owners went over to see what the noise was and noticed the monk held the phone upside down, 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 that he had a friend in Phnom Penh who worked for the Thai consul and had seen a Thai monk in a boxing stadium a few hours previous. Taksin could not do much as it was Cambodia and didn’t know if the information was relevant. However it was something, so he gave Pon the location and details, Pon thanked him and declined Taksin’s offer of his friend’s help.

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 market trader. He put his robes and other items in his rucksack, and tied his sword onto the back. He knew he could not cross the border without papers, so he walked around the back of the market to where a small stream, a tributary of the Mekong River meandered under a bridge at the border crossing. This was

covered by 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 and stay close to the jungle, in order to rest from the searing afternoon sun. He would travel during the early morning and nighttime, when it was a little cooler, and rest 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*.

Pon decided not to stay on the main roads, instead, take smaller tracks that ran parallel to the major roads and he had 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 the dried food that he had brought with him, and drank the liquefied 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 past events as he concentrated 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 they 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 mountains nearby. They sometimes spent years on these small carvings, they were in no rush and not unusual to see five or six monks 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 thought they may be worth something. He had brought along; a finished golden nugget, two red stone, one blue stone ornaments, and his unfinished gold nugget, which he now worked on. It would give him something to do and occupy his mind.

Pon had arrived at the stadium after travelling for four days. He knew Dam had a good lead. He hoped that Dam was the monk Taksin's friend had seen, and would still be about somewhere in the area and hoped 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 any money,” he explained, “but I have these, and you can have 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 four inch gold unfinished nugget and said.

“His name is Dam and he lives with a man named Andrew Towhee and a Spaniard.”

He then 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.

“Be careful of Towhee, he is a bad man, very dangerous.”

Pon thanked the fighter and left the stadium, leaving the fighter examining his newfound wealth.

Pon got 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 that 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 and he intended to kill him, and anyone else who stood in his way. He'd planned for Dam to die that night. Pon sprinted along the unlit, potholed roads for 12 kilometres.

***Thais** are all given ID cards, these stay with them throughout 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 the Thai people are 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 the most visited border crossing, which leads into the eastern heart of Thailand.

– Chapter Eight –

The underground storeroom was a converted 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 launchers. Towhee sat at his small desk and smiled. He had just got off the phone after speaking with 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 whiskey; he savoured the flavour of the smooth velvety amber fluid as it slipped down his throat.

‘Life is good,’ he thought.

His phone rang and interrupted his euphoria,

‘What does that stupid Arab want now?’ he thought and answered.

His assumption was wrong, it was Kip.

“Hello, Mr. Andrew,”

Kip then went on to make small talk, about his health, his business etc. Towhee let him ramble, because he felt that nothing could upset him today, he stared at his racks and drank his whiskey while Kip rambled on, then he stopped suddenly and sat up straight in his chair.

“What?” he asked.

“Yes Mr. Andrew, she only came today, eight years old, needed a bit of a cleanup, but she would squeal good for 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 cannot 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 as he had previously lost a fortune while living there, by having to pay off corrupt police, both for protection of his dubious business dealings, and moreover his sordid personal pleasures. Although it had been many years since he’d lived in Thailand he had vowed never to return.

He had sent Dam and Miguel away that morning, the 13th, he wanted them in Pattaya for the 14th, 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 at one of the many hotels around the border town. Miguel would then walk across the border first thing the next morning. Dam would go across on the back of a ‘load cart’.

Cambodians are allowed to cross over the border. These were usually the market traders, who sold their wares at Aranyaprathet, the Thailand-side market. The market was quite vast, selling everything 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.

Once across the border, Dam and Miguel would meet up in the market area, 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, giving them plenty of time to prepare.

Towhee sat behind his large teak desk. He had poured himself another glass of *Bushmills* and waited 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'd managed to con 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 into heaven 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 significant artefacts from religious history. His prized possession was the 'Holy Grail' of Christ. He had paid \$2,000,000 for the grail, from his now good friend Professor Julian Grimes. Mohammed had advertised over the Internet for artefacts and although he'd 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, whether or not it actually 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.

Grimes arrived at the Sheikh's palace with a stone block, which was x-rayed immediately upon its arrival, where it was revealed that within the block was the Holy Grail. The stone was then carbon dated and revealed its age, as the good professor had stated. Delighted that he possessed the grail, he immediately locked the item away in his private vault, convinced that he now owned the symbol that Christians had searched so long to try and find.

It was of course an elaborate hoax. Professor Julian Grimes also known as, Mr. John Crawford, who 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 dubiously obtained a chunk from the stump of a column from the ruins of Glastonbury abbey, which he knew was a building block from the late 10th Century.

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, and explained that the missing chunks of the originals were the reason everybody had searched in the wrong place. He went on to explain, the 'Knights Templar', had found the grail during the 11th 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 900 years ago, and he knew, pointing to the evidence, the location, within the guarded 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 employed a stonemason to cut a bung out of his ancient masonry. He then placed the model in the hollow, cemented the model in, cut the removed bung to make a top and sealed it 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.

Grimes then 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 appeared terrified and claimed that a radical group of Zionist, who had known about and, had been secret guardians of, the Chalice for millennia, and they now pursued him and had

issued death threats. Grimes implored Mohammed never to mention him, or the Grail, The Sheikh bought his tale and not wanting to get his good friend Professor Grimes into any trouble, locked the Grail away and agreed, and gave his word, that he would never divulge anything about the grail, and gave his oath to keep his silence on the Quran and the prophet Mohammed.

Grimes told Mohammed that he also knew the whereabouts of some missing parchments of the *Gnostic gospels. Excited by this, Mohammed commissioned his new and trusted friend to find this artefact. "Spare no expense Julian," he would say, "money no object."

Grimes A.K.A. Crawford, explained that they had been buried somewhere in a desert and he was going to head there, straight away, to give his fugitive status time to cool, stating that he may be gone for some time.

Grimes went to the desert. The Nevada desert, and to accurately pinpoint his location, Caesars Palace casino, Las Vegas.

Mohammed, pleased with his acquisition, then turned his attention to his next project. His advisors had taken many months that dragged on into years, collecting proof and documentation to support the fact that indeed, such an artefact did exist. He recalled the most recent piece of his information on his computer, which showed a hooded monk who appeared to be outside an ancient temple holding a small golden box.

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 introduced himself, and told him that he wanted the Buddha's relics. Towhee, who was a little taken aback, said

“The price is still \$1,000,000 dollars.”

“Yes,” said Mohammed “No problem.”

“Ok I will obtain it for you and call you when I have it.”
Said the exited Toohey.

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 been given was of Dam, photographed entering *Angkor Wat, an ancient temple City in Cambodia, dressed in monks robes, clutching a phony, home-made relic. Towhee thought it added a bit of mystery and intrigue to the set up, although he realised that Mohammed would have the means to find out more information about the real holy item. He received the call which confirmed Mohammed’s eagerness to buy the artefact three weeks ago, now Towhee was only days away from adding more wealth to his already full pot, care of his friend, who was 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, and a happy Kip was stood outside with a small child, who appeared to be about eight years old. The girl had been sobbing and her dirty tears had 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. Grippped with fear she started to sob again and was sharply checked by Kip who squeezed her hand.

“Good evening Mr. Andrew, I trust she is okay for you?”

Towhee grabbed the girl and dragged her inside closing the door and instructed Kip to wait on the porch, and told him that he would receive a bonus tonight. Kip went over to a table and sat down, and lit a cigarette. The door opened again, and. 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 snivelled

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

Towhee dragged the sobbing girl towards his bedroom. She was terrified, but noticed the safe.

“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 intended 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, or I'll break down the fucking door.”

The door slowly opened and the little girl came out.

“Come here, come here now!” growled Towhee.

The terrified child moved slowly over toward Towhee, who leapt up and ripped her dress off, grabbed her arm and dragged her with him onto the bed. The little girl sobbed frantically, 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 coming from 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 impatiently. 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 walked nervously out of the bathroom. She glanced at Towhee and then looked over at the

figure now who 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 an angry Towhee.

The figure moved forward into the light.

“Who the fuck are you?” Towhee yelled in English and then 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, threw Towhee the 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 and desperately held 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, removed his sword and sliced it across Towhees throat 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 remorse about killing as he was trained not to have. Vitchae 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 carried Kip's lifeless body, who he had dispatched with his Pitou minutes before, to join Towhees corpse. He laid Kip on top of Towhee and placed Towhees head on the top, like a cherry on a cake.

The little girl picked up Towhees safe key, which had fallen off his neck, due to having no head to hold it in situ. She had opened the safe, her eyes widened as she took out bundles of crisp dollar bills, she explained to Pon, who looked for clues to the whereabouts of Dam, about money. It was only paper to him, but she explained what this paper could do.

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, besides, and there is enough for me and my family to start a great new 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, which showed Dam going into Angkor 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 Taksin's friend, he thought maybe he could help but he still had one more task to complete. He went back into Towhees bedroom and over to the two bodies.

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 dust, and black, blue and white fine filings and sprinkled these in a circle around the bodies, this would, when the sunblaze ignited, react with the heat and direct the force upwards. 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 his 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.

“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 was his name?” he asked as he covered the mouthpiece.

“Kip,” replied the girl and screwed up her face in disgust as Pon said

“Dam it’s Kip, Andrew is in the shower.”

“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, I am fine,” said Pon. “What’s your message?”

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

“Yes,” said Pon, “I will tell him.”

The phone clicked off and Pon stared at the phone. “Soon my friend, very soon,” he said as he placed the phone in his bag, switch it off and asked the girl if she knew where Pattaya was?

She didn’t, but he thought ‘Now I have another phone, I will call Taksin maybe he knows where Pattaya is.

Pon felt relieved and thanked Buddha for his continued help by saying a prayer; he then blessed Towhee and Kip’s bodies and, along with the young girl he walked outside. Pon lit some tissue and tossed it through the open window into Towhees bedroom. There was an instant whoosh! With a blinding white light and intense heat, and then, darkness, all that remained was a fine gold line around where two dead bodies were laid only moments ago, although there was now a large hole in the roof of the late Andrew Towhee’s bungalow. Pon and the little girl walked away into the hot dark night and caught a passing tuk-tuk.

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

***Angkor Wat** Stretching over some 400 square kilometres, including forested area, Angkor Archaeological Park contains the magnificent remains of several capitals of the Khmer Empire of the 9th to the 15th centuries, including the largest pre-industrial city in the world. The most famous are the Temple of Angkor Wat and, at Angkor Thom, the Bayon Temple with its countless sculptural decorations.

Angkor Archaeological Park was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1992. At the same time, it was also placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger due to looting, a declining water table, and unsustainable tourism. UNESCO has now set up a wide-ranging programme to safeguard this symbolic site and its surroundings.

Angkor itself has no accommodations and few facilities; the nearby town of Siem Reap, just 6 km. south, is the tourist hub for the area.

– Chapter Nine –

Cenat squeezed Vitchae’s hand,

“Are you okay old friend?”

Vitchae was elated and turned his head in Cenat’s direction,

“Yes, I feel fine.”

The Royal Bangkok hospital is a modern and luxurious medical facility. The rooms in the royal wings are the best in the country, which along with its high paying patients it also caters for royalty and high-ranking government officials. Although a relatively small hospital, it houses state of the art operating theatres and some of the countries, if not the worlds, top surgeons.

Nurses rushed in and out to check Vitchae’s vital signs every 30 minutes.

Wednesday 14th December 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 20 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, and 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, trying to imagine 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 with its plush upholstered interior, a large seat was raised higher than the others, where the King sat, there were two seats in the front for the personal guards to sit, and then four rows of three, which 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, and 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 king's escort guards quietly sniggered. Cenat and Taksin were talking, Vitchae listened, while he held 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'. Vitchae and Cenat felt strange, as they had not been to the temple for many years. The last time Vitchae was there was when he was the Prime Master and, he had not seen the temple since his sight failed. Although he still could not see, he still felt in awe by the atmosphere created by the holy temple, 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 had been spread out around the table. The King would ask a questions, and one of the experts would explain something, and point 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 Vitthae and Khun Cenat,” said the King.

Vitthae had grown up alongside the King, who was only six years, his junior. Vitthae remembered seeing him as a boy. He came to the temple with his father and watched the ceremony. Vitthae, himself only on his second cycle as a novice monk was 12 years old. He had seen the King ascend to the throne in his early 20's and had blessed and chanted with the King when he was made Prime Master 30 years ago. Apart from the last four years, they had developed together, although with 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. He was the ruler, the living Buddha, and they were his servants and finest warriors. The King himself had noticed Vitthae 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 Vitthae's sight failing year by year, and then four years ago, Somchay had taken up Vitthae role as prime master, so he presumed that the old monk had died.

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,” he replied, at which point the King ordered the six out of the room, they gathered up all the papers and photographs from the table, and 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, while 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 appeared to be like a shepherd wanting his lost sheep returned 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 then went on to explain that as he became older and approached 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 nowadays, the use of technology had outweighed the old ways and he was not about 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 Vitchae’s train of thought

over the last few days, he had mentioned to Cenat, that he knew the Tinju could, and probably should, be restructured.

“And we are no longer needed my old friend,” he said to Cenat. “Our ways have not changed in centuries, perhaps it had been a sign from the Lord Buddha that they moved on, and now his majesty, living Buddha had confirmed it, we must 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 left most of the decisions to them. They would take the ideas to the village. On the third day, the King 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. Vitchae 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. Vitchae 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 Vitchae, he then gave it to the woman in the group who looked at the ornament, and with eyebrows raised looked at the smiling King. She held onto the ornament, and 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 into 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. The King summoned them personally and on their arrival, shown to the stateroom, where the confused monks were waiting 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 lens 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 spoke in English with a strong Swiss accent.

“Schedule the 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 severe cataracts, and replace with new lenses. Bandages were applied overnight. The following morning doctor Tapakit cut the bandages that were wrapped around Vitchae’s eye’s, removed the gauze patches and stood back. Slowly Vitchae opened his eyes and focused around the room, Cenat was at his bedside, someone unfamiliar to him entered the room, which he ignored as he was engrossed in his new, crystal clear world, and he took hold of Cenat’s hand.

“I can see again old friend, I can see!”

Cenat laughed with joy. Vitchae looked around the room again and again.

“Ready for discharge,” instructed the Swiss doctor, and strode out of the room, on to his next patient, with the small Thai doctor rushing to keep up.

Vitchae, gazed at everything, then he focused on the man who had entered.

“Hello, Master monks,” said Taksin.

“Hello Taksin” replied Cenat.

Vitchae smiled and said

“It is very nice to finally see you Khun Taksin”

Taksin Wai-ed the monks and said.

“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 him up that morning, and now Pon was on his way to Thailand.

Pon had informed him that his 'duty' had gone to Pattaya. He was in pursuit and confident the holy relic would be returned in the next few days. My friend dropped him off and made sure he got on the 'aeroplane'. He has just phoned and confirmed Pon was 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, as he was confident the pilot could miss the sun again.

"Excuse me," said Cenat "What is an aeroplane?"

– Chapter Ten –

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

Pon had left Towhee's bungalow, he and the small girl had taken a tuk-tuk to Phon 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 to get there 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 and the girl arrived in Phnom Penh; she then caught a night bus back to her village. 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 and then slept 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 that 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 therefore have no problem in dealing 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, packed his belongings into his rucksack and had 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'd decided that he did not like these foreigners. *'These people are strange'* he thought, *they did not act with honour or principle, maybe they were all the same*, and he hoped that 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 intended to add a small bird and because the fighter had taken his unfinished work, he would add it 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 drove Pon to the airport, about a 20 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 small airport, and only a few aircraft took off or land there, Pon saw a plane land as they approached and he became a little scared.

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

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

They went into the airport and Taksin's friend took Pon straight through to check-in where a Cambodian customs officer waited to greet them. Taksin's friend gave Pon strict instructions that once he'd left the terminal, he should give the official one of

the envelopes, and the other envelope was to be given to a Thai official when he left Utapao

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

“Okay,” said the Cambodian, holding out his hand. Pon gave him the envelope written in Cambodian. The man hurriedly folded it 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 woman, who showed him to a seat at the rear of the plane. She could see Pon was anxious, so she reassured him by telling him that he had the safest seat on the plane.

“Aeroplanes never backed into mountains” she chuckled, This bit of light-hearted banter didn’t help, and Pon was terrified. She buckled him into the seat, and he stared out of the window, not daring to move. He’d sat on the plane alone for about 30 minutes and then a large bus pulled up and the other passengers started filing onto the plane. Still nervous, he stared out of his window as the jet engines started up. The plane started to taxi down the runway. *‘This wasn’t too bad,’* thought Pon, as the plane hurtled down the runway and then suddenly went 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, with Pon still clutching onto his armrest. The flight attendant 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 flight attendant came and opened the blind.

“Look,” she said, “we have landed.”

An Immigration official got onto the plane, he and Pon remained there until the other passengers had disembarked, and 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 to 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 marked 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 it looked easy, and he was right, but the road, which was only about an inch on the map, was in reality about 40kms. He decided to walk.

– Chapter Eleven –

“Seven days, that’s 168 hours, 10080 minutes.”

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

“168 hours...” 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.” said an anxious Stu.

The dancers came on stage and Stu shut up and watched. The first performer out, dressed in a sexy Tina Turner Basque and a large wig started to mime to, simply the best. She strutted about the stage like the real Tina, 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 attractive back up dancers, whipped off their bikini tops revealing their breasts, 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, and asked.

“Three more, lads?”

Nick had broken his arm in his tumble out of the window. He was taken to a hospital and x-rayed, which revealed a small crack in his left Ulna, the 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 returned home to the U.K and get 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 now forgiven Spock, who hadn't even realised that he had bumped the door into him, which resulted in him 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. However, he always did now.

Nick was happy, he had phoned Luanne while he was at the hospital, and she'd agreed to visit him. Stu and Spock had gone to the hospital and stayed with him throughout the day and forced to listen to him grumble and whinge.

His mood changed when he arrived back at the hotel after being discharged. Luanne was in the reception with Dao and Moo. Nicks whinging stopped and he started to hobble and pulled pathetic pained expressions. Luanne came over 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 present boyfriend when Nick had called her.

The poor man, a middle-aged Englishman, who had been saving up for months, often at times with difficulty, due to having to send Luanne money because her baby was sick. She told him that she needed 10,000 Baht a month, which he gladly sent the love of his life. When the Englishman arrived, Luanne had been waiting 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 anywhere, mainly because he had no money to go out with after paying Luanne. Luanne had told him that 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 professed her undying love for him and told him that she didn't care about his money. This was, of course, a load of old bollocks, but it was the Thai way and, 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 made 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 Nick pleaded with her and claimed he was on his death bed, and the doctors' gave him only days left to live and he was in desperate need of her. She weighed up her options. 10,000 Baht a month, or Nick. Nick was a Pattaya-wise foreigner, and knew that he'd been bullshitting her, she also knew he wouldn't give her any money.

However, she also knew this new man to be a stupid foreigner who would believe anything, so she could do as she pleased. She had known Nick for a long time, she liked the 'cheap Charlie,' and maybe he would pay her something this time. She walked back into the room to where the Englishman was laid on the bed.

"Is everything okay darling?" he enquired.

"No," she sobbed. "My mama call to me, my baby is very sick, I have to go home, I will call you later."

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 contacted him.

Now 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, and 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 would 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 felt uncomfortable. The bikes engines were hot and positioned in the wrong place. They stopped 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 sat was deserted and people seemed to be avoiding 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, she, and Dao moved away.

"What?" said Stu?

The two girls started talking amongst themselves about the English translation. There was no need, as a large liquefied brown blob landed on Stu's half-finished ice cream. The two lads looked up and saw three or four monkeys that scurried 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 the following day they would try the 'Million Year

Stone Park and Crocodile Farm’, which they would get to 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 had a stone that has been carbon dated to be over a million years old. There is a large pond that contained giant catfish and several tiger and bear enclosures. However, the main attractions are the crocodiles. There were thousands of beady eyes, peeping out from an enormous lake. The four watched a show, where a Thai man puts 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 that 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 order 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 now eating the cast.

Over the next few days Nick had started to feel better, so they all went to a small island, about a 40 minute ferry ride from Pattaya called, Koh Larn. They caught the ten o’clock ferry. Nick was happy as it only cost 20 Baht. They had a few beers on the chugging old ferry, and arrived at the Koh Larn jetty, forty-odd minutes later. There was no beach where 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 sun block, same factor as red lead. They frolicked on the beach and Stu dragged a giggling Dao into the sea.

"I'm going in for an aqua shag," he proudly boasted, followed by Spock and Moo who was soon up to her shoulders in the water, which had only covered Spock's waist.

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 slowly kissed her. They then heard rapid high-pitched, unfamiliar speech directly behind him. Dao looked over Stu's shoulder and pulled herself closer and stood still, with Stu still inside her. A black rubber ring floated by the couple, with three young children and one old Japanese woman, who happily chatted and just drifted along and looked 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 chuckled as the two lads enquired as to whether the floating Japanese enjoyed sex and travel.

"Fuck off."

The Japanese just smiled, nodded, and continued to float around and chatter for 10 minutes, by which time the lads ardour had worn off. They straightened themselves up, got out of the water grumbling, and went over to a laughing Nick and Luanne who had been watching the drama from their beach 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 that his arm

was sore and he went to bed with Luanne, leaving Stu, Dao, Spock, Moo and one-eyed-Steve to sit and talk. Steve suggested they went to watch the sunset at the small beach that was 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 then turned into a fiery blood red along the horizon as the sun slowly made its nightly descent as the darkness drifted down to meet it. There were a few midnight blue clouds 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 and left a dark starry sky. The odd light grey-blue patch remained, which made the sky appear like a dark, cobalt blue quilt. The lights from Pattaya lit up the horizon, as nature's spectacle took their breath away.

The unlit beach was in darkness, apart from the odd glow of a star making a late appearance and after about 10 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, 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 to their rooms for a Listerine gargle and sleep; the lads went to the restaurant. Steve and Non sat at the small jetty that overhung the ocean.

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

His restaurant and rooms was on a pier, directly opposite the jetty where the ferry stopped. They had five rooms, plus a large snooker hall. The pier was T-shaped, with the restaurant being at the top. It was a large open restaurant with just a roof supported by beams and surrounded by the sea. It had a small bar in the centre and 20 tables around it. There was also an extra-uncovered overhang at the front, approximately 20 meters long by five meters wide, there you could fish 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 had 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 surreal, like the scene in jaws when Hooper and Quint started comparing scars.

“Take a 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 explained the story behind it; they would then 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’d spent in the Royal Navy, when he had visited HMS Victory, Nelsons flagship, were a brass plaque was placed on the quarterdeck, 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 is also a walking calamity*.’ Nicks ears must have been burning.

One-eye-Steve and his wife Non, who were now quite shitfaced, ran out of scars to show, and looked to Stu and Spock to announce a winner. Stu mentioned that although Non had some impressive scars, the majority had come from the same place, a hole in the kitchen floor, which went straight into the ocean, or onto rocks when the tide was out. Non's exit from the restaurant was therefore not 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 being 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, Non smiled and shouted.

“Good morning,”

Their heads throbbed from the night before, but not as much as Steve's shins. When they approached him they noticed large scratches and dried blood. He had sealed his victory. He'd fallen down the hole in the kitchen floor while he made 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 a different island, as they didn't consider that this one didn't feel safe.

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 24 December. That way they didn't have to go 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 felt ecstatic as they were having a great time and would have wages at the end.

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 pay for them to spend the night with them. However, most of the new girls want a steady boyfriend and happy with the man only paying the bar fine. They know that if they are taken long time, especially by the new and unwise foreigners, that there is every chance that they will be taken care of for a long time. So money is rarely mentioned, they are, in the eyes and the customers, a girlfriend. This stage if a man takes them, it will usually end in marriage.

Now, with only one week left for Spock and Stu, the lads decided to have a 'boy's only' night out. They left the girls in Spock's room to watch T.V and compare notes and trophies. Dao now had a mobile phone courtesy of Stu and the already telephone-owning Moo, now 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, 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 to watch the Tina Turner ladyboy show for a laugh, they would go back early only juiced. (But the best laid plans of mice and men.) They watched the show and soon became spannered, making their way rapidly to shitfaced, and it was only eight o'clock.

The '*katoeys*' ladyboys were all elegantly dressed, it was difficult to tell them apart, from real women, especially when they danced, and mimed Tina Turner, Diana Ross, and Barbara

Streisand numbers. They finished their first set and background music started to play. 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, situated where the ladyboys now stood chatting, fixing their make-up and adjusting todger position.

Stu looked at Spock and announced

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

Spock agreed, and they decided to wet their pants instead. Nick saved this embarrassment and suggested that they could go outside. He pointed to an alleyway a short distance away at the side of the Dolphin hotel and Nick told them that they could have a slash against the side wall of the hotel.

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 Pattaya as he still knew corrupt policemen there. Even though he had left under a shadow, he knew forgiveness would come in the form of Baht notes. Therefore knew this was the place for any transactions. 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 were no searches at the borders and no detectors, unlike airports, which made it ideal for Miguel and his small ‘package’. He had chosen the hotel of one of his old acquaintances, ‘The Dolphin,’ for the meeting. Towhee knew that his friend paid the police to ignore the goings-on there. It was a favourite venue for many underhanded activities, mainly the street walking prostitutes. These girls could not work in the bars, as they had the reputation for stealing, or abusing customers and therefore blacklisted, had to walk the streets for customers.

Mohammed wanted a neutral place to meet, and this, Towhee had told him, was ideal. Towhee had planned for every contingency, except his premature death.

Dam and Miguel had become concerned. They had tried to call Towhee for two days, and his phone was now switched off. *‘Very unlike Andrew, something must have happened,’* they both

thought. They considered postponing, but they knew that Abdul was arriving on the 16th; they did not want to risk incurring Towhee's wrath if his deal didn't go through, and so they went ahead with the schedule. Miguel had booked one return flight to Cambodia for the 17th. He decided to change the venue for transfer of funds into to his bank account in Gibraltar, just in case something had happened to Towhee.

Everything was set. The inspection of the relic and transfer of funds would take place in their second floor room at the Dolphin. Miguel's extra task was already set up and planned. The murder and disposal, of this now surplus to requirements Thai, Dam. They booked Abdul in 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 appear hollow on x-ray. Dam and Miguel had the statue made on their arrival.

They had returned the hire car that 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 carried with him a large suitcase, '*much too large for a one-night stay*,' thought Dam.

They headed to Pattaya. Miguel and Abdul made small talk about Towhee and Mohammed, about how long each had worked for their respective employ. Dam drove, as he could not understand English, so therefore could not join in. They arrived at the Marriott Hotel and Abdul went to freshen up, while Dam and Miguel waited in the reception, which they thought to be a pleasant change from the seedy Dolphin.

The three then went to the Dolphin Hotel and up to the second floor, room 205. They sat down at a small table. The

hotel had a musty, urine odour and the rooms were dank. Dam pulled open a large window 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, and made an internet 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 started to get an odd feeling in the pit of his stomach. Abdul did not appear as if he was from a museum, he wore large gold bracelets, rings, and a genuine Rolex gold watch. Dam felt something was definitely not right. Miguel glanced at his watch, and patted the small bulge by his rib cage. Walther PPK handgun with silencer, his favourite gun.

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

“Hello,” said Mohammed

He and Abdul then had a conversation in Arabic, and then 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 and surrounded by fierce looking devil headed warriors, with armoured elephants in the background

The other photograph had been an enlarged segment of the first that showed only the box. Abdul compared this against the box, grunted and started to operate the machines and scraping small shavings off the box, which he placed on various pads and sensors.

“This will only take a moment,” he said.

Lights flashed, and noises emanated from the machines for several minutes and, when the device had completed its diagnostics, Abdul turned to the computer screen and announced to the smiling face of Mohammed.

“I will have to carry out a *Carbon 14 test on the contents in Saudi under better conditions, to be 100% certain. But with the age of the box’s metal, I am confident that it’s genuine.

Mohammed beamed and said

“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 were the first Tinju,’* he thought and a twinge of remorse cursed through his body.

Mohammed appeared to be focused on something off screen for several moments and then spoke to waiting three.

“Transfer complete,” he said.

Abdul passed the computer over to Miguel, who spent a few seconds typing in his bank account details. He pressed a key and let out a sigh of relief.

“\$1,000,000, I’m a rich little Spaniard, thanks to these stupid Arabs,” he spoke aloud in Cambodian, so the two Arabs wouldn’t understand, but Dam understood.

Dam shouted at Miguel in Cambodian.

“No! I won’t let you double-cross Andrew,”

Miguel shouted at Dam to shut his mouth, or he would not see Andrew again. A heated exchange then took place between the

two. Abdul nervously reached into his pocket for a handkerchief. Dam presumed Abdul had been going for a gun, and swiftly reached into his jacket, unsheathed his 'Glave', and in one smooth, flowing movement removed the top of Abduls skull. He then grabbed the holy box, as Miguel fired his PPK at him. The bullet entered Dams left shoulder and he launched the Glave at Miguel, which missed and stuck firmly into the wall behind the now determined Spaniard. Miguel aimed again. Dam, seeing only one way to escape, leapt out of the open window.

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

*Radiocarbon dating, or carbon dating ¹⁴C is a radiometric dating method that uses the naturally occurring radioisotope carbon-14 (¹⁴C) to determine the age of carbonaceous materials up to about 58,000 to 62,000 years. Raw, i.e. uncalibrated, radiocarbon ages are usually reported in radiocarbon years "Before Present" (BP), "Present" being defined as AD 1950. Such raw ages can be calibrated to give calendar dates.

– Chapter Thirteen –

The sound of three zips being opened, followed by the sound of three high stream jets of water hitting a wall and finally, three long satisfied ‘ahhs!’ signalled that Nick, Stu and Spock had made it to the alley at the side of the hotel, and relieving themselves of excess fluid, to make room for more beer.

A thud, groan, followed by another loud thud and then a yelp.

Stu, leant with one hand supporting himself against the wall, turned to face Spock and casually enquired

“Did somebody just fall on your head?”

Spock wiped his now sodden hand down his shorts and slurred

“Yes, matey, it would appear so,”

They both looked to where Nick had been standing moments earlier. They looked down upon a laid out Nick, and a small Thai man lying prostrate across him.

Spock glanced at his old friend Stu.

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

Spock and Stu rapidly finished with their squirts, and went to help the two fallen men. Spock picked up Dam, who was conscious, but a bit shaken and confused.

Stu went over to assist Nick. He noticed something shining on the floor, so he picked up the object, slipped it in his pocket and asked Nick if he was okay.

“No, I am not bloody okay,” said an indignant Nick, who spat a white object into his hand. Spock and Stu helped the two injured men to their feet. Nick had a large gash on the back of his head, were he had hit it against the floor.

Dam was groggy and mumbled in Thai. Spock and Stu couldn't understand the Thai, but noticed a large dark stain 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 into the nearest bar.

Miguel came rushing out of the hotel, as the four turned the corner, still cursing and with gun in hand. He stopped and stared at the group as he took aim, and then lowered his arm as they disappeared around the end of the alley.

The two injured men were sat down. The girls at the bar came over to help, although avoided the Thai man, after they had noticed blood coming from his shoulder. They guessed it was a drug related wound, either way they did not want any involvement and turned their attention to Nick.

Now in the light, Spock and Stu noticed that the dark stain on Dam's jacket was blood. They looked at one another, unsure of what to do. An anxious mamasan told them to get the injured men to hospital as soon as possible. She said that she would call the police and she informed them that Pattaya Bangkok Memorial Hospital was only a few Sois away. The girls tended to Nick, and eased his todger back into his sodden shorts and zipped up his flies, and dabbed at the urine that covered the front of his shorts with some tissues. Nick took a clean tissue from one girl and wrapped up his denture, which had been knocked out by Dam. He put the tissue wrapped package into his shirt pocket. He looked like a vampire with no front teeth. All that remained between his remaining canine teeth, where small metal rods that the crowns were stuck to.

To break the sombre mood, Spock removed his upper denture 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 be expensive 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 according to plan, his main fear wasn't that Dam would talk to the Police, he wasn't scared of them, he was however terrified of Dam. Miguel knew once Dam had regained his strength he would come to hunt him down and he knew this assassin easily could kill him, *'so I have to finish 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 run back down to the alley and into the Dolphin Hotel, and lie low until the dust settled. He had \$1,000,000, and knew that 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 flagged down a Baht bus, and gave instructions to the driver. Spock carried Dam into the bus and laid him on a bench. Stu helped Nick, who complained about feeling sick and dizzy.

“So do I,” thought Stu, “It's called being spannered.”

They climbed onto the bus. People had gathered around them, curious by the ongoing activity. Nobody noticed that from the alley, a large, brilliant white plume, shot 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, Stu went inside and returned 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 efficient and, while

Stu and Spock sat in the waiting room, the two injured men are taken behind some large swing doors and into a treatment area

Approximately 30 minutes later, a doctor came out. He introduced himself and asked what had happened. He spoke English and Spock and Stu had no problem understanding, but they couldn't be much help and told the doctor what they had seen. The doctor went on to explain that the Thai man had a bullet in his shoulder that would be removed when the emergency theatre team arrived. He then informed them that Nick had a nasty laceration, and a concussion. The doctor explained that they would both be admitted to hospital. They intended to suture and observe Nick, although he would probably be released the next day. The Thai would be treated for his gunshot wound and, as nobody knew who he was, turned over to police custody. He told Stu and Spock that they would have to pay for two private rooms, as the Thai didn't have 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 man 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. They left the hospital and caught a bike taxi back to the hotel.

The girls had spent the evening laughing and joking about conquests, foreigners, food and shopping. They became spannered on the whisky and wine coolers that the lads had left them.

Spock and Stu entered the room, which went from raucous laughter, to a guilty silence.

“Where’s Nick?” slurred Luanne.

Spock explained that a Thai man fell on his head, bounced off him and landed on Nick, who now had to stay in hospital overnight. There was a stunned silence, and then the three girls burst out laughing, joined in by Spock and Stu.

After the merriment had died down, Luanne announced that she had better go to check on Nick. She left the room still chuckling to herself.

While the others planned what to do next. Stu put his hand in his pocket, and pulled out the golden jewel encrusted box. They all stared at it for a moment and then Dao asked.

“What is it?”

Stu turned the box over and they all looked.

“I don’t know, there is a lid, 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 the age period, were rounded and not faceted or polished.

“Maybe there was a catch somewhere?” Spock said and started pushing the stones. He pressed 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 an over-full vacuum cleaner bag, a small cloud of dust escaped. The four gazed at the contents of the box.

“It’s a portable ashtray,” announced 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, before King Bumnalonkorn had made the golden box. Now with time and the sudden introduction of air from the outside world, the teeth degraded, leaving only small hard ash

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, 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.

The two lads laughed and the girls joined in, although not knowing what for. A thought had occurred to Stu. He took Nicks tissue wrapped dentures out of his shirt pocket and placed them in the box.

“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 and came up with a happy solution.

“Right,” said Stu, “so we are all agreed, we leave for Koh Samet Island first thing in the morning.”

“Too right,” said Spock. “I don’t want to get stuck at a hospital all day again listening to him moan. We can see him in a couple of days, which should give him time to get over it, and besides, we are on holiday and only have left, 164 hours, that’s less than 10,000 minutes 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 returned to the hospital after the earlier flurry of activity. Both Dam and Nick had been taken to their respective rooms. The operating theatre staff prepared for emergency surgery, and x-rays of both Dam's shoulder, and Nick's skull, had been taken and processed. 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.

Dam was drowsy from the effects of the narcotic Omnopon, and he felt in no pain. He heard voices outside his room, and a heated discussion between a doctor and a police officer. The police lost the argument and was told to wait until Dam was stable, before they would let him answer any questions, or turn him over to police custody. Dam heard the conversation, which 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 a bit-map E.C.G monitor, which showed his heart rhythm, which in his case had been a sinus rhythm usually associated with extremely fit athletes.

Dam sat up in 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 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.

Due to the narcotic drugs, Dam now felt in a euphoric state. He had thought a lot during the last hour or so, and now that he was alone once more, he thought about the happy times in *Salaburi* and of how his hopes and dreams had now been shattered. He thought about Andrew and Miguel, but mostly, his drowsy thoughts went back to Vitichae and the last conversation that he’d had with the Prime Master. He recalled how he’d pleaded with Vitichae to let him fulfil his destiny and become a warrior. He recollected the hurt that he’d felt on being rejected. But the worst pain of all came when the old monk, Vitichae, told him that Jinn, the boy he had always believed to be his brother, wasn’t, and for that, Dam could not forgive. The heartbreak washed over him again, which was spurred on by the face that now stared back at him from the bottom of his bed.

The figure was dressed in a Tinju monk’s robe with a sheathed sword held in his hand. Dam stared at Pon for several minutes and smiled.

“Have you come to send me on my last journey. . . . my brother” he said quietly.

Pon stared at Dam then moved closer into the light at the side of Dam’s bed. Pon had also 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 deeply in Pon, and he knew that 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 pre-med drugs bit deeper, he shook himself alert and spoke.

“I don’t know, brother,” and he briefly told Pon how he’d grabbed the box before he leapt out of the window. He said that maybe it was still in the alley.

Pon had been hiding in the alley and had seen Dam tumble from the window and, he was about to climb up and enter the room to search, when fate changed his course of action. He’d seen Stu and Spock aiding Dam and Nick and he had searched the alleyway after he’d dispatched Miguel, but there was no sign of the relic.

He then presumed that the foreigners must have it, either the ‘*Phra farang*’, foreign monk, Spock, or his small assistant, Stu.

Dam cut off his trail of thought and asked.

“Will you forgive me, my brother?”

Pon solemnly replied,

“You know I cannot. Only Lord Buddha can do that.”

To which a calm and composed Dam said.

“I am ready to atone for my sin against my family, brother.”

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

Pon removed the bandage and dressing from the silent Dam’s shoulder. Dam put his arm around Pons neck, as Pon moved closer.

“Pray for me my brother.” whispered Dam.

Pon remained silent as he thrust the Pitou into Dams open wound and directed the instrument towards his heart and pierced through his myocardial muscle. He felt a pop as the Pitou pierced the left Arterial chamber, and felt the pressure of Dams heart as the blood forced against the Pitou. He never engaged the blades. After a few seconds the pressure on the Pitou ceased, and Dam’s arm fell limp from Pons shoulder. He

removed the Pitou, and a trickle of blood oozed from the wound. He whispered to the lifeless body of Dam.

“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. Alarms and lights started to emanate from the monitors, to alert the emergency teams that a patient’s vital functions had stopped. Pon replaced the pads, 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.

Pon entered Nick’s room and saw Nick in bed, the air-conditioner was on full and Pon felt cold for the first time in his life. Nick’s sidelight was on, but he was asleep; his head was bandaged, which looked like a thick white turban. By the side of the bed a woman slept with her head resting on the mattress, he drew his sword and replaced his Pitou, and made his way to the foot of the bed. He noticed the medical charts were written in Thai. Pon picked up a chart and noted the address ‘Siam Sawasdee hotel’, Soi Buchouw. He replaced the chart and eased slowly out of the room.

Nobody paid any attention to the monk as he made his way out of the hospital. Monks’ usually visited the sick and dying, and there had been too much activity going on in Dam’s room to pay much heed to Pon. He stood outside and looked up at the sky. He thought as to what higher purpose had he been allowed to survive, and his duty to have been his own brother. Was this a test by his god? He would surely continue until his duty had been concluded and the holy relic returned. He hoped his brother’s journey to the afterlife would be swift. Pon prayed for guidance and set off for the Sawasdee hotel, in the wrong direction.

– Chapter Fifteen –

*S*alaburi was a frenzy of activity. People descended upon the village like ‘wolves on the foal’, and walked around with cameras, theodolites, clipboards and various types of electronic equipment. They measured and probed around the village and surrounding tropical forest.

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

It had been that 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 too.

It was mid afternoon when the large Sikorsky S92 from the Royal flight landed. As the large aircraft approached, the villagers gathered, in the hope of catching another glimpse of 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 unloaded electronic equipment from the chopper.

The two monks and Taksin approached the remaining monks and Wai-ed them. The monks noticed, as did the other villagers, that Vitthae had walked unaided from the helicopter, and towards the standing monks. He addressed each one individually, and looked directly at them. The villagers noticed

the look of surprise on the older monk's faces, and the look of horror on one young monk, who used to pull faces at the once blind master. A murmur sounded through the gathered villagers. Vitchae faced the crowd and gave a long respectful Wai.

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

"Vitchae can see."

"The King has cured Vitchae."

They all bowed their heads and were jubilant, although not surprised the King had given back Vitchae's sight, after all, he could make *rain, so curing blindness would be easy for the great King.

Vitchae, Cenat and Taksin spoke with the village elders and family heads and arranged to meet with them all the following morning, which would give the team of researcher's time to do a bit of work and prepare. Cenat asked the villagers to assist them with their preparation and it would be discussed more thoroughly 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 their guide.

With the team and Taksin busying themselves with their preparations. Vitchae and Cenat knew it was time for them to lay out the plans for the Tinju's 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. However, the assassination side of the training would cease.

The monks would not be chosen as a birthright, but positions in the order could now 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 young age, usually 12 years-old. They had to serve a few years as a monk, to learn Buddhism and the Buddhist way. A few stayed on, making it their lifetime calling. The best of these would be eligible for Tinju admittance.

Martial artists and the best Muay Thai fighters in the Kingdom would be brought in to train and support the monks, until the trainee monks were competent enough to become instructors. These were to be the new Tinju and it would be how the original Tinju had been created millennia before.

The current young Tinju monks would be re-united with their families. Vitchae knew the identity of the family's. These younger monks would be given the opportunity to stay with their family, or continue with the Tinju. It would be their family's choice.

The other elders remained silent while Vitchae outlined the plans and then he and Cenat sat in silent meditation and awaited the elder's comments.

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

"Immediately," announced Vitchae, "his majesty has put the word out amongst the other *Wat*'s, 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 Vitchae, "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 joy as some families were reunited with their sons. Families and friends from the village congregated in the meeting area at the side of the *Wat*, all brought food and drink. *‘Sato’ and ‘urban whisky’ went down well among the villagers and the newcomers.

The monks stayed inside the *Wat* to meditate and pray.

The bleary-eyed villagers gathered the next morning at the large village altar, on the large stone table were laid out plans, drawings, photographs and laptop computers with 3-D images on the screen. The woman geologist and her team had returned the previous evening and joined in the celebrations, but had left at first light.

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

The proposal was to make a roadway and 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, they were informed, would bring prosperity to the village, whose crafts, carvings, and jungle produce, could be sold to make money to improve their lifestyles, and bring them in line with the rest of the country. The villagers had been 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 would all be given ID cards and therefore find jobs and borrow money from banks, anywhere in Thailand. The King would personally provide four pick-up trucks, for the village in order to transport fruits and other 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 and looked at the images of what it could be like, on the simulations on the laptops and drawings.

Taksin then concluded by reading out a message from the King that ended with *‘My beloved people of Salaburi, the decision is yours to make.’*

Silence descended, followed by murmuring amongst the villagers, who were confused and apprehensive about any change to their lifestyle. However, 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?”

Slowly Vitthae thought and then replied,

“Our King has thought about this and decided that it will be good for us all” he paused and then announced “I agree with him, we must change in order to survive.”

The villagers became silent again, until one of them asked.

“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 held up the pictures that they had removed from the now torn and discarded brochures.

“I want one too,” said another villager

“Me too,” came the shout from individual villagers. Vitthae turned and looked at Taksin.

“I think that’s agreed then Khun Taksin.”

Taksin picked up a digital satellite transmitter and dialled, and on receiving a reply announced.

“Your majesty, the village has wholeheartedly agreed.”

The next few days brought men and equipment in droves, followed by the arrival of small surveying helicopters that mapped the area between the village and Pong-Nam-Rom. Everyone either helped with feeding the newcomers or carried 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, they meditated and cleaned 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 that he'd sent this brave warrior monk to kill his brother and recover the holy relic.

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

The geologist returned to the village the following afternoon and headed to Taksin. She looked excited about something. She and her assistants laid out machines in front of a thoughtful looking Taksin. She spoke and showed Taksin a screen, or graph, which he studied and nodded at the geologists. When the conversation was over, Taksin thanked the geologist, who looked fit to burst as she gathered up her equipment and headed back into the hills.

Taksin tried to find Vitchae and went into the *Wat*. Cenat informed him that Vitchae was in the village at the home of one of the monks' families, and when he mentioned whose home, Taksin respectfully delayed his news for now. He mentioned to Cenat that he had to depart for Bangkok that evening, and excitedly told Cenat with a large smile, "The village would become extremely 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 locate a suitable cloud high up in the atmosphere over an area that requires rain. The cloud is then permeated with 'seeding chemicals' and the base of the cloud is sprayed with liquid Nitrogen, 'Dry ice', which when mixed with the seeding chemicals produces precipitation and lowers the now rain filled cloud. As the cloud gets lower to the ground, it releases the rain. The same as a natural cloud.

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 three other patents in agricultural innovations. This is one reason why he has the title 'The Great' and one of the reasons why he is well loved and respected by his people.

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

***Sato** is a Thai moonshine made from rice, cloudy yellow in colour and tastes similar to 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.

– Chapter Sixteen –

Chantaburi is a town situated on the south end of the eastern seaboard of Thailand. It is the main coloured, Gemstone trading centre in the world. Dealing with both precious and semi precious stones. There are four stones classed as precious; Ruby, Sapphire, Emerald and diamond. These stones are classed precious, by their scale of hardness and density. Ruby Sapphire and Emerald register between 9 - 9.5 and diamond, being the hardest, registers at 10. Every other gemstone, such as Amethyst, Garnet, etc register below 9 and 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 South America.

Chantaburi and its neighbour Trat, used to have large deposits of Ruby and Blue sapphires. The mines, although almost mined out, left a legacy of a highly lucrative trading centre. Millions of dollars change hands every day in exchange for precious Rubies and multi-coloured sapphires that would be set in jewellery and worn by people all over the world. Chantaburi bustled with activity on trading days and boosted the Thai economy. Most Rubies now though, come from Africa or the nearby Burma and Sapphires from Sri Lanka. Chantaburi has the reputation for having some of the world's most skilful cutters of the stones, turning the drab, raw dull stones into beautifully faceted gems. The Thai ruby is one of the rarest and most sought after, as it is Pigeon blood red with just a tint of a violet. The Thai blue sapphires are 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 Rattray Sesilin, the geologist and mineralogist, with the group of specialists. She had done some laboratory tests on Vitchae's ornament and confirmed that it was a large unfaceted ruby. About 60carat in weight and 'inclusion' free, which made it very high quality.

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

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

She appeared thrilled when she told Taksin that she had never come across anything as exciting as this, and would continue in the area for several more days, until a complete and thorough report could be made to the King.

Taksin sat in his office at the Imperial Palace. The telephone hadn't stopped ringing since his return. 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 is on the line khun Taksin.”

Major General Chinawat was the chief of Police in Pattaya. The two exchanged morning greetings, 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 discovered, which had half the skull cut clean off, by a sharp double bladed instrument that had been found embedded in the wall. They had taken finger prints off the blade and the prints belonged to a young Thai man, about 25 years of age who had been taken to Pattaya Bangkok Memorial Hospital with a bullet wound. He went on to explain that the man had died in the night, rather suspiciously. He also mentioned that they had found a computer in the dead Arab’s hotel room, which had been receiving messages from another computer, and they were now trying to trace the person who it had been linked to. His officer’s had also retrieved several pictures, of what appeared to be the object that Taksin had been searching for.

“Have you any further leads?” Taksin enquired

“Sadly, no,” said the chief, “We appear to have hit a dead end. However, there was blood on a window, so we assume the Thai lad jumped out. We also received reports about three foreigners who accompanied him to hospital, we tried to interview one who was injured, but he seemed a little confused, and we do not know where the other two are. We went to their hotel, and the receptionist informed us that they had left with two girls early in the morning and 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 Dolphin’s receptionist told my officers that the Thai man had

checked in a few days ago, along with another foreign man, who they recognised as a friend of a Mr. Andrew Towhee, an unsavoury character, who had left Thailand some years ago, but they could find no trace of this other man anywhere. They did however; find a scorched area and a slight gold outline on the floor of the alley at the side of the hotel.”

Taksin thanked the police chief and advised him, at this stage just monitor the situation and continue investigating. He was confused and had many unanswered questions.

Who were these foreigners? Moreover, who was 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 that the sacred relic had not already left the country and hoped that the young warrior Pon, was safe and would contact them soon.

– Chapter Seventeen –

Spock, Stu, Dao and Moo were now on their way to Koh Samet. A small island, nature and marine reserve on the eastern seaboard. They hadn't booked anything; they had just caught the 09:30 bus to Rayong and hoped for the best. The lads ordered the girls to turn off their mobiles, and to 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

While on the bus the girls had been trying to teach Spock and Stu some Thai language, but without much success. Thais liked the foreigners to learn a little, but not too much, of their language. The lads weren't 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,

'Kah' polite ending for female.

They figured they now knew the essentials, all they needed to know, and besides their ladies spoke English, although not so good, but they could be understood. They surveyed the other

passengers, who were a mixture of foreign and Thai .Stu pointed to a bald Thai man wearing a T-shirt and jeans.

“Look Spock, it’s your Thai brother and he is as bald as a bell-end too.”

Spock chuckled.

“Yeah, he is the economy size.”

They arrived at the Rayong jetty and bought their ferry tickets and then went to one of the tour desks and booked two bungalow style rooms, at the ‘Malibu Beach resort’, which looked reasonable and was situated on the beach. They walked around the small market and bought some masks and snorkels. They embarked the small ferry 30 minutes later.

“Look Spock, your economy size brother has got on, and it looks like he has a sword tied to his rucksack, ready to chop off your useless head,” said Stu, chortling.

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 heard laughter coming from the giant white monk and his companions, which for some reason put him at ease.

They arrived on Samet and caught a Tuk-Tuk to the Malibu Beach resort, and they passed Pon along the way.

“Your brother looked lost Spock,” mentioned Stu. Then noticing Pon follow in the same direction continued, “No, it’s okay, he appears to be coming our way,”

They arrive 15 minutes later at the Malibu Beach resort, a large resort with 50 rooms, swimming pool, restaurant and a small mini mart right on the beachfront. They checked in,

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 happily munching on some dull yellow coloured fruit that gave off a pungent aroma.

“What’s that?” asked Spock

“*Durian,” explained Moo “You try, *alloy*, tasty.”

Spock pulled off a chunk out and sniffed it

“Smells like crap.” He took a large bite, then spat it out
“Tastes like crap too.”

The girls ranted about him wasting food. He picked up the chewed lump of Durian, washed the sand off with some bottled water and offered it back to the girls.

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, with many people on the beach and by the pool.

That evening they ate, showered and took a stroll along the beach. Malibu beach wasn’t large, but other beaches were easily accessible from there. It was a central location, and they found smaller beaches with small resorts and bars, owned by both Thais and Europeans. They stopped at ‘Inga’s bar,’ that had small bamboo sides and a thatched dried banana leaf roof. Inga, the owner, was from Norway, an amenable chap, who once he started speaking, never seemed to want to stop. They ordered some cocktails as Inga told them that they were the best on Samet.

“Why don’t you try the Long Island ice tea?” He said

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 because it had a cocktail umbrella, which meant low alcohol. She’d believed this, drank it down like water, and ordered

another. Inga had told them he'd had the bar several years and high season was good, which allowed him to survive throughout the low season. He said that he lived at the back of the restaurant, in a small bungalow, which, when the lads investigated on one of their voyages of toilet discovery, there was a shabby, run down shack. And when Stu enquired as to whether his bungalow was behind the dog's kennel, Inga looked indignant and went to speak with 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 around midnight, carrying a well wankered Dao. They put her to bed, Spock and Moo staggered to their room.

Koh Samet, like most Islands in Thailand, are jungle covered rocky outcrops or mountains. The larger islands have been developed to a stage where very little jungle remained, 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 hordes of foreign visitors and their money. The smaller islands remain 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.

In this small jungle terrain, overlooking Malibu Beach resort was where Pon had made himself a small shelter in order to observe his 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 fish didn't look the same as the ones 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 meditated and continued with his carving. His plan was to make a move that night, but when he saw the four returning to the resort, and one of the women appeared sick, 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 11am. They ate breakfast and went down to the beach; it was a hot and sunny day. Dao had a hangover and 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, because the previous night, while talking to Inga, they mentioned about sharks in the ocean. Inga had told them that there were sharks, mainly Leopard Sharks, but they were harmless to humans as they were only bottom feeders and fed on small crustaceans”

This had panicked the lads a little, as the words, Leopard and Shark in the same creature’s name, certainly did not sound harmless to them.

After spending the morning chilling out, the girls went to their room to watch television, leaving the two brave explorers, who had eventually plucked up the courage to go beyond their ankles. Spock and Stu entered the warm clear water, the sound of the *Jams* 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

seabed, 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 pointed out to each other different species, a large brightly coloured triggerfish swam past, and a large Crown of Thorn starfish caressed the hard coral, taking its lunch out of the living rock. They snorkelled along and didn't notice the crouched figure on the rocks, who watched their every move. The two lads loved every minute.

They had their attention focused on a cute-faced, small, box puffer fish, when suddenly there was a loud splash in the water close by.

Their first and only thought, 'Shark!' They popped their heads out of the water and swam in a panic toward the beach. They went a short distance and then stood up on the sand. They looked back at the rocks and noticed thrashing arms, legs and a body, which 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 too shallow, nobody swam and now he learned the hard way. He had slipped off the rocks and into the sea and thrashed about in panic, with his arms and legs slapping the water in an unsuccessful attempt to keep afloat. He swallowed some 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 imagined that he would soon be in Nirvana and was ready to meet his Buddha for guidance on the journey to beyond. He felt a tug on his T-shirt and became aware of being lifted to the surface. He broke the surface and started coughing and spluttering as water was expelled. He then got carried toward the shore.

Spock carried Pon to the beach and placed him on the sand, and whilst on all fours he 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 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 went by and Dao and Moo joined the lads on the beach. They had been snorkelling again, but now decided it was time to shower, change, eat, shag, and go out. They decided to leave the snorkelling gear in Stu’s room and, as they entered, a familiar face dressed in monks’ robes with a sword pointed at them, was now stood, with his back against the wall. Shocked, they moved forward and the monk cut through the air with his sword as a warning not to go any closer

“Where is the sacred relic?” Pon snarled, in Thai.

Dao and Moo couldn’t understand what he meant by relic, and became scared and confused. Stu was angry and confused. Spock became angry with somebody pointing a blade toward him.

Spock reacted and threw the masks and snorkels at Pon, who slashed the masks clean in half, but did not respond 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 tried to shake the effect of the blow off. He now dangled off the floor with an angry Spock staring at him. He became subdued and looked at the four.

Stu instructed Dao and Moo to ask him what he wanted and Spock released his choke-hold slightly, to allow the monk to reply. Pon tried to think of a way to reach his Glave. Moo then asked him what he wanted and he croakily replied.

Dao and Moo then understood.

“The little gold box belongs to him, and he wants it back,” said Dao.

Stu thought for a moment and said.

“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 real brother and now he was confused about these two white men. He realised that he had been driven by his lust for revenge in his quest to return of the holy relic to restore the honour of the Tinju, and he considered, *‘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, he glanced to his side and looked at the giant monk, these people didn’t appear the same as the other white men he’d already dispatched. They had saved his life and he owed them that. He quietly said.

“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, and had slipped off his path to enlightenment. He was 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 and lowered Pon to the ground. Pon 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 conflicted, the only release valve was laughter. Spock looked at the laughing monk and smiled and put his arm around Pon's shoulders and looked deep into the small monks' eyes, and said, "You my small friend are a nutcase."

Stu started to laugh, 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 knew what had been so amusing, it felt good and continued for several minutes.

Once the laughter had died down, Pon sat on the bed and briefly told his story via Dao and Moo. Although their English wasn't so good, the two lads got the gist and noticed that the two girls look sheepish, every time the contents of the box were 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.

Stu, Spock continued with their laughter and Pon, who didn't have a clue what they'd said, 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 his story. Stu and Spock told of their plan to spend two more nights on the island and then return to Pattaya. They assured Pon that the relic was safe and he was welcome to stay with them until they returned to Pattaya. Pon, although cautious, reluctantly agreed, he did not want 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 were 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 gotten quite a liking for this new liquid, by the fourth glass, he was wankered and fell fast asleep. Spock and Stu booked him into a room and carried him to his bedroom. It was only seven o'clock. The four went to Inga's, for another night on the Island. Pon woke up once during the night and rolled onto the floor and fell 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 presumed that he had been duped. He had been running around, swishing his sword and causing mayhem. The resort staff eventually subdued him and said that he had been put in a room by his friends, and he calmed down when they took him along to Stu's room. Stu brought Pon into his room, after Pon had blessed the staff and apologised. Stu didn't think he had slept that long but his watch read five o'clock, so he left Dao and Pon in the bedroom, while he showered and dressed. He wanted to do a bit more snorkelling, so he would get Spock up and grab a bite to eat first. He walked back into the bedroom. Pon and Dao were watching television. Dao showed Pon how to work the TV remote controller, and Pon flicked through the Thai channels.

"Come on," said Stu to Dao, who was still naked with just a sheet wrapped around her,

"We'll go to 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, got led, with his ear gripped firmly between the finger and thumb of an 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 the 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 lay 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, who 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 marvelled by 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. The lads had fun watching him perform this greeting especially at Inga’s, but they received a bollocking off 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 had been cooked, and finished 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 caught the two o'clock boat the following afternoon and headed back on the bus to Pattaya. Pon had turned on Towhee’s phone and called 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 had now been discharged from hospital and would be able to lead the police to the other two. Pon had realised they had been referring to Spock and Stu, so he told Taksin that he had everything under control and asked him to inform the Pattaya police to back off from the investigation. He informed Taksin that he would get the relic later that day and return with it to Bangkok the following morning. However, Taksin told him that he would travel to Pattaya first thing in the morning and escort him back. 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. Therefore, what they have never had, they never missed. Pon having spent time in the company of two attractive women 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’

***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. It is considered by most foreigners as the vilest of fruits, but it is a favourite amongst Thais who look forward to the Durian season, which occurs three times a year.

– Chapter Eighteen –

It was twilight when they arrived back at the Sawasdee hotel. The girls had switched on their mobile phones while on the bus and Dao called Luanne who told them that the police had been searching for them and Nick had been questioned over their disappearance. Pon overheard their conversation and smiled.

The girls then relayed the news to Spock and Stu, who looked a little bemused and worried, until Pon spoke to the girls and said, “*Mai me banbaa.*” No problem, as 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 of their holiday.

Nick and Luanne sat in the hotel lobby when the group arrived back Dao and Moo went over to Luanne.

Stu, Spock and Pon went over and sat down next to Nick to get his moaning out of the way. Nick had altered since they had first met him. Now he had a plaster cast on his arm, 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 that his teeth were somewhat safe. Nick continually moaned on about how much they 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 women. After he'd left the table,

Nick asked who he was, to which the Spock joked that he was a trained assassin and now their bodyguard.

Spock did not realise how right he was about the first part, until Nick mentioned that the Thai man that had been taken to hospital had subsequently died, which was why 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 had been in the alley when his brother jumped out of the window, he told me that his brother had attempted retrieve the holy relic from the two foreigners who had stolen it and 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 needed the ashtr...relic to restore order and in memory of his brother.”

Pon had told the girls only a small white lie.

The lads believed this and presumed that Dam had died from his bullet wound. They thought best not to dwell on it too much, and, as the police were no longer involved, it must be true.

Dao returned to the girl’s table and Pon spoke to her. She then came back over to the three boys and said

“Pon wants see the relic?”

Spock thought fast

“I have an idea,” he said.

They fetched Pon over to the table and told him that Spock, the great white monk, would bring down the relic. However, Pon replied that he would rather receive it in the room, for a private ceremony, and he would go to the toilet and change into his monk’s robes.

“Quick Spock,” said Stu.

They went in the lift to the third floor and Stu took out the box from his bedside drawer and sprung open the lid. Spock came from the lift with a plastic cup filled with some sand, taken from the ashtray outside the elevator. They placed some sand around the tissue paper that contained Nicks’ denture, shook out the excess into the sink and snapped shut the lid and 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 the original.

Approximately ten minutes later Pon, Dao and Moo came to the room. Pon dressed in his monks’ robes, with his sheathed sword on his red sash. He 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 and smirked as Spock bent down like the pope, with the golden box in his hand and a stupid smile. Stu took a few photographs of this to finish off his film, and to give him something to do in order to stop him burst out laughing.

Pons ceremony lasted about 15 minutes and when it was over, he took the holy box, carefully wrapped it in a silk cloth and placed it in his robe pouch. He then turned around to give a quick blessing to the girls, and smiled. He mentioned something to Dao, who scowled at him and spoke to Stu.

“He wants to go out now.”

Stu had booked a room for Pon on the same floor. Pon became a little concerned about the relics safety until Stu assured him that the girls would be staying in the room, so it would be well taken care of until they got back. Pon showered, then neatly and ceremoniously folded his robe and put his Glave on top for

protection. He 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 with fruit based alcoholic drinks and other provisions for the night.

Nick, Spock, Stu and Pon went into the hot sticky night air.

"First on the agenda," said Spock "We'll buy Pon some new clothes he has been wearing the same jeans and T-shirt for three days now. Then," he continued, "I think Soi 6 would be a good place to start, on our mission to get the mad monk laid."

It was a good night, the entertainment mainly being provided by a shy, Pon. Although the language barrier was a bit of a problem, they overcame this with gestures. Pon translated through the many lady muggers who, like before, had swarmed onto the lads. The Thai women 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, was enough to put the ladies off as they would not receive any money from him. That problem however, was soon overcome when Spock and Stu offered a rather buxom Thai woman, 1000Baht to take care of their friend and work colleague. Pon and the lady disappeared into a room above the bar, and returned several minutes later, with a glazed look over the face of Pon and a smiling lady who had just made the quickest 1000 Baht she had earned for a long time.

They took Pon for a 'soapy' at Sabailand and by the end of the night; he was 'one of the lads'. They had him drinking beer again although they'd informed him that Heineken beer, because the bottle was green, contained no alcohol, unlike the Singha on the island. He fell for this and quickly became spannered and working his way to shitfaced. The lads decided they'd had enough laughs for one night and returned home to the girls at one o'clock.

Embarrassed, Pon went along Stu's room and tried to act sober. He bowed to the girl's and took his robes back to his room, and slept 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 29 years, this little Tinju warrior had devoted his life unselfishly to his cause of wisdom and courage, on 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 enjoyed every minute.

The other three went to Stu's room. Nick took Luanne back to his room, as she was spannered, as were the other two girls. Stu had suggested a game of dominoes, but Dao spannered and feeling in a romantic mood, gave Stu a long lingering kiss and started to rub his todger over his shorts, and then whispered,

“Are you sure you want to play dominoes?” and nibbled his earlobe.

Spock and Moo were shoved out the door, which was closed 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.

***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 elevator.

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, and they 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 this routine is carried out daily.

– Chapter Nineteen –

A loud sawing noise emanated from Stu's room, followed by the sound of Dao's voice.

“Stop snoring, pig William”

Then silence. This had been going on for the last few hours. It started again, but stopped when there came a loud rap on the door. Grumbling, Stu got out of bed, put a towel around his waist, and opened the door. Two armed, uniformed soldiers stood in the doorway, Stu drowsily 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 sleepy Stu.

The smartly dressed man in the white uniform spoke English and requested

“May we come in please?”

Stu asked them to wait and closed the door. He went back inside the room, opened the curtains and windows, told Dao and then re-opened the door and invited them inside. The two guards remained outside, Taksin and Pon entered the room.

Pon, who followed behind Taksin, got a clip around his ear from Stu as he entered, which made him chuckle. Taksin Wai-ed Dao, who was sat up on the bed and a sheet covered her naked body. She tried to hold on to the sheet as she returned the Wai. Stu removed his clothes from the chairs in the room, and invited

them to sit. Taksin introduced himself, and told them that he was a representative of the King, Dao was in awe. Taksin went on to explain about the significance of the holy relic and express his gratitude for all their assistance in the recovery of the sacred item.

Pon asked Stu to go to get Spock. Stu left the three in the room, and walked past the guards who saluted him as he went to Spock's room. He rapped on Spock's door and a sleepy eyed Moo opened it. Spock still festered in bed. Stu told him about the events of the last few minutes. Spock slipped on his shorts, Moo wrapped a towel around herself, and they went along to Stu's room, the guards saluted 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 and, not understanding a word he was saying, the guards remained stone-faced, so Spock joined the others in the room. Taksin and Pon Wai-d the new arrivals 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 informed them that the relic would be taken to the Imperial Palace, and they could visit as his special guests. He said that he and Pon would now be going to Bangkok, and thanked them both again. He rose from his chair and Wai-ed the girls first, and then the lads, who again clumsily returned the gesture. Pon said something to Taksin, who Wai-ed the monk and left the room. He heard a small slapping sound, as Spock gave Pon a clip around the ear. However, Taksin never looked back, exited the room, and closed the door.

Pon faced the four and, through Dao and Moo translating thanked them for everything, he now considered Spock and Stu as his brothers, and the girls, his sisters, a great honour for the four.

Pon then reached into his cloth bag and brought out a small gold 'ornaments' which he handed to Dao.

"For you my sister," he announced.

Dao took the ornament and Wai-ed Pon He then brought out the blue ornament and gave it to Moo, who did the same. He removed his 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 had grown fond of 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 this time brought out the wad of dollars that he had shared with the small girl in Cambodia. He gave the wad to a startled Spock.

"He'd 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. He smiled and walked out of the door, leaving the four stunned by this cheeky little monk. Dao broke the silence by clipping both Stu and Spock around their ears, saying.

"Your fault, you teach monk no good."

They all stared at their gifts. Dao knew hers was gold and couldn't wait to show Luanne and brag about it. Moo looked at her intricately carved ruby, although unaware of its value. The lads stared at theirs, noting the skilled workmanship of the carving they both felt sad by 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 *Porkey pies*, lies, about gifts.

Although unbeknownst to Stu, in this instance, he was correct, it was a 67-carat un-faceted, flawless ruby and it was worth a fortune.

The four looked at the wad of dollars that Spock had now laid out on the bed.

“What should we do with this?” asked Spock.

Dao counted the 100-dollar bills, there was \$2600.

“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 are both '*jai dee*,' good heart,” said Moo and Dao.

Spock and Stu were now in the good books with the girls, and all four decided to go eat breakfast and then go to ‘Pattaya Park,’ a water theme park and recreation centre. Nick then came and banged 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, as 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 are safe.”

The two lads laughed and the two girls looked at each other with a worried expression on their faces and quickly changed the subject. “Is Luanne awake?” asked Moo “We want to show her something.”

– Chapter Twenty –

There was a tranquil feeling 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 down on the three figures knelt below.

After an hour of chanting and prayer, Pon left the other two and, with a small glass case in his hand, ascended the scaffold until he reached the head of the 50' statue. The monk slowly and reverently slotted the four rods on the base of the glass case into four newly drilled holes on the head, and slid the glass box into place. The monk then 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 that was next to the holy relic. The two treasures would remain together until the end of time.

Pon looked down at the two that remained below and he felt honoured, to be the one who would site this, the most holy of relics, into its final resting place.

The two figures looked up at Pon and the holy relic. A beam of sunlight shone through a small skylight in the temple and hit the new addition. The gemstones and gold box gave off a radiant glow. It threw light from all the colours of the spectrum around the top of the statue's head, which appeared as a 'halo' and left all in the room to imagine that Buddha himself was present at this holy ceremony.

Pon climbed down from the scaffold and joined Taksin and the great Thai King. They all 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, and then he would join Taksin and the King in the stateroom and brought up to date with the happenings within *Salaburi*, and more importantly the Tinju.

Pon washed and ate with the palace monks and when he'd finished, he made his way across the vast grounds of the Royal palace and shown into the stateroom by two guards.

He entered the stateroom, and met with Taksin, the King and Crown Prince Maja Vijiralongorn. He bowed at the party, and the King invited him to take a seat in a large armchair. On a table were laid out plans, pictures, and 3D images on computer screens.

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, even though he knew that to a Tinju, it was all part of his training, although Pon never mentioned the events of the previous night, although he smiled when he thought back to them.

The King and Taksin informed Pon of the work now 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, which would be the envy of the world. The town would still be self-sufficient with all this wealth. The King felt that only few outsiders would go into the village and there would be only minimal disruption to the surrounding jungle, as

they intended to use a new mining technique that the King had been interested in developing.

Taksin then told Pon about the plans for the new Tinju and informed him that all the elders had agreed. He also told him that, all of the surviving young monks had returned to the Tinju to carry on with their calling. New monks and instructors had already arrived and they were just waiting for their head instructor and new 'Prime Master'... Pon.

The King proposed that Pon should continue as a Tinju, but as the Prime Master. He also wanted him to be the royal bodyguard to his son the Crown Prince. That would mean he would travel around the world with the prince as an envoy and representative of Thailand and its monarchy

Pon would also be given a residence at the palace, befitting his new rank if he chose to accept.

"This invitation," continued the King "would also extend to your family."

Pon looked confused by the Kings last comment, but let it pass, as he had some plans of his own. He hoped that the King could offer him guidance and wisdom on his decision.

Pon thanked the King for his gracious proposal and told them about his ideas. The three listened to Pon as he relayed his thoughts, ideas and the reasons behind them. The room went silent, as the King thought about the information, and 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 Vitchae and the other elders before making his final decision. Pon rose, bowed at the party, left the room and returned to the monk's quarters. The King, the Crown prince and Taksin chatted 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 Vitchae, and inform

him that their warrior would return to the village first thing the next morning.

A white Bell jet Ranger helicopter waited on the palace helicopter pad the next morning, with its rotors idling as it waited for its passenger, who stood well away from the rotors, and ignoring the constant waving of the pilot for him to board. 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, his home and the airman's family.

The helicopter flew around Pong-Nam-Rom and the previous 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 would take the route that 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 gathered crowd. He was overwhelmed

and wai-ed and bowed to the people. He looked around; there was a small group who started to walk toward him. Pon noticed Vitichae had walked unaided towards him and looked directly at him

Is it possible? Pon thought, he walked forward and the party met about 20 yards from the helicopter. They all stopped, Pon recognised the tearful old woman 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-ed Pon and he returned the wai. The old woman could not contain her excitement any longer, and went and hugged Pon, her 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, even Pon. After a few moments of constant chatter and hugs and, still holding on to Pon, Vitichae spoke.

“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 Vitichae!” exclaimed Pon “has your sight returned?”

“Yes, Pon,” said a smiling Vitichae “The Kings’ miracle.”

‘That explained a lot,’ thought Pon, ‘after all he could make rain.’

The new family was led to the temple and left alone. It seemed the most appropriate place for a miracle. The family chatted, cried and prayed for a few hours and then Pon discussed his plans, he wanted to get their thoughts, before he talked to Vitichae, after all a family should make plans together.

Pon didn’t mention Dam. He thought best that the old woman should continue to think her brave young son perished in the jungle eight years ago; there was no point in muddying his memory as Dam had repented and atoned for his crime. Moreover, Banti had thought that she had lost both her sons,

with Jinn, but now her son had turned out to be the bravest of warriors of the Tinju, so Pon decided to let her enjoy this moment and every moment from now on.

Pon and his family left the temple after a few hours. Pon's father having to prize Banti off their new son and said

“Don't worry woman, he isn't going anywhere,”

Pon walked into the monk's quarters and into Vitichae's room. The old master was with Cenat and beckoned Pon to join them. Pon sat on the floor along with them and they prayed together and thanked Buddha for his protection and wisdom.

Vitichae outlined the plans for the village to Pon and then led him through to the arena where the new instructors put the new monks through their paces. They saw Pon, stopped what they were doing, faced him, and gave him a long respectful wai. They remained bowed until Pon returned the gesture and asked them to raise their heads. One of the young monks said.

“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'.

Pon was perplexed about his decision and he turned to Vitichae.

“Master,” he said, “I have something to discuss with you.”

“All in good time, Prime Master,” said Vitichae. “Let's look around the village and see what was happening.”

Vitichae, Pon and Cenat left the arena and the monks went back to their training.

Vitichae had a suspicion about 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 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.”

Vitchae had been 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 avoided the subject.

Eventually, when there were no more people to meet, Pon turned to Vitchae as they sat along with Cenat, 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 Vitchae looked at Cenat, who rose and suggested he should leave.

“No, master Cenat, please don’t leave, I would like your thoughts on this also” said 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 Vitchae and he put his hand on Pons shoulder and asked

“What troubles you?”

– Chapter Twenty-One –

That dreaded day had sprung upon them, a day that 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, but now referred to as the freezing cold, depressing, shit-hole, England.

Spock and Stu thought the time had gone far too quickly. A sentiment not shared by their new friend, Nick, who thought it couldn't have come soon enough as he was running out of pain free extremities and money, in his constant forking out for hospital bills. Their flight was due to leave 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, which gave them plenty of time to check in. They woke up early 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 would believe you. At the time Stu and Spock thought their friend's had been talking rubbish, but now weren't so sure. It certainly wasn't

normal to go out in England and have a great time, be surrounded by beautiful oriental woman who took the greatest of care, eat delicious food any time day or night, get drunk 24 hours a day and stay cheaply in a four star hotel. They had been used to going out, getting spannered, buying loud obnoxious drunken slappers drinks in loud obnoxious places, and then going back to their cold flats with a bag of cold food, alone and get no change from a £100. £20 of which would be spent on taxis. Before they had come to Thailand this was all that they knew and accepted this existence as normal. It was all they knew. In Pattaya they'd spent less than £50 a day and getting so much more.

“Mate,” said Stu, as he made his way into Spock’s 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 times she would trot upstairs to Stu’s flat with a mouthful of chocolate, Followed closely by Spock who accused 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 witnessed holding a drunken man by the throat and shaking him for kicking Chunky, who had been 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 to England, he would try the NHS and change for ceramic. He ate soup.

They ate breakfast and returned to the hotel to pay and get their belongings. Dao and Moo wanted to go to the airport to see the two lads off. Stu and Spock had given the girls 10,000 Baht each, the night before, to take care of them for a while. The grateful girls had given them their treat in return, and neither of the two lads had a seed left between them. The Listerine share price also took a tumble as sales declined

Stu and Spock stood at the reception and waited for their bill. The hotel manager came to the desk and Wai-ed the pair.

“You two, do not have to pay, that had already been taken care of.”

The two lads looked at each other; confused and then Spock said.

“Pon must have had something to do with this, the little shit.”

Stu agreed, and said

“I hope someday we run into the amusing little chap again”

They again signed Nicks’ plaster cast and Spock asked.

“Who was going to take care of you now?”

*‘Certainly not you two f*****g m*****er f*****r b*s**ds’* thought Nick

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 translated with a quake in their voices

“Courtesy of 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 had been 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 drove out of the courtyard, Stu asked the chauffeur 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 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. The car had only gone a short distance and Luanne went back inside. Nick stood and watched, as the car slowly made its way along the road. Nick wanted to make sure these two, who he was sure had jinxed him, were gone. He leant out into the road, one last wave he thought, and through grated teeth smiled, and thought, *‘Thank god, they’ve finally gone.’*

A passing Baht bus then hit him.

The side of the bus hit Nick hard on his right shoulder and spun him around like an ‘atomic slinky’ into the courtyard, he lands on his right shoulder, which thudded and he felt his bones snap on the hard stone floor.

Dao looked out of the car’s rear window and saw Nick being hit, the Baht bus didn’t stop, they never do, and it just sped up and drove away.

“A Baht bus hit Nick,” she said, the others looked back and saw nothing.

“Stupid women, speak English, what do you mean?” said Stu, and then followed a short sharp slap from Dao around his head.

The car drove out of Pattaya towards Bangkok. After ten minutes they pulled into a place in Banglamung town. A sign above the drive read ‘*Baan Jinjay*’ the car pulled up to some small buildings, which resembled a tatty resort. All four got out and went into an office. A large German priest was sat behind a desk, along with a Thai Christian nun in deep discussion. They went silent 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 inside the envelope and showed the nun, they both smiled and looked out of the window as the large car reversed. 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; however 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 same feeling she felt being with Spock. This 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 once they’d gone and we go back to working in the bar” explained Moo in Thai.

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.

The car came to a halt outside the doors of terminal One, 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 arranged 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, hopefully 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, they turned down the offer .

“I will wait for you,” said Dao and Stu assured her she would not be waiting long.

“And next time I will take you to England” 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 was 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 world.

Both Stu and Spock had lumps in their throats and felt like bursting into tears. They composed themselves and walked into the departure lounge. Their lives would never be the same.

Thais require a visa to enter countries 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. However, 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 need 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 jobs-worth.

– Chapter Twenty-Two –

A lone figure stood in the palace temple in front of the 50' foot gold statue, previously named 'The temple of the Emerald Buddha' and now known as the 'Temple of the Sacred Light'. Here stood someone else whose life had been changed over the past few weeks. Pon stared 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 that in a short matter of time, the afternoon sun would shine directly through the skylight and 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 treasures bounced sunlight off each other, and created it a holy bright aura.

The temple would re-open to the public the following day, after a ceremony by the palace monks, new and old Tinju, who were on their way to Bangkok. Vitchae would perform, and lead the ceremony. The Royal family would be in attendance and it would be an awesome spectacle. Pilgrims would flock from all over the Kingdom to pack out the temple. People from around the world and every walk of life 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 positions. His thoughts turned to the quick transformation in his life; he knew it would take time for him to adjust. His new family were already housed in large quarters in the palace grounds. He had discussed his ideas with Vitchae and Cenat. Although his lifelong 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 would accept the Kings offer and become 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 that he wasn't yet wise enough to undertake this role and had spent long hours in discussion with Vitthae, who told him that he understood and mentioned that the Prime Masters position would be kept available for him for when he decided the time for him to undertake the role was right.

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. The family were thrilled it was a dream for them. They had never left *Salaburi before*, let alone travelled in a helicopter.

Pon would travel to *Salaburi* when his palace commitments allowed, where he would train the new Tinju, and he would choose a worthy assistant, but he would do this as a 'warrior monk'. His palace duties and his new role and title. 'Defender of the Monarch.' Meant he would accompany the crown prince around the globe on state visits and be an ambassador for the Thai people, as well as the prince's bodyguard

Pon thought back to when he had recently told Vitthae, of the more private part of his journey and his decision not to take up the position of Prime Master. He expected Vitthae to be angry with him for breaking his vow of celibacy, but all Vitthae said was.

"What was it like?" And, "tell me more about foreigners," which brought a look of shock from 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 he hoped that 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 wearing 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 that displayed the royal heraldic crest and shiny golden buttons, again with the crest on them. His red sash had been embroidered with a golden border, sewn with traditional Thai emblems, which bordered both sides of the sash and at the base was clipped his sword.

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 that it was not the end of a friendship that had taught him the most valuable lesson of all .The most effective weapon that he had in his arsenal was, 'laughter'.

The sun had now hit the skylight. The light show undertook its spectral dance as the sun's rays bounced around and created the Buddha's halo. Pon stared as the lights gained in brilliance until the halo had completely surrounded the Statues head. He could imagine how the spectacle would amaze the throbbing masses who would witness it, and feel the same tingle of excitement that 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, for just a second thought that 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.

“The expensive ceramic false teeth, of Nicholas Godfrey from Brighton.

Pon turned around, walked towards the door of the temple and outside into the hot sticky Bangkok air.

HIS DUTY WAS CONCLUDED



– EPILOGUE –

Spring had at last arrived and released its icy grip from the fingers of a long, cold, English winter. On a mild spring morning, the birds sang in the trees. The lambs jumped and frolicked in the fields. Fish splashed around in the babbling brooks, and a euphoric feeling abounded in sunny old Blighty and it felt a good day to be alive. Everything was happy. People were happy. Animals were happy. The plants and trees were happy, and Nick was happy as he sat in the departure lounge of Gatwick airport.

He smirked as he thought, *'Bimen airways, Bangladesh airlines', never in a million years, and Gatwick airport, no chance it's too far for them.'* He took a long gulp from his pint of lager, while he recalled the events from his previous encounter, and remembered the pain from his arm, mouth, head, 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 inexpensive return flight with Bimen Airways. He would then go to Pattaya and, if they were not there, he would stay. However, if they were in Pattaya, he would head to the now re-developed Phuket. He had left instructions with his sister, that if they called she was to tell them that he had gone to London to work.

Nick felt pleased with himself and moved his stool closer to the small table, and took another gulp of his lager.

Nick passed away the time people watching as he waited for his flight to be announced. He watched the world go by as he enjoyed his refreshing pint. He took another swig from his quarter full pint.

He held his glass to his lips and suddenly felt an icy chill course through his body. He looked over the rim of his glass and saw two figures approach him. Fear gripped him like cold steel. He stood bolt upright, and hit his knees on the bottom of the small, but heavy, table, and instinctively fell forward and hit his head, and mouth, with full force on the edge of the table.

Stunned, he fell to the floor and rolled onto his back. His mouth and nose throbbed and he could taste his own blood. He spat out a lump of blood, mucous, and his new crowns. He groggily looked up in pained surprise at the ceiling of the departure lounge. Two heads popped into view and looked down on him.

“Mate, that looks painful,” said Spock.

“Just lay there and we will go to get you some help,” joined in Stu.

Just for the time being.

THE END

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