

16: The birth of Goldchild, son of Buakhli

[II/1]

Khun Phaen's powers became well-known. All over the city people were in awe of him as of a fierce lion.

While asleep in his bed at midnight, he started awake with the shakes. He had been sleeping alone for many days and felt randy thinking of his wife.

'Damn Khun Chang for separating us! He was intent on taking my darling away. He was my friend, but over this wife matter why was he so treacherous?

Not content with that, he misled the king that I'd climbed over the city wall. Now I'm facing a bad time because karma made the king not bother to check this information.

He got angry and found me guilty, so Laothong had to be detained in the palace, and I'm forbidden from attending court or entering the palace. On top of that, I'm condemned to patrol the forest.

The more I think about it, the more I'm losing my mind. Khun Chang, this lord of karma, can do all of this! If I can't get even and give him what he deserves, I'd rather die than go on living.

I'll go and kidnap Wanthong. If he comes after me, I'll kill him. The only thing I'm afraid of is that the king will send troops after me.

If they show no mercy, I'll be chopped down dead. How can I protect myself? On my own, if I make a mistake I'll probably be crushed to dust.¹

In the forest there'll be no one to rely on, only my spirits and **spirit-figures**,² and they're getting old and losing their powers. They probably can't put up as good a fight as I expect.

I'll forge a sword, buy a horse, and find a son.³ That will give me the expertise in knowledge to face my enemies. If I can find these

¹ *Phong khli*, literally the dust of a polo game

² *Hun phi. hun*=something deemed to have magic power molded into human shape, then enchanted so a spirit resides in it. Kept on the body as a protective device (Red 130-1).

³ *Kuman*, here meaning a spirit son. The spirits of stillborn babies are believed to be specially potent, perhaps because they contain all the energy of the un-lived life. The most common form of these infant-spirits is *luk krok*, a stillborn baby, small and not fully developed, dried and kept as powerful protective charm, nurtured or enchanted so it will love and hence protect its master (KP:141-2). For extra power, Khun Phaen wants this spirit to be his own son.

three things to my satisfaction, then I won't fear any rumpus.'

This thought made him boil with excitement. In the dim light just before dawn, he washed his face, looked out all his personal gear, and called in old Ta-Bua. [2]

'I'm going to the forest frontier on government duty. You're the senior person staying here in the house. I'm going alone and I don't know how long I'll be away.'

He put his kit in a sidebag, and thirty pieces of silver⁴ in a waist-sack. He stuck a kris enchanted by a teacher in his belt, and at dawn left for the upland forests.

In search of the things he needed, he sought out unusual places, passed through villages of Karen, Kha, Lawa, and Mon,⁵ and slept alongside the paths through the mountains.

Nai Det, 'Blackbones,' had established a big gang in a lair⁶ at Ban Tham.⁷ He was a leader of notorious skills, and had been given the title Meun Han, the valiant.

He looked fearsome. He was almost four cubits tall,⁸ with bulging eyes, a moustache which curved up at both ends, eyes rimmed red as if painted with vermilion, firm flesh,

and a chest of thick curly hair. He was as tough and fearless as they come. His whole body was lumpy with magic charms inserted under the skin.

He was invulnerable to guns and other weapons, and if he trod on spikes in the ground, they shattered. He had twenty good soldiers who were all invulnerable and could stand up to anybody.

⁴ The unit is not given, but is probably tamlung, making this equivalent to 120 baht (Red:134; KP: 137).

⁵ Karen is a general name for several related ethnic groups who live along the hills which separate Thailand from Burma. Kha is a homophone of a word for servant, and is a pejorative term applied to many non-Thai groups. Lawa is the name of a Mon-Khmer ethnic group, but the term is also used more generally to refer to non-Thai groups. Strung together like this, these four words become a catch-all term for the various non-Thai groups who live in the hills on the western edge of Siam.

⁶ , *song*, implies a settlement beyond the reach of government, usually in the forest. Such settlements may always have been common, but certainly became numerous in the period after the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767. Records from the early nineteenth century show the court dealing with such settlements in order to acquire forest goods for trade, and having to ignore that these settlements existed beyond the manpower laws of the time. As the lines below suggest, such settlements attracted people with various reasons to escape these and other laws.

⁷ 'Cave village,' on the southern bank of the Maeklong river, in Khao Yai tambon, Amphoe Tha Muang, about seven kms southeast of Kanchanaburi. Ban Tham is clearly marked on the early nineteenth-century maps recently found in the royal palace (RSM, 95, 102). Wat Ban Tham sits at the foot of a craggy spur of hills that straggles away from the Tenasserim range. The wat contains a shrine to Buakhli, whose image is painted on the foot of a stalactite, and a series of murals based on this chapter.

⁸ By current reckoning of a , *sok*, that would make him almost two meters tall.

The big village teemed with cattle, buffalo, elephants, horses, and servants. Houses were crowded together. The furniture was as good as any palace.⁹

There were throngs of young Lao and Thai girl servants, all just of age and good-looking. The halls for sitting were lined with soft mats, pillows, and carpets, with items of gold, silver, nak, and niello – everything.

With his wife, Nang Sijan, he had a daughter called Nang Buakhli¹⁰ who was just to maidenhood, about seventeen years old, and as beautiful as a palace lady.

Governors and local officials had sent people to make their pledges and ask for her hand, but her father had refused them all. She looked after the servants on his behalf, and oversaw people working in the fields every day.

If any stranger came to the village, the soldiers would lock him up, then after dusk take him into the forest, chop him down, bury him in the earth, and have done with it. [3]

People who had stolen elephants or fled from their masters could penetrate into the forbidden camp, but their masters dared not follow and had to find an intermediary to go and ransom them.

At dawn, the radiant Buakhli called the servants to go to the fields and orchards. Both male and female went along in a crowd to tend the vegetables and various fruit trees.

They took hoes to dig water channels. They built a shelter in the middle of the fields to sit and sleep comfortably during the heat of the day. Afterwards she put them back to work.

Khun Phaen had been walking through the forest for a long time, taking every path and visiting every village. Arriving at Muen Han's fields,

he found a yang tree cut down across the way, and posts driven in to make an embankment around the holding. Surprised to see the place teeming with workers, he hid and sneaked up.

He saw Buakhli in the shelter and took in her fair complexion, youthful looks, bright eyes, figure, and bearing.

His heart skipped a beat in sheer delight. He liked what he saw, felt he was falling love, and wanted to bed her.

On closer examination, he saw she fitted the requirements in the

⁹ The word used is *krom*, department. In late Ayutthaya, royal relatives were allotted retainers as *krom*, and given titles prefixed by *krom*.

¹⁰ Meaning open lotus.

manual¹¹ in every way. If they were to have her first child together, he would certainly get the son he wanted.

‘Whose daughter is she? How can I find out? She has lots of servants. I’ll have to go and make enquiries from them.’

He pushed through the undergrowth and went into the field. The Lao and Thai men and women sitting around in groups caught sight of a stranger and ran up to take a look at him.

Some clapped their hands and called out to him to go away. ‘Why do you come this way, **you skin ghost?** Our master’s daughter is over there by the bombax tree.¹² Without you knowing it, your head’ll be blown off your body.

‘We’re telling you to go out the other way, so why are you standing there, you blinking abomination? Our boss is as fierce as tiger, an awful man. You’re going to die for nothing.’ [4]

Khun Phaen stooped his body and acted scared. ‘I didn’t know who it was.

‘I’m a hill person from the forests. Beg pardon for walking straight in. If men are forbidden to enter, then she’s the daughter of the lord of what country?’

The Thai and Lao servants could tell that his accent and manners were not those of a forest dweller, and so shouted back, ‘If our master came and saw this, it wouldn’t do.

Where did you blunder in here from? Mistress Buakhli here is the daughter of Meun Han, and he’s not someone who trembles in fear of the district officials. Many passers-by have died already.

‘We’re telling you kindly to make merit for ourselves. If our master comes and sees you, it won’t turn out well. Get away from here right now. I’m being kind because you act like a gentleman.’

Khun Phaen had found out that her name was Buakhli, and she was the daughter of Muen Han who lived in this village and was famous for his skills.

‘I could ask these servants to act as the go-between. She probably wouldn’t escape my clutches and I’d get what I want. But I fear we wouldn’t really get together because her father would go crazy and tear us apart.

If we got into a fight it would be a big hoo-hah and mess up any idea of getting close to her and achieving what I’ve got in mind. I’ll have to make friends with the father,

¹¹ Manuals about the appearance of men and women such as *Tamra phrommachat* (Red: 671).

¹² , *ngiu*, bombax ceiba or variant. Tree 114/115/116.

act humble, and let him make use of me. After a bit, he'll get to like me a lot and probably give her to me as wife. If I keep on the right side of him, I think I can get what I want.'

With this in mind, he said goodbye, walked back into the forest, and cut across to Muen Han's house. He arrived at the sala in the lane outside the gate, and waited to talk to villagers going in there.

They watched him coming and asked him menacingly where he was going. Khun Phaen replied, 'My master worked me too hard so I ran away.'

I want to stay here and seek the lord's protection from now on.' The villagers said, 'If you're telling the truth, stay here in the sala and don't wander off. [5]

If you blunder off into the house compound, the soldiers will catch you and make your liver flow. We'll go to talk to people inside to inform Muen Han.'

They went into the compound and told the soldiers there was someone who had fled his master and wanted to seek the protection of the boss.

The soldiers asked, 'Is that right?' and rushed in to bow and say, 'A man who has fled his master is waiting outside. I told them not to let him in the gate.'

The head of the lair ordered the soldiers, 'Bring him to my house, the elegant one.' The soldiers grasped their spears, ran off, and returned dragging Khun Phaen by his arms.

He went up and prostrated¹³ on the terrace. Muen Han sat quietly examining his face. 'He's someone who's studied the texts, and is good at astrology,

not some vagabond with lowly lineage. His skin is unusually fine and clean. Maybe he lost his cattle, buffalo, and everything else playing beans,¹⁴ and so staggered up here.'

He asked menacingly, 'Whose slave or servant were you and where? What name do you go by? Where are you from? Why did you stumble into our village?'

Khun Phaen spun a line. 'My name is Kaeo from the six units.¹⁵ I was on government service at the frontier. It was tough and I was whacked so I ran away.

I've no father, no mother, no wife. I'm very poor, got nothing, so I've been wandering around the forest. But I fear they'll come after

¹³ *Mop long sok*, prostrating with arms from elbow to fingertips flat on the ground (Red 671).

¹⁴ *Len tua*, a game in which four beans (or tamarind seeds, or similar) are placed under a cup, then moved around, and the players bet on how many remain under the cup.

¹⁵ See note in ch. 8.

me, so I came here.

I want to live in your lair and shelter under your protection from now on. If your lordship is kind and merciful, I'll be your servant until death.'

While speaking he blew a Beguiler mantra onto Meun Han which distracted him and dispelled his doubts. The power of the mantra made him love Khun Phaen like his own son.

'For sure! You and I will live together. If you're loyal, I'll get you well-established here. If you have any crooked ideas, you'll be ground down into the dust of our district.' [6]

He arranged a house for Khun Phaen to stay, and gave him Granny Khai to look after his food. Khun Phaen acted very timid, bowing, prostrating, and crawling about on his elbows and knees every day.

Meun Han liked him and took him into his personal service. Khun Phaen moved together with his daughter, wife, servants, and maids. He kept his feelings under control, and gave no clue.

Buakhli took to calling Kaeo elder brother, and brought betel, pan, and tobacco for him. Meun Han's wife liked him too, and not once had the slightest inkling of what was hidden.

Meun Han, who was skilled in the ways of the forest, had an idea to go and hunt forest gaur.¹⁶ He summoned Phlai Kaeo. 'Will you come with me?'

Khun Phaen agreed, 'Yes sir, I'll go along.' Meun Han handed him a sidebag and a tooled lance¹⁷ to take into the forest. He put on a waistcoat and black trousers,

and tied a powder horn and box of fuses¹⁸ round his waist. He slung a suthan¹⁹ gun with a tooled barrel on his shoulder, took some rifled 3-baht bullets,²⁰ and went straight into the forest.

Khun Phaen followed behind carrying the lance. They passed through *rang*²¹ forest and bamboo forest. Seeing a red gaur hidden

¹⁶ *Bos gaurus*, a massive wild buffalo of dark grey or black colour, which weigh around a ton when fully grown.

¹⁷ The spear is *kram*, meaning a pattern has been worked into the blade by scoring the surface and then casting and forging silver or some other metal into the pattern. This was for beauty, but also because the process amounted to another stage of annealing for hardness (Sup: 89).

¹⁸ *tao chanuan*, a box to hold lengths of cord used to touch off powder (Sup: 89).

¹⁹ Possibly this came from pistol, pronounced in Thai as pissathan, then shortened to suthan, and used as a general term for a gun (Red:139; Sup:89).

²⁰ Three baht may be the weight, which would make it elephant shot (Red:139). *Phanlam* is the term for a longitudinal pattern which seems to mean rifling (Mat:620; Red:671).

²¹ *rang*, *shorea siamensis*.

among the trees, they crept up and hid at the foot of a *lamphaen* tree.²²

Meun Han poured powder **into the chamber and closed the cap.**²³ He raised the gun to his shoulder, poked it through a rattan bush, and took a steady aim. But he did not notice the gaur raise its head to eat.

He pulled the trigger, the **chamber** flashed, and the report echoed around. He missed the kaur which tossed its horns and immediately came towards them. Meun Han turned but fell down flat in the middle of the clearing.

The kaur charged. Khun Phaen leapt in and got a grip on the kaur by its horns and jaw. The kaur slammed into him and tossed its horns, but he was strong enough to hold on.

He dodged the horns, ducked under the beast's hooves, and grabbed its tail. The two thrashed and spun around like a windmill.

The kaur went to gore him, but he jumped out of the way in time. As the kaur raised its head, he darted in and got a grip on its neck.

As the kaur leapt, he delivered a mighty blow. The kaur's eyes rolled up and it collapsed to its knees. Meun Han plunged a lance into the side of its neck, and it fell to the ground mooing loudly. [7]

With the strength of rage, it leapt back up, spurting blood, but then shuddered and collapsed, thrashing and flailing around, splattering blood all over the ground, until it expired.

Meun Han pulled out the lance and said, 'If you hadn't been here to help, and hadn't leapt in and grabbed it so niftily, I'd have died in this forest.'

He was so angry he did not take the gaur meat. 'Leave it where it was speared. Let's go home.' He slung the gun on his shoulder and set off quickly, still shaking, through the thicket.

They arrived after a short time and went straight up the stairway into the house. Meun Han threw the gun down with a bang and said to his wife. 'I met bad fortune in the forest and nearly died.

We were stalking a gaur, but I shot and missed. It charged and would have gored my arse if Phaen hadn't come and confronted it. Between the two of us, we killed it.

If it'd been anyone else but Kaeo, I think I'd have had it. We owe him a lot. For sure, wife, we must be generous

and repay him. We'll give him our daughter, young Buakhli. They look just right for one another as husband and wife. Don't feel bad,

²² , tree of the sonneratia family.

²³ Literally, poured powder into the secret ear, and closed the fire face. Need proper gun terms.

wife, tell me how you feel about this.’

Sijan already loved Phlai Kaeo like her own eyes, so she was happy that her husband suggested something that accorded with her own wishes.

She replied. ‘It’s up to you to give her away, I don’t have any objection. If you think this is good, I’ll fall in with your wish. He’s not a bad guy.’

Having agreed, the couple summoned Kaeo and talked to him. ‘Are you going to be with me a long time, or do you have any thought of going home?’

‘I’m thinking of making you a son-in-law, giving our daughter Buakhli to you. Or maybe that’s not to your liking? Don’t be polite. Speak the truth.’

Phlai Kaeo replied eagerly, ‘I’m just a poor vagabond in trouble, and you’re thinking of setting me up as your son-in-law. [8]

If it pleases you, sir, I’ll stay here and not run off anywhere until my dying day. I’m an orphan, on my own. I want to entrust my life to you and have no thought of leaving.’

Meun Han and Sijan were happier than they could imagine. They called the servants to get a house ready by sweeping, laying mats,

setting out bowls, dishes, pots, spittoons, trays, tables, and pintos neatly all around the ruean, and finding a good bed, mosquito net, curtains, mattress, and pillows,

along with ornaments for the room including spittoon, bowl, dressing table, mirror, and comb. ‘There’s no wat²⁴ here for prayer chanting. We make spirit offerings in the old way.’

Sijan prepared lots of food including pork, crab, fish, and liquor. Everything was ready.

On the following day, a Thursday, they decorated the shrine, gave offerings to the spirits, scooped up the soul,²⁵ made blessings, and gave various instructions about looking after one another until death.

When the ceremonies were over, Kaeo went into the main ruean and was presented with cash, other property, and servants. Elders went in to make the bed.

²⁴ Later in the chapter, however, Khun Phaen goes a short distance to Wat Tai.

²⁵ *Thak khwan*, usually one part of a *khwan* ceremony. Someone uses a ladle to mime scooping the *khwan* into a bowl which is then covered with a cloth (Amuman, *Essays*, 237–8).

Phlai Kaeo prostrated with his hands together in a wai, and the parents stood behind giving instructions. When everything was finished they left just as the light of the sun disappeared.

Late in the night under a bright, resplendent moon, Sijan went to caress her daughter and give her advice.

‘My darling, you’re going to live with your husband. Look after yourself, and do as I instruct you. The time is right. Don’t worry. I’ll escort you over there.’

Buakhli was still totally flustered at the idea of having a husband. Her mother’s words made her frightened. ‘Oh mother and mistress of mine, have mercy.

Are you going to give me to this man just like that? I’m innocent. I’ve never had a partner. Please give me some breathing space. Postpone going over there for a bit.’ [9]

Sijan comforted her and said, ‘Sex with a husband is nothing to fear. Go along there, darling, and don’t worry.

When it comes to sex, there’s no teachers. You’ll know everything without need for lessons. In a trice you’ll be happy and all your worries gone. It was the same for your father and me.

When my mother escorted me over, as soon as he came close to me I was trembling with fright. But your father was good at pillow talk and put me at ease.²⁶ He kept on saying that nothing would happen.

He didn’t lie down. He didn’t go to sleep. He just kept on at me gently. I was easily persuaded and gave in to him. I was caught between fear and love, and got so tense that sweat was pouring down my face and back.

I “closed the door” and wouldn’t let him enter, but he insisted and pushed. I clenched my teeth, and held my breath, and in half-a-tick he’d slipped in through the door. Then I knew the power of it. That was it!

Afterwards we did it again and I had no problem. I was only worried he’d get up and leap about. Doing it in any position, I wasn’t afraid. It’s like a gambler playing the bean game. You get very excited.

The first time you play, you get bruised and have to speak out half

²⁶ From here until ‘take it all without complaint’ is Khru Jaeng’s version from Sujit: 198. Prince Damrong omitted this as too crude and substituted: ‘He kept on saying nice things to please me./ After listening for just a short time, I was in love. I relaxed and gave way to him. Sex has been like this forever, and that’s why so many children are born.’

way through, because you're new at it and your heart's pounding. After three days, you get more daring and dive in. Even speared real hard, you can take it all without complaint.

You don't have to study from teachers. It's easy to understand. Like threading a needle. When you're still learning to sew, you have to concentrate. When you know everything, you don't even think about it.

So go along, darling, and don't worry. Your husband should teach you sensitively. In a trice you'll know one another. The cock's crowing already, my sweet.'

She hustled her to bathe, comb her hair, powder herself, and get dressed. Once she was ready, Sijan walked ahead of her into the room.

Phlai Kaeo was lying still and forlorn waiting for Buakhli. He had not slept for over half the night. 'Why hasn't she come here yet?'

Hearing the creak of the door hinge, he turned over and looked up to see her mother escorting her in. He got down from the bed

and watched Sijan by the light of the lamp. She peered around the room, coughing to clear her throat,

then went over to the bed and sat down. Phlai Kaeo prostrated and wai-ed to pay his respects. Buakhli hid behind a curtain in confusion. Never having been with a man, she was totally shy.

Her mother spoke to Phlai. 'Look after one another until death. May you be free from illness. May you grow richer with every passing day. [10]

My daughter is still a very little kid. Be patient and take the trouble to teach her. May you both be happy forever. The cock is making a racket. I'm off.'

Phlai Kaeo paid his respects and received her blessing. Sijan got up to go. Buakhli clung onto her and would not let her leave. Sijan consoled her not to worry.

She escaped her clutches, left the room, and walked away. Buakhli, trembling with fear, was too late in thinking to follow her mother, and Phlai Kaeo prevented her.

Unable to escape, the lovely Buakhli hid behind a curtain and stared at the wall. Phlai Kaeo spoke soothingly. 'Why are you standing still with your face hidden?'

Here, let me tell you the truth. When I saw you out in the fields, I fell deeply in love, and that's why I came to serve your father without any fear.

Because of that, merit²⁷ induced him to bring us together as

²⁷ It's not clear if this means Han's merit, or Phaen's good deeds.

husband and wife. Please relax and chat. Don't be scared.' But just a touch made her tremble.

Buakhli's thoughts were racing. She was starting to shake with fright. She said nothing. The touch of a man made her act like a bird chick.

She turned her face away, her lips moving silently, looking ready to flee. Phlai Kaeo could see she was worked up, so said imploringly, 'Please. There's no need to be shy and upset.'

He clasped her at the same time as blowing a Beguiler breath onto her eyes. 'I love you as much as my own life. Why are you pulling a face and pushing me away?'

Then he lifted her in his arms onto the bed, and caressed her insistently. 'Please turn your face this way. Is it a waste of my effort to love you as much as my own heart?'

Buakhli responded to his pleading with a sidelong glance. She strained away from him, shook her head, and said with her face turned away, 'Why are you so insistent?'

I know that father gave me to you. I can't escape your clutches, can I? But please leave me alone for two or three nights. I've never had sex at all.' [11]

Phlai Kaeo replied, 'Why put it off? Lovemaking is nothing to be worried about, my darling. Even though you've never done it, in a moment you'll know all about it.'

With these words he blew the God-of-Love mantra which stirred excitement in her heart. He kissed her cheek, nuzzled her breasts, and encircled her. 'Don't struggle, you'll only bruise yourself.'

Touched by the love charm, Buakhli relaxed and her fear slipped away. Passion attacked her heart, but she was still shy. She turned her face away, glanced around the room, and kept silent.

Phlai Kaeo hugged her to him, but she pushed against him, scratched him, and tried to get away. Phlai Kaeo fended her off. Then both rolled around, overcome by passion.²⁸

A storm broke wondrously. A typhoon wind²⁹ stirred up crashing waves. The deep ocean seemed about to collapse under a hellish gale which slammed waves of mighty power

²⁸ From here to 'cheek-to-cheek every day' is another passage of Khru Jaeng which Prince Damrong omitted from the standard edition. Translation based on Sujit: 200-1.

²⁹ , salatan, a southwesterly wind at the end of the rainy season, but a word used more generally for strong storm winds. (Mat: 845]

against the Chinese junk, almost sending it to the bottom. The sloop cut across to shelter close to the shore. The Hainanese,³⁰ heeling over with gunwales listing, cut across to the peninsula and skirted along the shoreline.

Entering the estuary, it sailed straight towards the channel but hit an obstruction and could go no further. Because the channel was small and the water low, it was too tight for the junk which got stuck dangling on the back of a turtle.

A strong burst of wind slammed into the boat, lifting it off the obstruction. Half the boat entered the channel but then got stuck again. The captain, afraid the ship would break up, tried to shift it free.

But the boat was too big for the small canal, and remained stuck half way and frantic. When they hoisted the sails and made fast the cleats, a stern wind drove the whole boat in, just as the water came.

Rain fell. The wind dropped. The ship coasted smoothly over the water away from the port. Both finished, refreshed and elated. They tasted joy cheek-to-cheek every day.

Phlai Kaeo and Buakhli lived together in total harmony. He put himself in Meun Han's service for some time, until Buakhli was several months pregnant.

Everyone in the household – all the many soldiers, slaves, and servants – helped to make a living. But Phlai Kaeo sat around the house, acting like a clueless fellow who had never done anything.

Sijan and Meun Han took note of their son-in-law's attitude. 'He doesn't do any work at all. He's only good at doing nothing. He's taken no interest for many months.

I've made a careless mistake. I thought he was good, but he's hopeless, evil, not up to everyone else. He just buries himself dozing about at the house. Does he want me to warn him with an elbow in his chest or what?'

The pair talked together and then called Phlai Kaeo in. 'Right now do you expect us to feed you until death?

Can't you see the example set by the soldiers? They see something then they do it – go over there, steal it, run away, get into a fight, bring it back – cash, cloth, silk,

cattle, buffalos, elephants, and horses. They seize everything, ransom it, and share out the proceeds. Then we all have something to eat and nothing to worry about day after day.

³⁰ There seem to be a lot of boats around where you would have thought there would be just one. The 'Chinese junk' and the 'Hainanese' could be the same, but 'sloop' can hardly be, as this word *kampan* was used as a generic term for European-style ships.

You've been living in this house a long time, but you haven't brought in one fueang. Aren't you ashamed in front of the servants? I've had my eye on you for a while.' [12]

Phlai Kaeo replied boldly to Meun Han. 'I have in mind to devote myself to you until death, and I expect you to feed and protect me.

If I do anything good or bad, please tell me. If I don't listen to your words, if I'm pig-headed or devious or cheeky or lazy, then it's up to you to deal with him how you see fit.

But I won't steal elephants, seize people, rob houses, or any other banditry. Yet if there's any danger, I'll defend you so you won't be affected.'

Meun Han heard Phlai Kaeo out. 'Struth! You think you can get away with it like that? Just how much knowledge do you have?

The soldiers in my house can fight one man against ten. They're all invulnerable and can stand up to anything – slice them, stab them, or whatever and they won't budge.

For all your boasting, you're just a frail softie. Your manners are like a woman. I don't think you could fight anybody. Just a puff of wind would bowl you over.'

Khun Phaen listened to Meun Han's scorn, and his boasting about his fierce, invulnerable soldiers.

He smiled boldly and replied. 'Just being invulnerable and unbeatable is not enough in my opinion.

They can be strong and tough enough that a blade will not penetrate, but that doesn't count as good. If they were surrounded by enemies stabbing and slicing, then probably something would get through and they wouldn't escape death.

To have true knowledge means being able to withstand any type of weapon – so if completely surrounded by people firing guns, not even one tiny hair is wounded.'

Hearing Phlai Kaeo, Meun Han's eyes turned green. 'This guy is really, really boastful! In a moment we'll put him to the test.'

He leapt down the stairs in the middle of the house and summoned the soldiers and servants in a crowd. 'Bring along the guns you carry, every one of you. Come and shoot this fine fellow to test his formula!' [13]

In response to their master, some twenty soldiers ran up with their

guns. They loaded cartridges,³¹ raised the guns, and cocked the triggers.

Meun Han called Phlai Kaeo, 'Quick, quick! Why don't you come down from the house. Stop fooling around and hurry over here. If your knowledge is good, you've nothing to fear.'

If you can really withstand any weapon as you said, then the guns will shoot but you won't get hit by a single bullet. But if you're not as good as you claim, you'll die riddled like a honeycomb.'

Phlai Kaeo sat calmly. 'Are you really going to shoot, father? Please hold off for a little until an auspicious time, then test me out.'

Meun Han pointed angrily at his face and growled, 'How this arrogant fellow boasts! If you don't come down to try the shooting, I'll beat you to pulp and chase you out of the house.'

Phlai Kaeo had dared bait his patron until he was red in the face, but could now see that he had been given many warnings. He put on an act of slowly sliding down the stairs.

'Maybe I spoke out loud and said the wrong thing,³² but I don't want you to bash me and drive me out.' He quickly walked over. 'Don't get angry. I'll let you shoot.'

He composed himself, pronounced a formula, and meditated to still his mind and focus it in one direction without wavering. Then he raised his face to signal them to fire.

Meun Han called out, 'Right, soldiers!' They raised the guns and took aim, twenty guns pointing straight at him. Then they pulled the triggers and the guns flashed and roared.

Each fired, reloaded, and fired again. Smoke enveloped the scene. The sound echoed off the rocks and shook the whole village.

Men and women ran up to look, but could not see Phlai under the pall of smoke. Some thought this meant he was dead because of the unending sound of gunfire.

They kept on firing and reloading until the powder was exhausted. Phlai was still sitting there, erect and fearless. Every one of the bandits shook their heads in fear. [14]

The villagers said, 'This guy is really good.' 'They've been loading and firing like a downpour.' 'All the powder and shot are used up, and he's not hit, not one hair wounded.' 'He's *good!*'

Meun Han was terribly shaken to see Phlai Kaeo unscathed. 'This Kaeo is formidable! Before, I thought he just stumbled in here to hide and conceal his identity. He acted humble like a mad

³¹ , *pastan*, powder and bullet wrapped in paper. Must be an English term. Cartridge?

³² Not sure if this is right, and not sure if it's speech.

fellow. I'm good with knowledge, but this guy is better. That makes me feel small.

I don't think two fierce lions can live in one cave. The more I think about it, the more I feel angry, stuffed!' He walked quickly up the stairs to the rucan.

Phlai Kaeo was still focused unwaveringly. When the guns fell quiet, he opened his eyes and pretended to challenge them.

'Why are you standing still and not reloading? Aren't you going to shoot some more? Don't worry about my life. Please take aim again.'

The soldiers prostrated to Phlai Kaeo in fear. 'The powder and shot are finished, sir. Please forgive us for trying to shoot you. Have mercy and don't punish us in anger.'

Phlai Kaeo replied, 'The idea was not yours. My father-in-law ordered you. You had to shoot, so why should I get angry with you lot?'

With that he went up to change his clothes. His face was as black as torch soot, and his whole body was dirtied with gunpowder, but he was cool and unbothered.

The soldiers had fired over five hundred shots without piercing him or wounding a hair. All the soldiers shook their heads in fear. 'He's superb.' 'Super human.' 'Just the best.'

Phlai walked into the house, picked up clothes to change into, and scrubbed himself with water to wash away the powder. Buakhli came to help him.

She wrung out his clothes, led him into the room, and sat close beside him. Meun Han was so angry he could not take food, liquor or tobacco. [15]

He kept sitting up and lying down in total turmoil. He called Sijan to talk. 'Kaeo's knowledge is miraculous, cleverer than mine. Can two great tuskers live in the same forest? Over time I'll be completely crushed.'

The elephants, horses, people, wife, and child will all end up in his hands, the whole lot. Just this much makes him overbearing already. I think he has to die.'

Hearing this, Sijan's breast trembled and she lost her temper. 'He's venomous, powerful, and bad, not at all how we thought. He'll cause trouble.'

But if we make a wrong move, it'll be like trying to beat a snake to break its back. He'll be as vengeful as a soldier. If you make a move, make sure he dies. Please think it out carefully.'

Meun Han said, 'We won't kill him with weapons. His powers are special, and if we try to slice and stab him it'll be chaotic. We must

act friendly and then poison him.’

He ordered a female slave to go and call Buakhli. When she came, he caressed her and said, ‘Please, beloved daughter, I want to ask your true feelings.

Who do you really love more? Your father and mother who raised you from birth? Or your husband you just met when you were already grown? I want to know your inner thoughts.’

Buakhli spoke her feelings without any doubt. ‘The truth, with no pretending, is that I love my husband but not as much as my father.

How much can you love a husband? Just going down three stairs you can lose one. But parents are never separated from their child into ripe old age, no matter how bad the child might be.’

At these words, Meun Han and Sijan hugged and stroked her. He said, ‘It’s no waste to love you like my own life. If that’s sincere, I thank you.

Recently we got you married and built a house, but we made a mistake. We have to set you up again. Kaeo is penniless. I won’t have you living with him. [16]

We’ll set you up with a new husband and hand over to you property and everything. We’ll make sure it’s a gentleman of good lineage with piles of silver and gold to keep you happy.

You’re still beautiful in every way. Why not get a new husband? We’ll kill him with poison. How do you feel about this? Tell me.’

Buakhli listened to her father’s question. She still loved Phlai like her own eyes. There had been no falling out so far.

But now her father had mentioned piles of silver and gold she began to think a lot about possessions. Selfishness influenced her emotions. She was fated to die while pregnant, and so changed her mind.

‘My parents have buckets of money, and I don’t need to worry about childbirth because I still look young and fresh. Crowds of people will come to ask for my hand every day.’

Because she was fated to die, she wearied of her husband, and believed everything her father said. With these thoughts she replied to him, ‘Up to you, father. I don’t object.’

Once his daughter had agreed, Meun Han immediately concocted the poison, combining many ingredients according to a big manual from an old teacher.

‘Take bile of peacock, bile of rat, bile of cobra; grind into a

powder with rat poison;³³ add a squeeze of lime and bile of snake.’ He wrapped the potion in a betel leaf and gave it to his daughter then and there.

‘Prepare a meal of rice and curry. Add this potion to everything. Take care that it’s well hidden. Give it to him today. Don’t let me down.’

Buakhli took the packet of potion, covered it with a cloth, and took leave of her father. She crept into her room and hid it in a secret place, then returned to the kitchen.

She made softshell turtle³⁴ curry, lizard³⁵ salad, *ho mok*, snipe, and new rice in a lotus-petal bowl. She sprinkled the potion on everything.

All the servants kept mum. They arranged the meal on a tray then carried it over and set it down along with the spittoon and water jug. [17]

One of Phlai Kaeo’s spirits had seen her adding the potion, and immediately whispered to Phlai. ‘Your wife’s up to no good.’

She sprinkled powder over the rice and curry prepared for you. It’s poison for sure. Make sure you don’t eat it.’

Phlai Kaeo was perplexed. Since they had been together there had been no problem, yet she treacherously intended to kill him.

He wanted to make absolutely sure. He picked a little from each dish – pork curry, fish curry, noodles, fishcake – molded them together into one lump,

and threw it up onto the roof. A crow swooped down, swallowed it, flapped shakily, and died in an instant.

Any doubt disappeared. He believed the spirit. ‘It’s true. She dares to kill me, the little demon. We’ve been living together for almost a year with nothing wrong. This must be Meun Han’s idea.’

If the spirit hadn’t told me, I’d be dead. I must repay her what she deserves. I can no longer support her as my wife. I have to kill her.’

He composed himself and totally concealed any hint of his intention. He slyly said to Buakhli, ‘I’m not well. I’m aching all over and got a bad case of the shakes.’

Only two or three mouthfuls of the food went down, and now I

³³ , *san nu*, which usually means arsenic. As other commentators have noted, with this in the mix it’s not clear why all the other ingredients were needed.

³⁴ *Taphap nam*, probably *trionyx cartilagineus*, the common Siamese softshell turtle, Wirot Nutaphad, *The Turtles of Thailand*, Bangkok: Siamfarm, 1979, p. 166.

³⁵ *Yae*, ground lizard, *lioleps belliana*.

feel nauseous and can't eat any more. Take the food away and put it over there. I'll sleep it off until the queasiness goes.

I can't sit up because my head's spinning.' Buakhli noticed nothing unusual. She put covers on the dishes and carried the food tray away, then returned and sat massaging his back.

She had no suspicion about Phlai Kaeo. After sunset, Phlai kept up the pretence by fondling and caressing her. 'Please give the little child in your belly to me.'

Not knowing his intention, Buakhli replied innocently, 'Why do you ask this of me? Surely the child in my womb is your child?' [18]

Phlai Kaeo saw that she did not understand. He stroked her soothingly and spoke with cunning. 'True, it's our child together. But I want the **right**, so I'm asking you.

The newborn first child must belong to me, the father. I'm asking my darling not to oppose that. If you still love me with your whole heart, please give your permission with no objection.'

Buakhli laughed. 'Why are you pleading with me like this? It's our child together, so it will be your child, whatever I say.'

Phlai Kaeo replied, 'What a pity, you oppose my wishes. This is all I ask and you won't consent. It's a waste of effort loving you. You don't think.

I just want you to say you agree that I can have the **right of ownership**, to raise and cherish as a partner for life. If you can't bring yourself to do this, then let it go.'

Buakhli was fated to lose the life she had been given. She carelessly replied with too much sarcasm. 'I agree with what you want.

You won't give up asking so slit me open and take it out.' Khun Phaen said, 'Good. You give me the **right**.' Her permission fitted with what he had in mind.

He hugged, caressed, and excited her. Buakhli was not at all dismayed. He hugged her tightly, kissed, and caressed to make her feel at ease.

Late at night when everyone was sleeping quietly, he blew a formula to immobilize people, and then got up to get things ready.

He quickly put his saddlery, three candles, a flint, sacred thread, and yantra-cloths³⁶ in a sidebag.

He grabbed a tooled knife with a coral handle, and went straight to Buakhli. He parted the curtains and turned up the mosquito net.

³⁶ , *lek yan*, yantra numbers, but here probably meaning cloths. Yantra are mystic designs, incorporating powerful numbers, mantras, and images of sacred figures, often within a geometric pattern. Such designs are found in manuals, but only acquire their power when drawn by a teacher in a ritualized way. Cloths bearing such designs are believed to give various forms of protection. (Anuman, *Essays*, 307-11)

The lamp shed a dim light.

He stood up on the bed beside her and examined her sleeping form with a big sigh. 'I didn't know such a body could have no heart. That she could kill her husband is unthinkable.' [19]

He raised the knife to strike, but felt a pang in his heart, changed his mind, and relaxed his arm. Then he thought again about her giving him the poison. 'Don't hesitate! Take her life.'

He plunged the knife in her chest, piercing right through. Blood spurted out and flowed down to her back. She writhed and died. The red blood spread all around like the killing of a buffalo.

Then he cut her whole chest wide open, and severed the umbilical cord. He examined the baby and was happy to find it was a male as he wanted.

He lifted the infant out of her belly. 'Come, my Goldchild.³⁷ Go with your father.' He picked up his big sidebag and hung it round his neck. He wrapped the son in a cloth, and slung him on his shoulder.

Opening the door, he left the house and walked quickly through the forest to Wat Tai. He closed the door of the wihan, shot the bolt inside, and inserted the batten to shut it tight.

He put down the sidebag and took out his kit. He struck the flint and lit the candles. He stuck pieces of yellow cassia³⁸ wood in the ground to make a frame on which to lay the Goldchild.

He put a yantra-cloth with a Narayana³⁹ design of mighty power on his head, another with a Racha design on his lower body, another with a Narayana Chikok⁴⁰ design in-between, and one with a Nang Thorani⁴¹ design on the ground.

He drove *rak*⁴² into the ground as pillars of the four directions, attached more yantra-cloths as flags, and circled them with sacred thread. For the roof he put a cloth with the design of Indra's necklace.⁴³ Everything was prepared according to the manual in

³⁷ *Kuman thong*.

³⁸ *Chaiyaphruek*, cassia fistula, golden showers. The text next says *phraya-ya*, perhaps the prince of medicines (Red:146). All the woods used in this ceremony have power because of their Thai names: *chaiyaphruek*, victory; *rak*, loyalty; *marit*, success (samret); *kankbro*, armor; *kanphai*, warding off danger – all qualities to be instilled in the spirit (Sup:102).

³⁹ In Thai usage, this means Vishnu, not Shiva.

⁴⁰ *Chik ok*, perhaps Vishnu with a cloven chest.

⁴¹ The earth goddess.

⁴² , *rak*, name used for several common trees in the Anacardiaceae family such as *gluta usitata*, *gluta obovata*, and *semecarpus cochinchinensis*.

⁴³ *Sangwan ammarin*.

every detail.

He made a bundle of *marit*,⁴⁴ armorwood,⁴⁵ and *kanphai* vine⁴⁶ to light a fire on the ground below. He meditated to focus his mind, and sat grilling the Goldchild.

He heated the whole body so the fat dripped and sizzled, turning it over both front and back. Just as the dawn brightened and the golden sun rose, it was dry and crisp as he wanted.

Buakhli's servant, Granny Lao, was in the space on the ground below the big house when she saw the blood soaking through and spreading around. Shocked, she ran up to look.

She saw the curtains opened, the mosquito net raised, and Buakhli lying dead with her face already pallid amid a spreading pool of blood. She ran out screaming, [20]

banged on the door, and shouted loudly, 'Buakhli's dead, master! Her whole body's slashed to pieces. And Phlai is nowhere to be seen.'

Meun Han and Sijan jumped up with a start. They scrambled across in shock, and saw their dead daughter.

'He cut her open! There's pools of blood! Damn! Kaeo thinks he can outdo me.' He went out of the house and called the servants who all ran over.

'Kaeo has killed Buakhli and run off. Follow him, all of you.' They ran off wildly in all directions, both inside and outside the house,

carrying every kind of weapon – lances, sabres, pikes, spears, guns, knives, tridents, swords, kris, and poisoned arrows. They followed traces of blood

left here and there on the grass straight through the forest to Wat Tai. They found the door of the wihan bolted from the inside, so walked round to look through a chink.

By the flickering light, they saw Phlai Kaeo sitting in the wihan. They called out to one another to surround the place closely, and battered the door with a ram.

Khun Phaen recited a mantra unperturbed. The spirit rose up and chattered. Khun Phaen leapt up on his neck. 'Goldchild, help get

⁴⁴ , *marit*, *diospyros discolor/philippensis*, in the ebony family.

⁴⁵ , *kankrao*, *fagraea fragrans*, tembesu, Burma yellowheart. 'Armorwood' is our invention.

⁴⁶ , *kanphai*, *afgetkia mahidolae*. A vine with bunches of purple and white flowers, found in Kanchanaburi. The botanical name was given in honor of Somdet Ya, the king's mother. (RI:105)

me out of this spot.’

Goldchild leapt up nimbly and took him out through the chink. Because of the mighty power of their knowledge, Meun Han’s people did not see them pass over their heads.

They arrived outside the ubosot. ‘I should appear to Meun Han so he knows my power and expertise, then go to the house in Kanburi.’

He released the mantra so people could see them. He stood looking formidable with his right hand holding the kris with power, and his left leading the Goldchild spirit.

The sight of them created an uproar. People shouted at one another loudly. Then they charged towards them brandishing poison arrows, swords, staves, and clubs. [21]

Khun Phaen yelled the Power-of-Garuda mantra.⁴⁷ Their weapons slipped from their hands. They fell down and could not get back up. Meun Han strode up holding a pike and drove his people to attack.

Khun Phaen called out, ‘You men have done me no wrong. I want to kill Meun Han alone. Don’t insist on protecting your master or you’ll die with your heads cut off and scattered all over the place.’

The soldiers had witnessed his invulnerability and knew they could not fight him face-to-face. But they feared their boss too, so they put on an angry act by wildly dancing the vulture dance and the crow dance.⁴⁸

In a rage, Meun Han wagged his finger and said, ‘Hey, you lowlife! You don’t show me any gratitude. What a waste of effort to have supported you.

I fed you every morning and night, and even gave my beloved daughter to you, and you still commit this treachery. This time I won’t spare your life.’

Khun Phaen was pumped up with anger. He took out his kris and danced towards him whirling it. ‘You shout out these accusations, but I don’t hear you talking about you own crime.

It was you who were treacherous enough to conspire with your daughter to poison me out of envy. If both you and I had been straight with one another, you’d still be my father-in-law. But you had crooked thoughts so I killed your daughter.

Don’t cling on to the idea that you have power. I don’t intend to leave you alive. Heads will roll, and faces turn white, both master and men.’ He came closer, waving his kris around.

⁴⁷ This mantra is used often in the battle scenes. It is a stunning mantra, which immobilizes the enemy.

⁴⁸ Presumably war dances.

Meun Han stepped forward, raised his pike and struck. But Phlai was invulnerable⁴⁹ so it did not touch even the end of his body hair. Phlai drew out his knife with mantra and stabbed, but it only creased the skin.

Meun Han slashed. Phaen parried, stabbed back with his kris, and twirled away, evading him nimbly. They fought a long time with neither giving ground.

Meun Han's pike was longer than the kris. Khun Phaen had to dart in close then dodge away. When Meun Han lunged with the pike, Khun Phaen stabbed with the kris, but the blows missed every time.

Then Meun Han slashed, Phaen parried, and delivered a mighty blow with the kris. Meun Han staggered. Khun Phaen struck again and again until Meun Han fell flat on the ground. Phaen leapt to tread on his neck. 'Now, father-in-law!' [22]

Some cowardly soldiers feared death and scattered into the forests, throwing away their weapons. Others more daring rushed up to help their master, and were all destroyed.

Meun Han squirmed desperately. 'Those people shouldn't have come close.' Khun Phaen raised his kris to strike and said, 'Do you see my power or not, you blackguard?

Not one of your thrusts and lunges penetrated me. Stop believing *you* are invulnerable. I'll stick this kris in your mouth and cut out your tongue. Hey, if you're good, then squirm your way free.'

Meun Han squirmed as hard as he could, rolling his head until his back and shoulders were skinned. He did not want to die, so cried out, 'I submit. Spare my life.

It's the truth. I got angry because we couldn't shoot you. I had the idea of killing you with poison. That was wrong. Please forgive me.'

Seeing Meun Han in fear for his life, Khun Phaen spoke with menace. 'You deserve to be punished with death.

But if I think a bit, you have a good side. You fed and supported me in your house. You gave me rice, curry, chili, and salt. For that goodness, I won't execute you.

Also your good wife, Sijan, gave me cash and clothing. If I didn't think of these things, your life would be dust. This time your fate is not to die.

Stay here. I'm going home.' He called Goldchild and all his spirits which swarmed around his body. He nimbly leapt onto Goldchild's neck and instantly disappeared.

⁴⁹ *Khlaeo kblat*. Textor (Inventory) argues this term refers specifically to resistance to firearms, but here it clearly refers to a blade.

They went like a wisp of smoke, unseen by anyone, through the forest, over canals, lakes, and streams, to the house at Kanburi.

With the swiftness of special power, the distance of over a thousand⁵⁰ took one instant. He went up to the ruean as happy as if he had got a precious gem.

Meun Han had seen the extent of Phlai Kaeo's powers, including his martial skills. He was still trembling. [23]

'I'm a person of some power, but not a fraction of what he has. I can't face up to him. The servants who are still left will gossip.

Though I'm not dead, I'm ruined. Wherever the news reaches, I'll be shamed. All my effort to build a name for myself has gone to waste. It'll be known for a long time to come that I lost my dignity and my reputation.

The more I think about it, the more I feel stuffed.' He called out to the servants to return to the house. He had a coffin made for Buakhli in great haste, and sent his soldiers to bury it behind the wat.

Meun Han never stopped seething with resentment. His breast was overwhelmed with cares. He still excelled in many branches of knowledge, but was immersed in brooding frustration.

Khun Phaen's powers were now unequalled. As he had hoped, he now had his skilful son, Goldchild.

Next he prepared to forge a sword to subdue his enemies. He gave thought to finding the correct metals according to the great manual on weaponry.⁵¹

Metal from the peak of a relic chedi, the peak of a palace, and the peak of a gateway.⁵² The metal binding from the corpse of a woman who died an unnatural death while with child. The metal fastening from a used coffin.⁵³ The metal from a roof gable.⁵⁴ A diamond

⁵⁰ No unit given. The distance from Ban Tham to Cockfight Hill as the spirit flies is about 27 kms.

⁵¹ The metals listed below mostly imply some kind of special power or protective ability. Several come from the highest point of sacred places. Some have been through rituals which instill power. Some are associated with gates or fastenings that are difficult to undo, implying protection. The two mines mentioned are the sources of metal for making royal swords. 'Fluid metal' is used as a form of amulet for protection.

⁵² See the Wiset Chaisi gate of the Bangkok Grand Palace as a possible example of a peaked gateway (Red:147). These three metals would obviously be very rare and difficult to come by. In addition, they have special power as coming from the highest point of buildings with sacred power.

⁵³ These two are special terms for fastenings used in crematory rites, with the implication that they will have gone through Buddhist ceremonies and gained additional power to prevent evil spirits escaping from the coffin (Suphon:78; Red:147-8).

⁵⁴ *Panlom*, the metal to fix the peak of a *jua*, the triangular gable end (Red:148).

bolt.⁵⁵

A bronze lance. A copper kris. A broken royal sword. A carved metal elephant goad. A door bolt. A mushroom nail.⁵⁶ **Five-colored special metal.** Household metal.⁵⁷ All genuine articles.

Fluid metal.⁵⁸ Metal cast at the Phrasaeng mine.⁵⁹ Metal and iron ore from Kamphaeng⁶⁰ and Namphi.⁶¹ Gold. Bronze. Nak from Aceh.⁶² Genuine silver. Forest copper.⁶³

All were collected and combined into an ingot. This was heated red-hot, beaten, dipped in a solution, left for three days, then beaten again. It grew smaller but still looked fine according to the manual.

Totally it was beaten seven times. Then at an auspicious time on Saturday the 15th of the waxing moon, he cut the wood to make an eye-level shrine, and arranged various offerings –

pairs of golden candles, heads of pig, duck, and chicken, and a bai. The bellows, anvil, and some of the charcoal used were brought in for the ceremony. [24]

The metalsmith's skills were known throughout the city. He looked handsome in white lower and upper cloths. He made a circle of sacred thread, chanted mantra, and waited to find an auspicious time.

Then at midday, at a time of victory, of the king, and of the lion, Khun Phaen worked the bellows to heat the metal bright red. The head smith beat it to shape the tapered end,

straight, one cubit and one fist long,⁶⁴ and three-and-a-half fingers wide in the middle.⁶⁵ The haft had the face of a cock. To temper, it was heated and doused three times, then filed until suddenly the blade was smooth and glossy,

⁵⁵ A bolt with the end filed round so it cannot be undone.

⁵⁶ *Tabu bet*, a large-headed nail, often used on doorways.

⁵⁷ Possibly meaning knives and other household implements.

⁵⁸ เหล็กไหล, *lek lai*, a naturally occurring metal-like compound, which becomes malleable under a little heat (e.g., a candle), and is believed to convey invulnerability to piercing (by making blades bend). (Textor:63).

⁵⁹ A famous mine in Uttaradit from where iron was taken to make the king's swords.

⁶⁰ Kamphaeng Phet. Probably included because of the meaning of the word, 'wall.'

⁶¹ A twin mine of Phrasaseng in Uttaradit.

⁶² A trading partner with Ayutthaya since at least the 16th century, a source of silver and possibly of other metals.

⁶³ *Dong*, forest, her possibly means the Dongphayayen hills on the border between the Chaophraya plain and Isan, where there are many deposits.

⁶⁴ , perhaps 50 centimeters plus 20 centimeters.

⁶⁵ Perhaps 14 centimeters.

with no cat's hair scratch. It looked razor sharp. Catching the sunlight, it flashed green like an emerald beetle's wings.⁶⁶

The handle, made with cassia wood, carved with the yantra of the Buddhist wheel of the law, was fitted over the metal stock. The hair of a fierce spirit was put in the handle, then sap poured in to seal it.

He picked up the finished sword and waved it so it flashed. The sky darkened and swirled. Great powers clashed in ear-splitting sounds. Rain fell. Thunder rumbled,

then burst in echoing bolts of lightning. Khun Phaen listened with his heart surging. Thunder like a gunshot was a good sign. He named the sword Skystorm, the mighty.

He placed it on the center of the shrine and intoned a prayer. The sword showed its power by jiggling about. Seeing this, he was pleased he had got what he wanted.

Medicinal *rangap*⁶⁷ wood was used to make the sheath. Powder was mixed to make lacquer to give a shiny surface. The top and bottom were decorated with one baht weight of gold from Bang Taphan.⁶⁸

Khun Phaen poured out fifteen pieces of silver to give to the head smith, saying 'Your craft is supreme, beyond estimation. I reward you immediately.'

Catching sight of a fine *rang* tree three spans wide, he slashed it to the ground, hardly feeling a thing at his shoulder, like cutting a banana flower. He promptly returned home.

He now had a sword made according to the manual and thus as mighty as the weapons of the gods. Arriving home, he placed the sword on the place of worship, and began thinking about looking for a special horse. [25]

He put five chang of silver in a waist sack and set off. Each day he could not find one he liked so moved on, ranging all over the country through Ratchaburi, Suphanburi, and Phetchaburi.

Luang Songphon and Phan Phan⁶⁹ went to Tenasserim⁷⁰ on the

⁶⁶ *Malaeng thap*, wood boring beetle, *sternocera aquisignata*. Used a lot as a metaphor because of its luminous green wings, and hence here renamed 'emerald beetle'.

⁶⁷ *Barleria siamensis* or *breynea glauca*, a *phyllanthus* whose leaves are used to treat fever. Appears here because of the other meaning of the word, 'suppress.'

⁶⁸ A mine in Prachuap Khirikhan, discovered in the early nineteenth century.

⁶⁹ Luang Songphon Ratchasamuha, head of the right division of the royal horses (*asawarat khwa*), sakdina 2400, already appeared above in chapter 2. Phan Songphonphan is a *palat* of that department (though Phan is spelt differently, in the text, in the law) (KTSD, I, 256).

⁷⁰ Tenasserim/Tanaosri and Mergui/Marit are two closely related port towns on the upper western coast of the peninsula. For a long time, Ayutthaya controlled these ports, and the portage route over the peninsula, and thus was able to act as an entrepor between the trade of the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea.

king's business. Along with thirty-four phrai who had followed along, they stayed in Mergui for half a year

because Luang Siworakhan⁷¹ had gone to the western lands⁷² to buy horses and not yet returned. He had to wait for the season of the wind for the ship to return from the western lands.

Luang Si brought back a total of sixty-five horses, both Thai and foreign. A bay from Mergui joined them, and was said to have mated with a water horse⁷³

and had a foal called Color-of-Mist, born on Saturday the 9th of the waxing moon. He had a formidable presence and black eyes. He saw the royal horses crossing the water and tagged along.

At Singkhon,⁷⁴ they stopped to rest and released the horses to crop the grass. Officials from Kui and Pran assisted their journey. They passed Cha-am and reached the landing at Phetchaburi.

They were feeding at Sala Ban Taeng Ngae⁷⁵ by the brick staircase next to the holy hill,⁷⁶ when Color-of-Mist tried out his power by biting one of the foreign horses.

Luang Songphon angrily had his men chase this devilish horse away. 'He's mischievous, abnormal.' But wherever he was chased away, he always came back.

Color-of-Mist would come to find his mother, and had to be hustled away again. As soon as they sat down, he would come straight back. After running around in circles, the whole team was fed up with him.

Khun Phaen saw Color-of-Mist acting boisterously and knew he had found what he wanted.

He was spry and nimble. His features matched the manual

⁷¹ The name ending in -khan suggests a *khaek*, probably a Muslim from the subcontinent, possibly an official in the right division of the port department (which looked after westward trade) (Red: 151).

⁷² *Muang thet*, a general term for westward countries from Arabia to the Indian subcontinent. Here it could mean India, but more likely Persia which had been a favored source of horses since the mid Ayutthaya era.

⁷³ The term nowadays is used for seahorse, but possibly at this time there was a mistaken idea there was an aquatic variant of the horse. 'Saying the father of Color of Mist was a water horse is not so strange because the Thai who started telling the *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* story seem to have had little knowledge of zoology and still believed there were both land horses and water horses, and that they could mate together.' (Kukrit: 154)

⁷⁴ A pass over the Tenasserim range, one of the major portage routes running from Tenasserim/Marit to just south of Prachuap Khirikhan.

⁷⁵ In the text, this place is spelt _____, meaning 'gourd crying,' which could refer to some incident. The old sala still existed when Khun Wichitmatra was writing in the 1950s, and has now been restored, i.e. replaced. However, the name on the restored version is spelt _____, meaning 'decorated corner.'

⁷⁶ Wat Bandai-it (brick staircase) is sited on a hill on the outskirts of Phetchaburi, about 1.5 kms west of the Phetchaburi River.

completely, as if he were a gift from Indra. Khun Phaen promptly went to find Luang Songphon.

‘Is this colt Color-of-Mist yours? Do you want to sell? If you would be so kind, I’d like to buy him.’ [26]

Luang Songphon informed him, ‘That horse, Color-of-Mist, over there? He’s not one of the king’s horses.

He’s a foal of a Mergui horse and came from Mergui with his mother. His appearance and bearing are good, but he’s mischievous to the point of being a pain-in-the-ass.

When we were off guard, he bit one of the king’s horses. Big concern. If you buy him, we’ll drop the price. Take him for 15 tamleung.’

Khun Phaen had what he wanted. He counted out the money immediately, then walked towards Color-of-Mist.

He enchanted some grass with the Great Beguiler formula, then approached Color-of-Mist and said, ‘If you will come with me, move closer.’ He proffered the grass

which Color-of-Mist took, chewed, and swallowed. He became frisky, high-spirited, and loyally attached to Khun Phaen. He followed along behind him.

Khun Phaen stroked his back, and put on a saddle, bridle, and pretty tailpiece,⁷⁷ all brand new with gold borders.

He put his foot in the stirrup, and swung himself up. The horse reared up. **With a fast gallop and a light load**, they set off, with the mass of servants following behind.

They traveled through the forest for three days. As the sun disappeared behind the hills, they reached the old house at Cockfight Hill. He ordered the servants to make a stable for the horse.

Khun Phaen went into the house and told his mother everything. ‘I’ve got a Goldchild, a horse, and a good weapon.’ Thong Prasi saw her son was happier.

She invited him to eat his fill. Phlai Kaeo was feeling very happy. He went to sit in his house and ordered Ai-Jan, ‘You and Ai-Kliang work shifts to look after my horse.’

Ai-Kliang and Ai-Jan rushed around arranging the stable, feeding with grass, setting a bonfire at the door,⁷⁸ and taking care of the horse as required.

⁷⁷ Something that goes under the tail of a horse or elephant, and attaches to the harness. Must be an English word.

⁷⁸ To drive away insects with the smoke.