

## **29: Khun Phaen rescues Phra Thainam**

[III/70]

Phra Thainam had been imprisoned by the Lao under full restraint for half a year without seeing daylight. He was almost mad from misery,

starvation, and discomfort. He wept all the time and was wasting away. No water had touched his grimy body. He was forced to endure this night and day.

‘Oh, has the king abandoned me to suffer this torture for so long? Why hasn’t he sent anybody?’

Phya Kueng Kamkong, who had escorted the princess, also moaned and groaned miserably at having to suffer so pitifully. Every day, both of them ate their own tears instead of rice.

Phra Thainam’s complaints were heart-rending. ‘This is just terrible, like falling into hell while still alive, with absolutely no let-up.’

Ai-Lo, a merry commoner, tried to cheer him up a bit. He had a playful face and a happy disposition. He always looked at ease and not at all distressed. ‘What’s up?’

Ta-Lo said, ‘Sir, you’re in jail, and you can’t do anything about it. You have to put up with it, so you should try to be cheerful. Moaning and groaning won’t get you out of here.’

Phra Thainam said, ‘Oh Ai-Lo, they’ve left us here to die. It’s odd the king doesn’t bother to send someone up here with troops to rush the place and release us.’

Ta-Lo said, ‘Sir, don’t get excited. Merit and punishment are just the same. Even if an army came up here to attack, we’ve seen with our own eyes that the Lao are no pushover.

Soi Dao, Thao Krungkan, Phrap Mueang Maen, and Saen Phetkla are skilled warriors. If they sent anyone here except Khun Phaen, it’d just be hastening our own deaths.

When we came up here, Khun Phaen was still in jail. We’ve no idea if he’s alive or dead. The other Thai nobles, all thousands of them, are not on par with the Lao of Chiang In.’ [71]

Phra Thainam responded to Ta-Lo’s words, ‘Yes, I agree that’s all true. I can’t see anyone in the land who’s better than Khun Phaen.

Oh almighty god under the great tiered umbrella! Please end our suffering by getting the king to send Khun Phaen.’

The two of them chatted to ease their pain until nightfall. As the sun set down out of sight, the warders made their tour of inspection, putting chains and cangues on everywhere.

Phra Thainam, Kamkong, and the volunteers were put under all

five constraints with no remission. The warders had prisoners hit a wooden triangle, while they sat awake at the lamps on watch.

Kamkong and Phra Thainam were manacled in a seated position. They leant their backs against the wall, and let their heads loll forward over the cangue, praying and yawning until they dozed off.

That night Phra Thainam was troubled by a dream about a splendid Brahmin with his hair coiled nicely up on his head and a powder mark on his forehead.

He carried a sacred conch with a right spiral.<sup>1</sup> He wore an elegant seven-stranded breast chain, ear rings, an upper cloth tied in a cross, and a sumptuous lower cloth in white silk,

neatly pleated and tucked in on one side with a flap. His complexion was a radiant yellow. He flew down at the end of the city, opened the jail, and walked up to Phra Thainam.

He poured medicine from the conch over Phra Thainam's head, and all his chains fell away. He repeated the pouring with all the other Lao and Thai whose chains also slid off.

Then the Brahman disappeared in a flash before his eyes. Phra Thainam promptly woke up with a start. Lying quietly, he realized it was a dream. 'This must be an omen with a lot of meaning.'

He whispered to wake Ta-Lo. 'It's me. Get up and help interpret my dream.' Ta-Lo asked, 'Sir, what was the dream?' Phra Thainam related it all. 'Please interpret it well. This is an impressive omen.'  
[72]

Ta-Lo smiled as he gave his interpretation. 'We definitely won't die here in Chiang Mai. We should be out of jail in a few days. The meaning is that some good person is coming.'

By my calculation, the auspicious day is Saturday. We're going to get out of here alive, for sure.' The two whispered together until the roll-call was made for the second watch.

As each name was called, the prisoner had to respond 'woi, woi,' or else he would be flogged.

When it was finished, the gong was beaten noisily. The prisoners took turns to stay awake and keep watch through until dawn.

Prison warders of corporal<sup>2</sup> rank came to the jail to distribute the prisoners to various places. 'Ta-Lo, Ta-Rak, and Pak Jandi. Your group is cutting grass. Find sickles and shoulder poles.'

---

<sup>1</sup> *Thaksinawat*. The right spiral is a sign of Vishnu (Red:683).

<sup>2</sup> *Nai roi*.

Thinking of Phra Thainam's dream, Ta-Lo sang and danced along merrily. The warders took them to walk through the market to loot.<sup>3</sup>

They grabbed raw betelnut and put it in their baskets. Someone tried to hit them but missed, and they snatched some bananas. They grabbed anything they could find, and ran off with their chains clanking

and scraping along the road. Whatever shop they entered, the women shouted, and sometimes cursed them at the top of their voices. They jogged across a bridge over a long reach of the river,

and made for a meadow at the edge of a lake.<sup>4</sup> They cut the grass, boisterously singing the sickle song.<sup>5</sup> The warders laid out cloth behind *phutsa*<sup>6</sup> bushes and went to sleep in the cool.

Khun Phaen ordered all the soldiers to stay together in the hiding place, and take turns keeping watch.

'Don't wander about. Wait for us. The two of us will go into the city and find a way to rescue the Thai and Vientiane Lao imprisoned in the jail.

We'll get out of the city quickly, and should be back here tomorrow evening.' The soldiers acknowledged with salutes, and he repeated the order to stay there safely. [73]

Khun Phaen and his son then both dressed up finely. They wore headbands formerly worn into battle, shirts with Buddha images,

and lower cloths like a Lao farmer. They attached hairpieces with a pink headcloth, strung on powerful amulets, and tied *pa khamong phrai*<sup>7</sup> belts round their bodies.

Khun Phaen grasped a sword, and hung a cloth-bag over his shoulder. Phlai Ngam carried a sturdy spear. Looking like two formidable lions, they walked into the city.

They walked among the Lao cityfolk without exciting any suspicion because the power of their spirits and mantras made people believe they were farmers come to town.

---

<sup>3</sup> The jail provided no food. The warders took them through the market to give them this chance to steal. The practice continues, though in more orderly fashion. In Bangkok, prisoners on work detail are taken through the local market to give the vendors an opportunity to give them something, rather like giving alms.

<sup>4</sup> Probably this is the lake which used to exist to the northeast of the city, in the area between the city walls and the Mae Ping River. It is shown on the map of Chiang Mai made by James McCarthy, probably in the 1880s, as 'Nawng Bua' (lotus pond). It was filled in for land development after the Second World War.

<sup>5</sup> *Ram khieo*, the sickle dance, a song with dance poses (Red:685).

<sup>6</sup> *Zizyphus mauritiana*, monkey apple, Indian jujube.

<sup>7</sup> Meet-head-spirit. Not sure what this means, but maybe same as the belts made from headskin of corpses mentioned later.

In the outskirts, local young girls eyed up little Phlai amorously. Their hearts leapt, and they could not take their eyes off him. Phlai walked with his face averted, looking at nobody.

Young girls, widows, and old ladies greeted him, 'Where are you going, young fellow? Why not stop here a while and play? I'll give you good betelnut, pan, and tobacco.'

The spirit of Noi Siwichai, who had come along with them, replied to the girls in Lao. 'Dear ladies, please forgive me. I've got business in the city.'

My heart loves you very much, but right now I must take leave of you. After going out on the town this evening, I'll come back to sleep, and then I'll call by for a chat.'

He kept walking along. Even the market ladies were good-looking. They thought little Phlai was a forest Lao, and found him very handsome.

One called out, 'Hey, sir, you walking at the back and not talking, going along in a daze. If you want anything, come and sit down.' Then she offered a flower to Phlai Ngam.

Phlai accepted it, and gave her hand a squeeze. The Lao girl turned away to hide, feeling excited. 'Where's your home? I'd like an affair. I'll follow along to sleep with you.'

Phlai looked at her sideways, and said, 'I love you.' The Lao girl uttered a sigh of love, and coyly loitered there, making eyes. She smiled, then lowered her face and peered up at him. [74]

Widows selling betelnut called out to him loudly and with no shame, 'You good-looking young fellow in pink, if you want some betel and pan, I've got them.'

Miss Ong called out to Miss Fak. 'He doesn't love widows, because you don't look so good. Aren't you ashamed to be bothering him?'

Fak replied, 'Get away with you. Young things like you can't compete with me. You've never made love, so what do you know? You young girls have got as much inner rhythm as a corpse.'

Just because your breathing, who's going to love you? When it comes to the tricks, watch out for us widows. A young chap like this is a pushover. Just tug his string and he'll get all het up.'

Khun Phaen and Phlai Ngam kept moving. Wherever they went, the vendors talked to them. 'Where do you two live? What business have you come for?'

The spirits who went along with Khun Phaen spoke in their stead. 'We're forest people. There's talk that some Thai have been captured in the city. I've never seen the face of a Thai fellow.'

I'd like to see what they're like. Where are the prisoners kept?' The

Lao told them the truth without suspicion. 'They're locked up in the jail beside the stables.

The officers don't get dragged off for hard labor, but the men are taken under guard to cut grass. If you want to see some Thai fellows, go to the meadow. They'll return as the sun sets.'

Khun Phaen was pleased to get what he wanted. After they bid their goodbyes, the two of them hurried off to the meadow.

They caught sight of the Thai chopping grass in the middle of a marsh, and hurried over to see them. They saw the guards asleep with eyes closed and heads covered, so cut across to the Thai.

Ta-Rak and Ta-Lo looked up. 'Where are these two good-looking fellows coming from?' When the two came close, Ta-Lo turned his face to examine them.

At first he thought they were Lao forest villagers. Then he looked again and recognized a face. 'Hey! That's Khun Phaen, for sure.' He took Ta-Rak over towards them. [75]

When they got close, Ta-Lo said, 'My lord!' He rushed to clasp Khun Phaen's feet, burying his face, and shaking with tears. In an instant, he recovered himself.

Khun Phaen said to Ta-Lo and Ta-Rak, 'Don't make any noise, or the warders will wake up. However upset you are, try to swallow it. It won't help the others.'

Ta-Lo and Ta-Rak wiped their tears, and talked to him in broken fashion. 'Khun Phaen, sir, it's been terrible. Jailed and manacled. Very painful.

They use the cane on our backs. We're all in. No rice in the morning, only evenings. My back's had over a hundred stripes. Phra Thainam is locked up day and night.

He's bruised in body and soul beyond description. He's been thinking of killing himself. By the power of merit, you've come in time, sir. Whose son is this young fellow?'

Khun Phaen told him, 'This fellow is none other than my first son, born with Wanthong. Phramuen Si presented him as a page.

Though his body is still a kid's, his heart is big beyond compare. He was bold enough to volunteer to the king. I was released from jail because of him.

I asked for thirty-five convicts, all brave fellows, and the king granted them. We've come to rescue you from death. Tell your commander, Phra Thainam,

and the Vientiane Lao, and also all our men. Tonight we'll come for sure. Wait and help chop off the warders' heads.

Don't fall asleep and cause delay. We'll come around 11 p.m. No

more talking. If someone sees us, we'll be arrested. Where's a good place to hide during the day?'

Ta-Lo said, 'No problem. Wat Nang<sup>8</sup> behind the jail is a good place. There's a derelict kuti on the edge of a pond with no monks. I haven't seen anyone coming and going there the whole year.'

He gave directions. 'Go straight to the rear of the city, and walk to the right. You'll see the jail beside the horse stables. Wat Nang is behind the sala. Go straight in.' [76]

Khun Phaen now knew his way around. 'We can't hang around talking.' The two of them went off across the meadow towards a clump of *yang* trees.

Seeing a lot of people on the road, they went off to the right and passed through a district with a broad bridge.<sup>9</sup> They kept clear of people by staying off the roads. Past the jail they found the derelict wat,

completely overgrown with brambles. 'This must be Wat Nang for sure.' They went into the kuti which was crumbling away but still had walls. They sat and slept while waiting for the time.

In the evening, the sun dropped below the tree tops. The warders shouted to the prisoners to go. They quickly picked up their shoulder poles and baskets, and all

hurried along in a group, carrying the grass. The warders chased them along with canes. Their chains clanked loudly all along the road.

When the vendors saw them entering the market, they lifted their baskets away, and closed canopies<sup>10</sup> to guard their cloth. Those in shops selling fish and prawn gripped the wicker covers and kept a sharp eye out.

At the head of the group, Ta-Lo scooped up some eels. Ta-Rak snatched some sweetlip fish. The others behind scrambled after some little fish. The vendors hit at them, and cursed when they dodged away.

Ta-Lo laughed uproariously. 'What shall I order today?' The vendors slapped them, but they dodged and grabbed oranges, bananas, and papaya, until they had enough,

---

<sup>8</sup> วัดหนัง, perhaps the wat with a screen, for puppets? There's a wat of this name in Thonburi, famous for amulets.

<sup>9</sup> Or perhaps the name of a district: *saphan khwang*.

<sup>10</sup> *Krachang*, awning outside a shop (Red: 684.); a hinged weather-shield on the front of a market stall (Mc:24).

and then clanked off in their chains. One woman danced<sup>11</sup> out in front of her house, and tried to hit them with a pole. Ta-Lo caught the pole, and she fell over.

The vendors shouted angrily. ‘What’s up with the prisoners today?’ ‘Why are they so high-spirited, and making such a disturbance?’ ‘I’ll petition for their backs to be flogged to ribbons.’

Ta-Lo said, ‘I’m not afraid. If you want to petition anyone, you go ahead. You don’t scare me, funny face. If you try coming over here, I’ll lay you out groaning.’

They left the market as the sun sank. They ran along clinking and clanking, carrying the grass and fish. At the jail, they deposited the grass and went to cook. [77]

They helped one another to put on the rice pot, and roast catfish. In a short while when everything was cooked, they scooped some rice into a small basket for their commander to eat. When the sun set,

a corporal<sup>12</sup> counted all the prisoners. After the inspection, they threaded them all on a big chain, set lanterns at three places, and locked and bolted the double doors.

When the three guards went up to their hut, Ta-Lo crawled to see the commander. He whispered to Phra Thainam, ‘Sir, your dream has come true for sure,

exactly as you told me. Khun Phaen has really come, sir, with his son. They were disguised as Lao. I was cutting grass when they turned up.

They had long hair just like the Lao, but Ai-Rak and I recognized them. He asked about you, sir, and the Thai. I told him everything.

He told me to tell everyone to be prepared. They’re coming tonight definitely. He’ll use mantras to put the whole jail to sleep, spring the locks, and get us out.’

Listening to Ta-Lo, Phra Thainam felt someone was anointing him with celestial water. He was as excited as if he had gone to Indra’s palace.

‘Hey, Ai-Lo, you loud mouth! The chain is long. Get them to whisper the message along to everyone. Don’t let the Chiang Mai people hear. He’ll come to fly us away tonight!’

They passed the message along in whispers to all the Lao and Thai

---

<sup>11</sup> รำมะงั่ว, no idea what *maka* is, and can’t find it in any dictionary. Recurs later in chapter. Mc:631, *maka* is a tree *bridelia burmanica*, leaves used as purgative

<sup>12</sup> Nai roi.

in chains. All the prisoners were happy. They prepared themselves. Nobody slept.

Khun Phaen, brave and expert in power, along with Phlai Ngam his beloved and talented son, looked for a time with no obstructions.

They saw the stars were **shining**<sup>13</sup> brightly, while the waning moon had left the heavens. They found a good timing late at night. They dressed and prepared themselves carefully.

They took off the Lao clothes and put them in the cloth bag. They put on lower cloths in a fine indigo, belts plaited from the headskin of corpses,<sup>14</sup> and headbands infused with power. [78]

They wore shirts enchanted with yantra and dyed with herbal medicine. They enchanted sandal paste and put it on their foreheads. They took up their swords and walked off in the appointed direction. They looked at the clouds<sup>15</sup> and saw an omen in the shape of a person.

Detecting the breath emerging from the left nostril, they stepped off on the left foot, and went up to the road. Then they chanted a formula to stun others into not seeing them, and walked quickly to the jail. It was brightly lit.

Khun Phaen chanted a mantra to put people to sleep. The whole jail was immediately snoring. He whispered orders to several spirits to use incantations to make sure all the warders were asleep.

Then he relaxed the mantra for all the Thai in the jail. They all came to as if waking up. Then he magically sprung the locks so doors opened wide on both storeys. The two then hurried in.

Khun Phaen enchanted rice and scattered it around. The chains fell off everyone – feet, hands, and cangues. All the Lao and Thai leapt up in excitement.

Phra Thainam and Kamkong came out. All the officers and men saluted Khun Phaen. Some were so hurt and angry they wanted to slash the people who had tormented them.

‘Those three wardens are evil.’ They cut the wardens to pieces until their swords were bathed in blood and gore. ‘There! Slashed to death. The bastards pushed us around and almost flogged me to death.’

‘The governor is in the outer shelter. That bastard flogged me twice.’ Ta-Lo went up to the shelter, smashed down the wall, and

---

<sup>13</sup> There's ឥន្ទ្រ in this sentence which I can't understand.

<sup>14</sup> *Khamong khamot*, a Khmer expression (Sup:374, Red: 384).

<sup>15</sup> *Yok mek*, inspecting the clouds to see an omen (Sup: 374).

swung his sword to drop the governor down dead in an instant.

Ta-Rak was angry at the fire inspector. 'He inspected and thrashed my back terribly. Why should this villain be left alive?' He chopped him down rolling on the ground in his own ruan.

The prisoners rampaged around, lopping off heads all over the place. Those spared the sword, dreamed, mumbled, and snored on, spattered with gore like a graveyard.

When they left the jail, Ta-Lo told Khun Phaen, 'We've been trussed up so tight that many people's legs are weak or lame.

We can't run well, and that'll help them to cut us off and kill us. We must steal horses for everybody so we can keep up with you. [79]

I'll go, because I know the place. The right-hand stable has the strong race horses. The left stable has the special steeds.<sup>16</sup> If we take them all, we can mount everybody.'

Khun Phaen said, 'Slow down, old fellow. I don't think you can do it on your own. You'll run into some Lao and there'll be uproar all over the city. They'll chase you down and crush you dead.'

He ordered Ta-Lo to lead the way, and all the rest to follow. At the stables, he scattered rice, and commanded the spirits to protect everyone.

The Lao guarding the horses, both husbands and wives, went to sleep, hugging one another and snoring loudly. The Thai opened the doors and swarmed in without any fear. They went around, poking into everything,

grabbing cloth and silk, stripping people of their lower cloths, snatching wives' purses, stealing waist-sacks, and picking up gold, silver, and valuables that caught their fancy. They took everything they could lay their hands on, without mercy.

Khun Phaen shouted, 'Don't waste time!' They all came to untie the horses and harness them. They mounted and rode off together.

Ta-Lo chose good horses for the four commanders – smart, rideable, with firm saddles. Phra Thainam rode at the front, with Kamkong in the middle,

and Khun Phaen and Phlai Ngam at the rear. They kicked their heels and trotted off to a place where four roads met. Khun Phaen used his sword to cut wood from a coral tree<sup>17</sup> to make a post.

He wrote on it in charcoal to tell the cityfolk the true story.

---

<sup>16</sup> Those used by the king.

<sup>17</sup> *Thonglang*, *erythrina fusca/stricta/subumbrans*, Tree: 357-8.

‘Whoever finds this writing, take it straight to your master.’

When it was finished, they erected the post, leapt on their horses, dug in their heels, and followed one another at a trot to the route out of the city.

Ta-Mo, Ta-Ma, and Ta-Lo said, ‘Sir, don’t rush off yet. In the hills, the Lao keep some thirty elephants, all fine tuskers.

We have a battle to win. It’d be good to have elephants to ride. At the least, their tusks are formidable. I know where they are.’ [80]

Khun Phaen called, ‘Old fellow, if we know the location, I think it’s a good idea to take the elephants. We don’t have that many people.

Several fine elephants will add to our strength. We’ve got many good mahouts who can smash their camps and destroy their armies.

Here Ta-Lo, take about a hundred men from among the young Lao. Seize the elephants along with their howdahs and everything else, and ride them back here.’

Ta-Lo counted off a hundred people. They walked through the forest to the place he remembered. There they halted, hollered three cheers, stormed in, and captured the elephant handlers.

They scared them but did not kill them. They tied their two elbows together, and then rushed around noisily seizing everything they could carry.

Howdah belly-straps,<sup>18</sup> front and rear leather harness,<sup>19</sup> stirrup ropes,<sup>20</sup> tooled saddles, howdahs, side-straps,<sup>21</sup> and goads. They collected enough for their needs, then mounted the necks and hit the animals with bolas.<sup>22</sup>

Feeling the bolas, the elephants set off, jostling for the road. Some trumpeted and crashed noisily through the forest. The Thai and Lao were known for their skill as mahouts, and rode the elephants fast.

---

<sup>18</sup> ประคน/กระคน, *prakhon*, a strap from the howdah passing under the belly just behind the front legs (Mat:524; RI:21,pix).

<sup>19</sup> พานหน้าหลัง, strap passing round the neck then over the back to hold the front of the howdah; and the strap from the rear of the howdah under the tail (Ele:477).

<sup>20</sup> ชะนั้ก/ชานัก, strap or rope passing around the neck of the elephant with metal pegs inserted to hold a stirrup made of rope for the mahout to get a grip with his feet (Mat:257, RI 344, pix; Ele: 288).

<sup>21</sup> กระแขง, a leather strap which runs horizontally from the *prakhon* howdah strap round the back haunches. In case of emergency, the mahout can catch hold of this (Mat:20; RI:28).

<sup>22</sup> ลูกดิ่ง, *lukding*, two balls of metal attached with a cord.

Ta-Lo followed the tracks to find Khun Phaen, and in a short time reached where he was waiting. He said, 'I've brought the elephants. They're all big, fast, and fierce, with long tusks.'<sup>23</sup>

Khun Phaen laughed heartily, and ordered all the elephants and horses to march. Late at night under bright stars and with dew falling, they arrived in the area above the lake.

The thirty-five soldiers heard a racket coming through the forest, and though it was the Lao from the city. They rushed to get dressed.

Phromson and Sammayang ordered the volunteers, 'We'll ambush the army and cut them down. If you hear the small drum, retreat; if the gong and horn, rush into the attack.'

They picked up their weapons, strung on *takrut* amulets, and put on auspicious headbands. Phromson led the division on the right, and Sammayang on the left. [81]

They went to a place where the road passed through a defile, and all hid in the bushes. They were all firmly resolved not to give way before the enemy.

When the leader, Phra Thainam, rode his horse unawares past the place, Sammayang ordered three cheers, and they rushed out of the thicket to attack the army.

One leapt up an elephant's tusks, raised his weapon, and hit Ta-Lo enough for the blood to ooze out like sap. Ta-Lo raised the goad in defense, and swung a blow that found its mark, so the fellow slipped and fell off with a thump.

He jumped up and rushed at the horsemen. He hurled his sword at Phra Thainam and hit him square. His shirt ripped, and he was rocked backwards, but he dug in his heels and galloped after the elephant.

The Thai and Lao did not know what was going on. In fright, they ran off, abandoning their swords. Khun Phaen thought some Lao had blocked the road. He spurred his horse into the thick of it.

Phlai raced after him, slashing left and right with his weapon. Thammathian rushed up with a group of soldiers and swarmed around them.

Khun Phaen bellowed the Power-of-Garuda mantra. Swords slipped out of their grip and dropped onto the grass. Phromson and Sammayang assumed an attacking pose astride the path, then stabbed,

hitting Khun Phaen in the chest. Their lances broke without piercing him. Khun Phaen drew his short sword, and stabbed old Phromson who fell writhing on the ground,

---

<sup>23</sup> Literally, tusks that root into the ground.

but his skin was not pierced. Sammayang slashed Phlai in retaliation, but it was like striking stone. The sword did not penetrate even his outer shirt, and crumpled to pieces.

Nai Dot and Nai Suea brandished their lances, and threw them at Khun Phaen, but they glanced off. Sammayang and Thammathian were perplexed. 'How come they're invulnerable beyond our powers?'

Sammayang rushed angrily back into the attack, but caught sight of Khun Phaen and so backed off. 'Who's that? Is it you, sir?' 'Eh? Is that Ai-Sammayang?'

The soldiers recognized Khun Phaen. In shock, they dropped their swords, and prostrated to wai him. 'We didn't know it was you.' 'Please forgive us.' 'We thought it was the Chiang Mai Lao bringing an army.' [82]

'I stabbed you, sir, and Phlai several times. I'm guilty of a capital offence.' Khun Phaen was pleased rather than angry. 'It's good you're this brave.'

Then they milled around getting to know one another. The horse and elephant troops followed along, calling out to one another rowdily.

Kamkong and Phra Thainam trembled with fear through the whole journey. They all dismounted noisily, and stayed together happily by the lake.

The early streaks of dawn touched the mountain tops and slid downwards into daylight. Lao officials of the capital went to unlock the prisoners to go to work.

They walked up to the door obliviously and found headless warders all over the place. In shock and panic, they ran around and found several who were still alive.

The governor's house was smashed and looted. They spread out to the other houses around, and then went up to the prison upstairs. They found the Thai and Lao had disappeared.

The warders were lying tumbled over one another with heads off, eyes rolled up, and faces blanched. Chains were piled up on both sides. Cangues and manacles were scattered around.

The manacles were still locked. The chains were intact with no sign of cutting. 'How did they slip out of these cangues? They're still intact.' In amazement they raced around the prison.

The Lao horse-minders, men and wives, woke and sat up drowsily, stripped of their clothes. As the mantra wore off, they looked around and saw that pillows, mosquito-nets, and baskets had disappeared.

One wife looked at her husband and saw he was naked. 'Eh? Who

took your lower cloth?’ The husband shamefully looked at his wife. ‘Where’ve your clothes all gone?’

They beat their chests in fear. In embarrassment, the wife grabbed a rattan mat. The husband groped around in confusion until he found a sack he could wrap round himself like trousers.

In both the north and south stables, there were no horses. The horse-minders rushed around, some of them with no clothes on and dangling. ‘They’ve all gone from my stable. We’re dead!’ [83]

The horse-minders rushed out in panic and ran into the prison officers. They talked together in confusion like drunks. Then the old elephant-keepers ran up.

They got together in the middle of the road and shared their stories. They set off towards the court, and came across the post with writing in the middle of the road.

They could see the message was Thai handiwork, so they uprooted the coral-wood post, read the message to know for sure, and carried it along to the sala.

Nobles and officials were sitting up in the main sala discussing the government business of the capital. They saw an unruly crowd running up.

Some were panting along wearing sacks and mats. Some were stumbling along stark naked. The officials called out. ‘What’s up? Who are these outcast,

galloping up here scandalously with no clothes on? Did someone rob them and run off? Are they okay or crazy? What have they come for? Duty officer, go and ask them what’s up.’

The group entered the hall, prostrated, and crawled clumsily over, with their mouths trembling and their necks shaking in fear. Hearing the questions, they explained.

‘Hail, sirs, merit above over head. We’re guilty of a major offence. Late last night, some good people came. They put us to sleep and killed many warders.

They unlocked the chains and released the Thai and the Lanchang people who’ve all disappeared. They killed the governor. Sirs, all of you, please have mercy.’

The elephant-keepers paid their respects. ‘They tied us up and flogged us. They stole around thirty big elephants along with their gear.’

The horse-minders explained through trembling mouths. ‘Hail, masters above our heads. They put us to sleep, and stripped off all our clothes.

They chose the good and powerful horses, and also took every bit of saddle and harness. By estimate, the total number of horses

missing is almost five hundred. [84]

Then we found this wooden post set up in the middle of the road, with a boastful, rude, provocative message that they're going to destroy Chiang In's city completely.'

The Lao nobles heard the account. 'Those damn Thai have created trouble.' They stared at the message feeling as angry as raging fire.

Once they understood its contents, they all went to change clothes quickly. They went en masse with the minor nobles following, and in a short while entered the audience hall.

King Chiang In, head of the black bellies, whose profound power shook the earth, and who lived in a brilliant golden palace, was in the resplendent jewel audience hall

with his nobles, giving royal orders and pronouncements. He saw courtiers coming in a tumult. 'Hey, what's that wooden post you're carrying?'

The nobles prostrated and said, 'Hail, power above our heads. Last night arrogant bandits came to rescue the Ayutthaya people.

They also stole five hundred horses, picking the tallest and best, and then went off to seize some thirty of the finest elephants in the forest.

All the prisoners escaped including the Lao from Lanchang, my liege. They left a provocative and fearless message. We searched for them but it was too late.'

The King of Chiang Mai listened as if fire was raging. He summoned an official interpreter. 'Hey, read this message and explain the meaning. What challenge does it make?'

Phan Jam, the interpreter, crawled over, picked up the message, and read it out. 'The monarch of the Thai city has sent me, a diabolical<sup>24</sup> soldier.

My name is Phraya Phaen Phikat.<sup>25</sup> I have marched here with my powerful son and thirty-five *athamat*<sup>26</sup> conscripts to destroy the city.

---

<sup>24</sup> *Phra kat*, the Prince of Hell.

<sup>25</sup> Khun Phaen has promoted himself to *phraya* for effect, and given himself a second name meaning 'the killer.'

<sup>26</sup> อทมต, a department which does not appear in official accounts such as those in the Three Seals Law, probably because it was an intelligence unit which ran spies in the border areas and in neighboring countries. There is a mention in the chronicle of the Bangkok Second Reign of a Mon officer in this department spying on a Burmese army. Damnoen Lekhakun suggested it was a specifically Mon intelligence unit operating on the

Because the Lao seized our king's Soi Thong, and imprisoned several Thai, we have come to rescue these Thai along with the Lanchang people who escorted the princess, [85]

so that our people may escape hardship. We are not running away or hiding. Will you wait there for us to come and defeat you? Or will you come out after us at the lotus lake?

If you love life and care for your peers, deliver the princess Soi Thong to us on your heads. Once she is sent, that will be evidence of your fear, and you will survive without death.'

The King of Chiang Mai was as angry as if the sky was on fire. 'Mmm! These arrogant, contemptible Thai. Their bragging is provocative and truly insulting.

Hey, all you nobles! Is what they say true? Or are they scared that we'll follow after them, and are issuing these threats to delay us?

There's only a handful of them, thirty or so. Are those who escaped jail capable of putting up a fight? We can round them up and chop them down in less than an eye blink. Who has an opinion on what I've just said?'

Phraya Jantharangi, minister of war,<sup>27</sup> promptly addressed the king. 'The words he uses are important.

If he weren't good, he wouldn't send such a challenge. The commander must be tough. If we march against them, there'll be a battle, because he's pretty full of himself.

But with just thirty-five followers, however good they are, he can't do it. The five hundred Lao and Thai that he's spirited away are half-starved.

Like a herd of deer once attacked by a tiger, they won't come back for more. Even if these thirty-five are top class, the starvelings will make them all run away.

Send a rider out to look. If they're still at the big lake, take an army and crush them to dust.'

King Chiang In, acme of the world, heard him out, pondered, and agreed. Then he ordered cavalryman Mung Kayong to choose a good horse, and ride out

---

western frontier. The meaning and derivation of the word have been subject of much debate. Some have suggested a Mon origin, but have been unable to come up with a convincing derivation. Others believe it may have come from a Tamil word meaning 'secret.' Kukrit believes this was the department to which Khun Phaen was assigned when he received his title, and that here he simply accredits the thirty-five to his own unit. But there is no real proof that this was Khun Phaen's department. (Kuk:276; Prachak:211-2)

<sup>27</sup> *Phu wa thi samuha thaban yai*, governor of the major military office.

to investigate. 'Have they fled, or are they still at the big lake? If they're there, hurry back. We'll conscript an army to attack them.'  
[86]

Mung Kayong Monglai took the order, and rushed off to saddle up the horse Phon Thorani Sijan.<sup>28</sup> He mounted and galloped off.

He gave the horse its head and raced along. As the sun weakened, he arrived at the big lake and dismounted. He stole through the bushes, and climbed a tree to spy.

He estimated there was a total of over seven hundred men. Their disposition was to fight, not flee. He looked carefully and saw no sign of a fort and moat.

He climbed down the tree, remounted, and rode back through the forest. At sunset, he dismounted and entered the audience hall.

Arriving at the front, he prostrated and gave his report to the king. 'I crept up and saw the Lao and Thai sitting and standing all around.

Officers and men together are over seven hundred. Their disposition is to stay and fight, but I saw no sign of them making a fort and moat. They are at the lake, half-a-day away.'

The king roared out, 'Mmm! These brave Thai. Isn't seven hundred too few to come and fight?

That's equal to just a handful of the Lao of Chiang Mai. In one breath, they'll be trussed up like frogs. If each person just breaks off a branch and tosses it down, they'll be buried completely.'

He commanded Thao Krungkan and Tri Phetkla to quickly form an army. 'Bring me back their heads.

Phya Prap Mueang Maen and Saen Kamkong, who have both acquitted themselves as leaders in the past, will command the left and right wings. Krungkan will be the army chief.

Saentri Phetkla, an excellent horseman who has been aggressive in attack, will command the cavalry<sup>29</sup> in the vanguard. Have everything ready tomorrow before 4 a.m.'

Phraya Jantharangsi took the order, and went to sit in the hall, issuing notices to call up troops, both officers and men, and to allocate elephants, horses, and weaponry. [87]

The cavalry had five thousand stout men of the most indomitable spirit, trained and battle-hardened. They could all ride wildly, both

---

<sup>28</sup> Leap-earth-moon.

<sup>29</sup> *Sinthop*, originally a breed of horses from the Indus River region (Iam).

right and left flanks.

They carried spears, throwing knives, and bows. These five thousand strong and tough volunteers, with their officers in charge, were ready as the vanguard.

Phetkla was mounted on a royal horse called Hem Rasmi Sijan,<sup>30</sup> which was powerful, nimble, and hardworking. Its harness had filigree inlaid with jewels.

The side flaps<sup>31</sup> were illustrated with dancing kinnari. The stirrups were inlaid with golden bo trees and hung with tassels. The saddle was tooled<sup>32</sup> and engraved with patterns. Its usual ostler<sup>33</sup> led the horse to wait for the march.

The<sup>34</sup> commander of the cavalry, Triphetkla, was a man with powers, invulnerability, and skill in the arts of war.

His right arm carried a gamboge<sup>35</sup> tattoo of Vishnu, his left arm a red<sup>36</sup> tattoo of a lion, his right leg an ink<sup>37</sup> tattoo of a tigress, and his left leg, a powerful bear.

His chest was tattooed with a picture of Phra Mokka,<sup>38</sup> his back with a *phakwam* Buddha<sup>39</sup> with eyes closed, and his flanks with a *na*<sup>40</sup> formula for stunning. He had a jet gem<sup>41</sup> embedded in his head, golden needles in each shoulder, a large diamond<sup>42</sup> in the middle of his forehead, a lump of fluid metal<sup>43</sup> in his chest, and *thian khla*<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Golden brilliance of the moon.

<sup>31</sup> *Phaeng kang*, there must be an English word.

<sup>32</sup> *Pru chalu*, which means perforation, a sort of stencilling. Can't think how to say this in English.

<sup>33</sup> The text here uses *khwan*, mahout, but the sense seems to mean a horse minder.

<sup>34</sup> This section actually begins with half a line saying, 'Putting aside the overall commander, Krungkan, let's talk about...' i.e., for reasons of precedence, the writer has to mention the seniormost commander first, but really he wants to get on with this wonderful description of Phetkla.

<sup>35</sup> The colours have symbolic significance. Gamboge, yellow, means being big (Red:390-1).

<sup>36</sup> ชาต, *chat*, erythrophleum succirubrum, a red dye, signifying power (Red:390-1).

<sup>37</sup> Black, the usual colour of tattoos.

<sup>38</sup> The story of a monk who was so tough that he did not die even when attacked by five hundred bandits and beaten until all the bones in his body were crushed (Red: 391).

<sup>39</sup> See note in chapter 28.

<sup>40</sup> See note in chapter 24.

<sup>41</sup> Black is the color of Saturn, and signifies magic, so embedding this in the head signifies an abnormally powerful person, and will make an enemy afraid to fight (Red:391).

<sup>42</sup> The hardest stone and hence a symbol of invulnerability, which accounts for its appearance in headgear in both western and Indian traditions (Red:391).

<sup>43</sup> See note in chapter 16.

and cat's eye<sup>45</sup> in his back.<sup>46</sup>

His whole body was a mass of lumps and bumps. Since birth, he had never been touched by a weapon, and did not carry even the scratch from a thorn.<sup>47</sup>

He was tall and broad like a tiger, very powerful, with firm flesh. His moustache was twisted and curved upwards. His teeth were white, and his mouth green like a giant leech.

His eyes were black like a tiger's, and rimmed with red as if daubed with vermilion. His beetling eyebrows and reddish moustache gave him a fierce look. His hair was coiled like a yogi.

He did not sleep with his wife throughout the year. From youth until adulthood, he did not bathe but applied a paste of medicinal herbs. Only before battle, would he bathe. [88]

Whenever going on campaign, he sought out herbs and enchanted them to make medicine.<sup>48</sup> He brought amulets, *takrut*, and a *phakwam* Buddha, and blew a formula over them.

He filled a bath with river water, put in the charms and the herbs, and used a formula to make the water boil as if it were over a fire. When he saw it boiling, he promptly scooped some water over his head.

Then he took out the charms and herbal mixture, stepped into the bath, paid his respects, and washed himself. Next, he looked for an omen in the water.

If he were in mortal danger, the water would be reddish like sappanwood. If he would neither win nor lose but something in-between, the water would have the color of dissolved gamboge.

If he were to have victory over the enemy, the water would have the brilliant luster of crystal. On this occasion, he was fated to die. The omen in the water was red.<sup>49</sup>

Phetkla stared at it, knowing the meaning exactly. Water colored like sappanwood was a terrible omen. He sighed in apprehension.

'This is the worst.' He went out to change his clothes. Although he could not survive, he thought his skill as a valiant warrior would be

<sup>44</sup> A hard, apparently metallic core naturally occurring in the *khla* tree, *Schumannianthus dichotomus* (Sup:378).

<sup>45</sup> A semi-precious stone supposed to be the eye of a dead cat miraculously transformed. It conveys invulnerability and other benefits (Textor, *Inventory*, 62).

<sup>46</sup> Several of these embedded objects are materials found naturally with some strange characteristic which suggests a miraculous origin. Such objects have power of themselves, without the need to be activated by a teacher with knowledge, and their main benefit is invulnerability (Sup:378-9; Textor, *Inventory*, 60-4).

<sup>47</sup> The fact that he has never been harmed is evidence of his invulnerability (Red:392).

<sup>48</sup> Khun Wichitmatra suggests the herbs might include *wan hanuman*, *wan saeng athit* (*Haemanthus multiflorus*), *wan kamphaeng jet chan* (Red:393).

<sup>49</sup> The same omen appears in *Lilit Phra Lo* (Red:394).

known among the Lao after his death.

In a foul mood, he got dressed. As it was a Monday, he wore a yok lower cloth with a white base. He put on a *takrut*, a glistening mercury charm, a diamond ring that sparkled like a star,

a *prajiat* red amulet cloth tied crosswise across his chest, a brilliant breast chain, a headcloth in white with scattered stars and gold edging, and a golden belt embroidered with writing.

He put a string of golden rosary beads round his neck, and smeared enchanted dinso powder on his forehead.<sup>50</sup> He picked up his pike, and strode to leap on the back of his magnificent horse.

He looked as bold as a lion, befitting his skill on the battlefield. He glanced up at the clouds for an omen, found an auspicious time, and ordered three cheers to begin the march.

A ceremonial umbrella<sup>51</sup> was spread for the army commander. The ground shook with the sound of horses' hooves. The forest echoed with the boisterous shouting of the troops. [89]

Thao Krungkan, the brave army commander, pressed forward with the preparation of the troops. He ordered the elephants to be harnessed up.

The Department of Elephants arranged robust and powerful military elephants, with good harness, first-rate mahouts for the neck and rear, one soldiers to sit in the middle of each elephant,

and a full complement of weapons. They formed two lines along the road. The men all wore shirts instilled with auspicious qualities, and were invulnerable against weapons –

some by using casumunar ginger root, some by chanting formulas, some by using enchanted yantra and applying oil, some by drinking liquor subjected to incantation,<sup>52</sup>

some from snake's fangs and animal eyes, some from *kamjat*,<sup>53</sup> copper, or stone, some by embedding diamond or jet in their skin. All were able to withstand weapons.

Phya Prap Mueang Maen, a great warrior and commander of the right wing, rode on the neck of a majestic tusker, wearing a headcloth in ruby color edged with gold,

a bright pink shirt edged with shot-gold silk on both upper arms.

---

<sup>50</sup> He would write a *na* symbol on some surface, wipe it off to become powder, then use his finger to put the powder on his forehead (Red:394).

<sup>51</sup> *Sapthon*, a long-handled ceremonial umbrella (Mat: 861, with pix).

<sup>52</sup> *Sura aphant*, where *aphat* means to enchant something to eat or drink (Sup:382).

<sup>53</sup> *Zanthoxylum budranga/rhetsa*, Sichuan pepper, possibly considered powerful because of the prickly lumps on the trunk's bark, and the fact an alternative meaning of *kamjat* is to eliminate or annihilate.

Nai Kamkong of the left wing wore the same ruby headcloth edged with gold,

a shirt of leaf-green velvet, and golden beads around his neck. He looked tough. Both wore yantra for invulnerability. Each commanded a thousand troops,

all battle-hardened, and carrying weapons of many kinds. Nai Soi Dao commanded almost a thousand men as the rearguard.

He rode on Phlai Kaeo Ming Muang<sup>54</sup> with a good harness. He wore a pleated shirt in wrinkled chicken-skin silk of moon color, a helmet in *mod* infused with charms, and a ceremonial umbrella. The army was ready.

The King of Chiang Mai presented his army commander with a royal mount named Phlai Phlik Thorani<sup>55</sup> to ride into battle. He was in must.

He stood six cubits tall, with tusks hooped in gold. He had a broad forehead<sup>56</sup> and a lower rear end like elephants in statues. He had a long tail, large ears, a brave heart, and dual frontal humps<sup>57</sup> on his head, which was auspicious. [90]

He walked nimbly with poise. He had thick hide, a huge face, and wrinkled skin. Under gunfire, he did not tremble, but whisked the rounded hairs of his tail around his heels.

He was decked with a sash across his forehead in gold thread, fine-looking tassels hanging from his ears, front and rear harness spangled with aporosa flowers,<sup>58</sup> and both flanks clad in gold and pure silver.

He had a stirrup-strap of embroidered silk, and padding on the middle of his back. The goad had a pike blade, sharp and glistening white. The mahout looked dynamic in a red shirt with a contending-flowers pattern,<sup>59</sup> and a hat of purple *mod*.

The expert soldier, Krungkan, decked himself out. He wore a Lao-style yok lower cloth in white with red flowers, a shirt embroidered with a fighting Garuda in gold thread,

breast chains, a *phakwam* Buddha, rosary beads around his neck, a

---

<sup>54</sup> Crystal-charm-city.

<sup>55</sup> Earth overturner.

<sup>56</sup> ตระพอง/กะพอง, *traphong/kaphong*, the forehead of an elephant (RI:427).

<sup>57</sup> โขมค, *khamot*, believed to the nerve centres of an elephant.

<sup>58</sup> *dok klom*, not sure of this. Mat says aporosa is a tree from the south. I think I found somewhere else that it's a hibiscus

<sup>59</sup> *Yaeng ching duang*, also called *kaeo ching duang* (RI:1413 has pix).

gold ring inlaid with a ruby, takrut amulets, an inner shirt with yantra to protect against weapons, and an embossed *khut khamong phrai* belt.<sup>60</sup>

He inserted a kris enchanted with the *prajukat* mantra,<sup>61</sup> then tied on top a sash in jackfruit spine pattern.<sup>62</sup> He wore a hat embroidered with gold silk in a lozenge pattern,<sup>63</sup> and a Japanese sword slung across his shoulder in a sheath plated with gold.

He sprinkled his body with water used to wash a Vishnu image, and walked from the room. The mahout made the elephant sit to receive him. He walked up to the neck, and grasped the goad.

He prayed, looked upwards, and saw a strange omen in the figure of a man with no head. On a second look, the arms and neck were not attached to the body. This bad omen made him lose heart.

‘Asking the king to delay would bring shame for the troops. Nobody born as a man can escape death.’ He steeled himself to go according to fate.

He spurred the elephant to walk off. He saw a bird chick fall dead in front of his eyes. Barn owls flocked around his head. A vulture and crow alighted on the ceremonial umbrella.

Thao Krungkan was full of apprehension. ‘Oh, my life is going to be crushed to dust.’ But he had to find the auspicious time to march. With three cheers the army set off.

He saw the flags drooped instead of waving. Unusually, the wind did not blow. Even the sound of the cheers did not echo but fell flat. Trembling and sighing, he entered the forest. [91]

Khun Phaen of exceptional powers, along with Phlai, Thainam, and Kamkong, sat discussing the battle with their troops.

They saw a pall of dust cloaking the sky, and thought it was probably the Lao bringing a large army. Khun Phaen sat quietly with eyes closed to examine the path of his breath.

‘The Lao are bringing an army of ten thousand through the forest.’ He commanded the men to go immediately to cut giant reed and wild sugar, and plant them as an embankment across the end of the lake,

and as crow’s wings on either side. Also to use sticks to mark out a moat on the ground, and to stack up the reeds like flimsy toy

<sup>60</sup> Similar phrase appeared earlier. None of the commentators or dix seem to know what this is, but perhaps similar to the belt plaited from head skin of corpse. Red: 384, Sup:374, appearing above.

<sup>61</sup> A formula to cancel the powers of an enemy (Sup 392-3).

<sup>62</sup> Guess. Unlikely to be made from jackfruit spines, so perhaps it’s some kind of metal embellishment.

<sup>63</sup> กรองตาขุน, *krong ta chun*, guessed as a lozenge pattern

models of fighting towers and watch towers.

When the army commander scattered rice, the reeds turned into hardwood, firmly fixed together all around, with the crow's wings more solid than true wood.

Where the moat had been marked now looked like deep water stretching across from the banks of the lake to the forest. The fortifications could even withstand hits from large cannon. The fighting towers were also perfect.

Khun Phaen commanded his soldiers to prepare themselves. Only the four commanders stayed up on a platform. Scouting units were sent to watch the Lao approach.

Saentri Phetkla<sup>64</sup> quick-marched the army to the Thon Tabaek forest,<sup>65</sup> where the road forked.

Looking around thirty sen<sup>66</sup> ahead, they saw the extensive Thai camp, with crow's wings spread to left and right, and a moat dug right across from the edge of the lake.

Arriving closer, they could see the field was set out according to the manual. They halted to set up a base, then raised flags, fired signal guns, and hollered three echoing cheers.

Khun Phaen heard the Lao cheer. He announced, 'As expected, the Lao have brought a large army.

My powerful son and I will lead troops out to fight with them. You two wait here with the army and keep watch. We'll deal with the Lao of King Chiang In. [92]

Gather all your Lao men together inside a circle of sacred thread. The fierce Thai can all come out on horseback.

Phlai will lead the thirty-five strong men as the vanguard. I'll lead the main army in support. If we get the advantage, storm them.

If there are thousands of Lao troops, we'll attack them with the elephants and kill them all. Be firm, don't fear, have courage.'

Khun Phaen and his son dressed and decked themselves in impressive gear – lower cloths according to the battle manual, fine belts inscribed with yantra,

inner shirts with yantra, outer shirts with large flowers in brilliant gold, glittering nine-gem *mondop* rings,<sup>67</sup> triple breast chains worn

---

<sup>64</sup> Again here, the text has a reciter's interpolation, 'Allow me to leave Khun Phaen here, and talk of...'

<sup>65</sup> Could be a place name (unidentified), or could be description: the upland with a *tabaek* forest.

<sup>66</sup> 1200 meters.

<sup>67</sup> A *mondop* (mandapam) is a roof over a shrine with stacked layers diminishing to a peak. A *mondop* ring has gems arranged to give a similar pyramidal effect.

crosswise,

and golden bead rosaries around their neck. Both father and son, of brave military lineage, wore hats edged with shot-gold silk, presented by the king. Khun Phaen stood majestically holding Skystorm.

He prayed and raised his eyes to look at the clouds. He saw an auspicious omen of a four-armed Vishnu floating on a cloud. He mounted on the neck of his robust elephant,

with Nai Phetjetban as rear mahout, wearing a shirt in a bright red pattern. Phlai Ngam rode the horse Sijan. The order was given to sound the gong at the auspicious time to move the troops.

Five shots were fired as a signal and the gong sounded. The troops replied with three cheers. The commander unfurled an auspicious flag, and the army moved off.

When the two armies came face to face, the Lao apprehensively split off as crow's wings. Saentri Phetkla cast his eyes into the distance and saw the Thai army was just a handful.

'It's like a midge entering a flame. Do they think they can survive?' He ordered the cavalry to advance at the head of the army. 'If all give a hand, we'll crush the whole Thai army.'

'Take them, men! Grab them at will! Don't let them escape!' He spurred his horse into the attack. [93]

They surrounded the Thai to the front and rear, slashing about. But the Thai had been chosen for their bravery. Phlai ordered three cheers, spurred his horse, and went slashing into the battle.

The Lao advanced, stabbing with spears to block them. The Thai parried the spears aside, and slashed in retaliation. The Lao threw themselves forward to block the Thai blows, but fell headlong down on their faces.

The Thai attacked, struck, swung, and parried. The Lao stabbed, but the Thai leapt out of the way and the blades did not pierce them. The Thai stamped on the ground, and advanced, slashing at the Laos' backs.

The Lao raised long spears, and stabbed fiercely at the Thai. The Thai hit the spears away, and stabbed back. Lao tumbled headfirst from their horses, but the more that died, even more galloped into the breach.

Phlai and the thirty-five were ranged athwart like a windmill. The Lao surrounded them, and closed en masse, hitting and slashing, but the Thai did not flee.

When the Lao stabbed, the Thai slashed them dead. Other Lao stepped over the bodies, and kept coming forward. They surrounded

them so completely in such numbers, that the Thai began to feel weary in the shoulder.

Phlai rode Sijan into the fray, slashing like thunder with his sword inscribed with yantra. Though the Lao were decked in charms and had taken herbal medicine, they were scattered dead on the ground by this sword.

The Lao regrouped and came at him yelling and stabbing, but their spears broke and lances crumpled. They advanced chopping at him from both sides, but the blades did not pierce him. Phlai slashed back, killing in droves.

The Lao took fright and held back. 'It's like taking a pack of dogs to fight a tiger,' they cried, 'Our swords don't pierce his flesh.' 'I slash him but it doesn't go through his shirt!'

Phlai raised his sword, flashing in the light. The Lao backed away, very daunted. It was like the king of the lions pouncing into the middle of a herd of cattle.

Wherever he advanced, the Lao fled in chaos. All the Lao shook their heads in respect for his boldness, and did not dare approach him for fear of their life.

Saentri Phetkla, in command of the main army, was apprehensive on seeing the troops confused and wavering. He charged angrily [94]

up to the front, slapping his feet into his horse's flanks, and bellowing loudly. He arrived in front of Phlai Ngam's horse,

and noted his attractive appearance. He went closer and asked, 'Here, my good officer, what's your name? You're just a youth, slight, tiny! You're a pupil of what teacher? A member of what lineage? Pray tell me.'

Phlai Ngam replied, 'I'm a soldier of Ayutthaya. My name Phlai Ngam comes from the family.

My father is Phraya Phaen Phikat, a name chosen and granted by the king. I'm a student of my father. The Phlai lineage extends over many generations.

And you, sir! What's your name? It's presumptuous to ask an elder who is not yet dead though very old, but what teacher did you study with?'

Phetkla was happy to reply. 'I'll tell you what you ask. You southerners didn't know when you came up here.

My name is Thao Kham Maen, holding the rank of Saentri Phetkla, and I come from a lineage of powerful soldiers. In Lanna nobody stands against me.

The teacher who gave me knowledge was the courageous and strong Si Kaeo Fa, who resides at Red Cow Cave on Gold Hill,<sup>68</sup> and is truly famous and respected everywhere.

Your name, Phlai Ngam, suits you, youth. You're very good-looking, like a statue. Your figure is pretty, like a girl.

Compared to my children, you're younger than the youngest, younger than my grandchildren. You shouldn't fight with a grandfather. Go back and tell your father to come fight with me,

to be a treat for the troops, an example for the soldiers. You're still a kid. Watch the exercise of knowledge. Hey, grandson, where's your father? Tell him to come.' [95]

Phlai Ngam called back to Tri Phetkla, 'Sir, don't be too arrogant and defame my family name.

You're old like a grandfather buffalo, while I'm a little kid like a tiger cub. Through my skill, Lao have died in thousands. Don't delude yourself that adults can't lose.

If I wasn't good, why would I have come? Let me try out my knowledge with you, grandfather, so I can see whether your powers are as good as you say, or your mouth is mightier than your skill.

Forgive me, but don't ask for my father until you defeat his son. Come and try just this once so people will talk about it. If you're tired and want to surrender, you'll lose face.'

Saentri Phetkla's eyes were red with anger like gleaming lacquer. 'Mmm! This guy really won't listen. Boasting he can fight me!'

He dug in his heels and galloped over to the middle of the battlefield in a rage. Riding beautifully, he flourished his spear in the preparatory moves.

Watching Tri Phetkla on horseback, Phlai Ngam rode his horse in the preparatory routine, then turned to approach him with a nimble rhythm.

Phetkla flourished his pike, flashing in the light. Phlai flourished his sword held two-handed. The two circled, gesturing rhythmically as their horses pranced round in a circle.

They drew up in the two-necked swan stance, feinting and slashing this way and that. Then they turned to the dragon-play-with-diamond stance, maneuvering nimbly around each other without giving ground.

---

<sup>68</sup> เขาค้ำถ้ำวัวแดง. There are caves of this name in Chaiyaphum, Udon, Uttaradit, and Phitsanulok. Can't find a hill of this name.

Phetkla's pike was longer than a sword. Phlai darted in to slash, then dodged away. Phetkla chased after him angrily, but Phlai maneuvered away in time.

Phetkla drew himself up and launched his weapon, but Phlai dodged, the blow missed, and Phetkla tumbled headlong. Phlai Ngam closed on him, drew himself up, and delivered a slashing blow.

But it bounced off ineffectually without piercing. Tri Phetkla stepped forward and delivered a return blow. Phlai dodged, and slashed at Phetkla's shoulder, but the flesh was as hard as stone or laterite. [96]

Saentri Phetkla raised his pike high, and slashed at Phlai Ngam, but he was as hard as rock. It was like a scratch on the back which made him stronger. Phlai leapt forward, slashing and hitting.

He chopped and slashed at him several times with his sword, but Phetkla was invulnerable and suffered no damage. Phetkla delivered a return blow with the handle, but Phlai's flesh gave way and then expanded back, leaving no sign.

Saentri Phetkla wearily realized that he could not win. He pondered quietly to himself, 'Damn! This Thai kid is really good.

He's stronger and more powerful than his body suggests. He looks like a girl, but he can truly match an adult like me because of real fighting skill.

I don't think there's any chance of victory using weapons. I must use the inner way of mantra to make him lose.' He rode his horse to halt some distance away.

He closed his eyes, chanted the Great Waters<sup>69</sup> formula given by his expert teacher, and blew it. Water gushed down like a stream,

unnaturally flooding the whole area. The wind whipped the water into splashing waves. The Thai soldiers scrambled to swim away and climb trees in total confusion.

Horses were swept away by the swirling torrent, their legs not reaching the ground. The volunteers desperately appealed to their commanders to counter the mantra.

Phlai Ngam immediately chanted and blew a formula which drained the water so everywhere became dry.

Then he chanted and blew the Fire Element<sup>70</sup> mantra. Instantly, a whole field burst into flames which licked towards the Lao troops.

---

<sup>69</sup> *Maha abo.*

<sup>70</sup> *Techothat.*

Seeing the fire approach, the Lao spurred their horses away in panic in all directions, shaking with fear, and calling out to their leaders, 'Help us!'

Phetkla saw the fire crashing through the forest. He calmed his body and chanted the Great Rain<sup>71</sup> formula. [97]

Clouds covered the sky, and torrential rains drenched the forest, flooding the ground and extinguishing the fire.

The volunteers shivered from unbearable cold. They clustered under the shelter of trees, almost fatally injured by hits from huge hailstones.

Phlai Ngam drew on his expertise to chant a formula to summon the wind inside his body, and blow it out as the Wind Element.<sup>72</sup>

With this power, a gale arose which blew so hard the rain could not fall. The streams of rain drops were scattered and disappeared.

Then he hurled a lump of gravel into the sky, and it rained drops of sand and gravel which splattered down on the Lao troops who frantically ran to hide.

Some rode into the bushes to give cover for their heads. Some were hit and injured so severely by the sand rain that blood flowed from all of them. Unable to bear it, they took off their clothes to cover their heads.

Seeing his troops with faces bruised and chests swollen, Saentri Phetkla was as angry as if his mind was on fire. He joined his fingers above his head and blew.

A mesh appeared in the sky which blocked the sand raindrops from falling. Then he commanded his soldiers to dismount.

'It's no good attacking them on horseback because they just run away. For grappling with them at close quarters, we're not as agile as going on foot.

Hide the horses in the bushes, and select only the long weapons – lances, javelins, and spears. Then advance to encircle the Thai.

If we use our strength to stab them, even though they're invulnerable, their bones will break. We have over a thousand and they're very few. We'll have them in an instant, men.'

The Lao soldiers dismounted and quickly formed up in groups. They surrounded the Thai to front and rear in large numbers, then

---

<sup>71</sup> *Maha wola bok.*

<sup>72</sup> *Wayothat.*

fell on them, slashing, stabbing, and hitting. [98]

The volunteers slashed back, cutting the Lao open from shoulder to hip. Heads fell and bodies dropped in splatters of red blood. The rearguard came up alongside to join the fight,

swarming over the Thai in waves, but their lance thrusts did not pierce them. The volunteers slashed relentlessly, but the more that died, the more kept on coming.

Their shoulders drooped, and they could hardly raise their arms. They called wearily to their commander, Phlai. 'We've slashed them to the end of our strength. For every one dead, another five or six turn up.'

Phlai Ngam did not slacken but could see the volunteer troops were tired to the point their shoulders drooped and they could scarcely raise their arms.

He pulled out three handfuls of tamarind leaves and enchanted them.<sup>73</sup> They turned into millions of wasps, buzzing around the forest, making everywhere pitchblack.

Each was as long as a little finger. They did not sting the Thai, only the Lao, over and over again. The poison in the sting was like a blow. Those stung repeatedly tumbled down on top of one another.

They dropped their weapons and frantically slapped with their hands. They got up, fell down, and hid their faces in their hands. They dived into the water to get away.

When they surfaced out of breath, they were stung again. If they did not dive back down, it was unbearable. Phetkla was stung in the eyes and had to close them. Horses were also pestered by masses of wasps,

and galloped off wildly with their faces smothered in wasp stings. Both officers and men fled in defeat. The Thai chased after and grappled with them.

Thao Krungkan saw Phetkla's troops fleeing away in confusion to surrender or hide. He spurred his elephant and led his troops forward.

Khun Phaen saw Krungkan coming to help the vanguard. He drove his elephant at the head of his troops, and came up in front of Krungkan.

He cried, 'Ha, sir! Is this a royal army?' Then he advanced his elephant further into the middle of the troops. 'Countless elephants and horses. Here, what country are you going off to fight?' [99]

---

<sup>73</sup> At Wat Khae in chapter 5, Phlai Kaeo was taught by Abbot Kong how to turn tamarind leaves into wasps.

The bold Krungkan was cut to the quick by this insult. ‘Someone who asks such a question without shame must be Phraya Phaen.

He’s stolen elephants and horses, helped people escape, killed many people, and written an insulting letter to boot. What a villain!

Doesn’t Ayutthaya have any horses and elephants? Is that why you come to steal from Chiang Mai? *This* army has come to round up forest bandits. If you return the goods, you’ll survive.’

Khun Phaen smiled and laughed. ‘You can talk well when you don’t think of your own shadow.’<sup>74</sup> Wrongdoing can’t be covered up by a smokescreen.

Lanchang sent the princess to the Thai capital. The King of Chiang Mai, intoxicated by delusions, had the princess abducted in the forest, and the escort captured.

The Thai royal retainers who went to receive her were jailed, flogged, and mistreated, both officers and men. Violence was committed without due respect. And a challenge was issued for an elephant duel.

It’s your king who’s the forest bandit. Why trade your life for this lady? There’s no precedent. If you love yourself and fear death, send the princess back, and live!’

Krungkan, the commander, was as angry as if struck by a thunderbolt. Knowing his king had not acted well, he felt as if a tree had fallen on him.

He pretended to cover things up. ‘Your words may go too far. The king of Vientiane is no good. He’s been a two-faced Phali’<sup>75</sup> for some time already.

A missive came offering the Princess Soi Thong to the king of Chiang Mai. Then he shifted his ground and offered her to the Thai. So we bear a grudge,

enough to lead to war. Why are you talking about us handing over this princess? Come for an elephant duel in the forest right now, to see who is good enough to survive.

If I lose to you in this contest, Soi Thong will be handed over to

---

<sup>74</sup> Spirits (i.e., the dead) don’t have shadows.

<sup>75</sup> A monkey in the Ramakian (Vali in the Ramayana), who rules the land of Kitkin. He promises his brother Sukrip (Sugriva) he will not violate the lady Dara, Sukrip’s wife, but then falls for her, forgets his promise, and marries her. Sukrip is forced into exile in the forest, where he meets Ram and Hanuman. Ram offers to take revenge on Phali. Sukrip challenges his brother to a fight, and lures him to a spot where Ram can shoot Phali with an arrow. Phali catches the arrow, but then stabs himself when he realizes his opponent is Ram. Sukrip becomes ruler of Kiatkin.

you. If you are defeated, Soi Thong must stay with Chiang In.’  
[100]

With that, he commanded the left and right wings, and all the elephants and horses of the central brigade, to advance and surround the Thai braves. ‘Don’t let anyone escape!’

Khun Phaen called out orders to his troops. ‘Don’t tangle with them. Make a defensive formation.

Samayang, give support on the right wing. Phromson, provide cover on the left wing. Thammathian, hold the rearguard. I’ll duel with him on elephants.’

He rode Si Kochadet<sup>76</sup> forward, chanting a formula and blowing it onto his forehead and tusks on both sides to make his whole head and body invulnerable. Then he rode the elephant towards Thao Krungkan.

Krungkan rode Phlai Phlik Thorani forward restlessly. He flourished the goad and pike with expertise. The two elephants closed and their tusks clashed.

The Lao elephant had been fed a lot of liquor, and was mad with intoxication. Kochadet stood clear-eyed. He was in must and had no fear of the other elephant.

Phlai Phlik Thorani advanced, and Kochadet tossed his tusks. When the Lao elephant turned and raised his head, the Thai elephant got in under his neck.

Nai Jetban, manning the side-strap, stabbed hard. The Lao elephant’s head was thrown upwards, and its haunches dropped. Khun Phaen quickly urged his elephant forward, to press his advantage and shove the opponent back.

The Lao elephant tried to push him away but could not hold its ground. The Thai elephant repeatedly smashed into him hard, forcing the Lao elephant further and further back.

Krungkan tried using the goad to make him regain ground, but the Thai elephant pushed him beyond hope of recovery. The Lao elephant was crazed with liquor, and in great pain. He jerked his shoulders trying to shake his opponent off.

Khun Phaen saw he had the advantage. He immediately flourished his pike, and slashed downwards, hitting Krungkan who collapsed on the elephant’s neck. But the blows did not pierce his neck, only bruised and drew blood.

Krungkan was able to recover and raise himself up. Khun Phaen drove his elephant close, and slashed again, making Krungkan lose

---

<sup>76</sup> Holy elephant of power. *Koch* is an elevated word for elephant from Sanskrit.

his footing and tumble headlong down from the mount. Khun Phaen slashed again, and Krungkan dropped to the ground. [101]

Khun Phaen called out to his elephant, 'Take him!' The elephant came forward trumpeting, coiled up his trunk, closed his eyes, and smashed down with his tusks. He went on hitting and stabbing until Krungkan lay flat.

He withdrew his tusks, tossed the body up into the air so it fell back down onto the points, and trumpeted again. Krungkan's head shattered, and his guts spewed out. The Lao elephant fled away from the army.

Samayang led his men to attack the brigade of Prap Mueang Maen on the right wing. Phromson led his troops to swarm into battle with the left wing of Nai Kamkong.

Both sides plunged into the attack, and the battle flowed back and forth at breakneck pace. When the Lao stabbed, the Thai defended. When the Thai slashed, the Lao parried.

But the Thai attacked hard, slashing first one side, then the other without pause. Samayang rushed on the opposing army commander, Nai Prap, but it was like hitting iron or diamond.

So Samayang blew a *prajukat* mantra, and then lopped off his opponent's head. With his sword bathed in blood, he kept on slashing left and right. The Lao began to lose their stomach for the fight.

Phromson chanted the *thon bot*<sup>77</sup> formula, and leapt forward, stabbing Kamkong in the lower stomach. He pulled out his twin-edged dagger and slashed the mahout who toppled down on the body of his master.

Soi Dao saw his commander had been defeated, and the officers on both the left and right wings were dead. He drove his tusker forward, slashing with his lance at the Thai on all sides.

Thammathian watched from the middle of the fray. In anger, he drove his elephant, Phlai Kaeo Ming Meuang, forward at a gallop to plunge his tusk into Soi Dao's breast.

Soi Dao straightened himself up enough to use his goad to pry out the tusk, and slashed in retaliation. Thammathian blew the Thunderer mantra on the wind, and sunk his lance half-way through the Lao's neck.

Then he leapt over and slashed the rear mahout. Both the Lao servant and his master died, lopped off at the neck. The remaining troops shrank away into the forest.

---

<sup>77</sup> Another formula to cancel the powers of an enemy. Originally a prayer, *thon lak bot*, offered prior to the construction of an ordination hall to remove the prior spiritual traces of any ubosot or spiritual residence that might have been on the spot in the past. Subsequently, the formula became more generally used to drive away spirits (Sup:393-4).

When the wasp stings wore off, Saentri Phetkla opened his eyes and got up. He saw the army broken and scattered. In anger, he rode off on his horse, [102]

and called out, 'Ha! Phlai and Nai Phaen. You thought I'd fled. Because wasps stung my eyes, the horse dragged me off unstopably.

I've come back. Do you dare try out my powers? Don't imagine I'll retreat. If I lose my life in defeat by you, my name will be known all over the country.'

Khun Phaen heard Phetkla's reckless words, and called out a reply for him to hear. 'You're still wagging your tongue and showing your face to challenge me.

I saw your powers against the infant. You had to raise a white flag and disappear off into the forest. Aren't you ashamed to lose to my little son? Now you want to fight the father.

Here we have the leader of all the Lao officers and men staggering up intent on saving his face! Because there's no way out, you're steeling yourself to fight me. This time, you'll die.'

Phetkla was green-eyed with fury, as if prodded in the ear with a lance a hundred thousand times. Seething with rage, he rode straight out at the head of his troops into battle without chanting any mantra.

Khun Phaen bellowed the Power-of-Giant mantra, rooting Phetkla to the spot. Khun Phaen raised his lance, and slashed down on Phetkla's head and shoulder. The Lao collapsed down on his saddle.

Ta-Lo said, 'Sir, allow me.' He rushed over and chopped down with an axe. Ta-Rak said, 'Me too.' He poked his staff in Phetkla's stomach so he fell down from the horse.

Nai Ho Samhok thrust with his spear, but the metal buckled without piercing Tri Phetkla. He threw a spear, and hacked with a machete, while Nai Ban Khwan Fa slashed him with a sword,

but it was like hitting copper or stabbing rock. The weapons crumpled and broke off at the handles. Not even a single bone was broken. His whole body was invulnerable.

Ta-Lo said, 'Khun Phaen and Phlai, sirs. This fellow Phetkla is shockingly good. However many time we slash and stab him, he doesn't die but lies there still breathing. Amazing.'

Khun Phaen called, 'Don't make a fuss. Hey, someone get a stave and stab his arse. Even though he's invulnerable, if you shove it up to his neck, he should die.' [103]

Ta-Lo and Ta-Rak hitched up their lower cloths, then wrenched

off his clothes. Nai Mo and Nai Mao brought a stave, and they pushed it through his anus up his whole body.

Many people helped give a heave. They also brought wooden poles and hammered them up to his head. Phetkla's face blanched. Blood leaked from the hole down to the ground like a slaughtered ox.

The surviving troops fled into the forest. Some horse messengers raced to the city to inform the nobles.

'Hail! All the five armies have been killed, sir. I don't know how many escaped with their lives.'

The nobles listened to the horse messengers. Then picking up their prostration cloths and tying them round their waists, they rushed to the audience hall, trembling with alarm.

They found King Chiang In, resident of the jet jewel palace, at the front. The officials prostrated, crawled in, made obeisance,

and said, 'Phetkla, Soi Dao, Thao Krungkan, Prap Mueang Maen, and the officers and men who marched out to fight with the Thai have been defeated and killed.

The remaining officers and men have fled into the forest, and are still scattered away. We don't know how many hundred there are.'

Hearing the army had been destroyed, Chiang In, acme of the city, felt as if the Prince-of-Hell was about to annihilate him. His face was plunged in gloom.

But with the will of a king he gave orders to officials of all ranks to quickly organize the defense of the capital. 'Set up camps around the city.

Close the gates securely, and reinforce them with wooden barricades. Place defensive guns all around the boundary. Organize ranks of flintlocks.<sup>78</sup>

On the camp boundaries, set up *jarong* cannon.<sup>79</sup> At the entrance of the central gate, place big cannons, *pa khao kwat wat*<sup>80</sup> and *chatchai*.<sup>81</sup> Block every opening. [104]

On the walls at the gate on the south side, suspend lots of logs which can be cut with machetes to fall and crush an enemy attack.

On the walls, clear paths for walking, make them big and broad.

---

<sup>78</sup> *khapsila* (Sup:396; Mat: 183, pix).

<sup>79</sup> A medium-sized cannon, about 3 cubits long, shot 4" diameter (Sup: 396).

<sup>80</sup> 'Lay ascetics sweep the wat', a heavy cannon, shot almost 20" diameter, used in the 1767 defence of Ayutthaya (Sup: 396).

<sup>81</sup> 'Victory umbrella,' another heavy cannon (Sup: 396).

In the centre, place guns and bonfires. Prepare hot gravel and sand for every brigade.

Have the Department of the City summon all gentlefolk and commoners from every village around. Set guards by the lamps. Make tours of inspection. Beat the gongs. Inspect the recruitment.

Set rosters to keep watch. If something happens, every house will face death. Have them accommodate the villagers brought into the city from outside the walls.

Dig out the ponds, wells, and streams of every house and fill them up with water. Have any farm which has food bring it to deposit here.

Only the local officials<sup>82</sup> are to stay at their posts. If the enemy enters their territory, they are to slash and stab them to their heart's content.'

The nobles took the orders and promptly left. They recruited people frantically, and dragged the cannon to defend the gates.

On the summons of the Department of the City, groups of men and women hurried in. Camps were set up on the perimeter of the moat. People were conscripted to man the walls.

Kindling was brought, fires made, and pots placed on them. Gravel and sand was heated in readiness at every spot. Inspectors went round to organize. Gongs were beaten around the town.

Villagers flocked in chaotically, carrying and dragging their children and grandchildren. In every house, betelboxes, food tables, and trays were buried in the earth.

Gold, rings, and other valuables were sewed into sacks and tied around the waist, sometimes in false pockets. Everyone hid important articles.

Widows and old folk bustled around wrapping things in cloth and hiding them in the cleft of the bottom, or under the chili and salt in fear of the Thai attack. [105]

Things were hidden in chignons, in blankets, in pillows, in mats, or pasted with dammar under the hulls of boats. Not even a little was left to take away.

Unmarried girls and widows who knew their menfolk had already died, cried and lamented. The whole city was packed and noisy with everyone swept inside the walls.

Inside the palace was in uproar. All the royal family members down to *mom* and *khun* were weeping and beating their chests red in desperation. Some hid things under the palace buildings.

---

<sup>82</sup> *Saen, thao, phya, and kuan.*

King Chiang In, acme of the city, spoke with the royal children and in-laws to soothe them. ‘Our people took this little battle too lightly. They fought rashly and were defeated.

But, hey, wait till you see my skill! I’ll chase them off into the forest. Their five hundred is little compared to us. We’ll crush them to dust under our feet.

Why cry and make a bad omen? Can an army of nobles rival me, a king? If they invade our city, we’ll mobilize for a day and they’ll be dead.’

He walked out front and gave orders to the officers to hasten all preparations. ‘Chiang Mai is our main camp.

If they storm the city, don’t go out to repel them. Stay secure here. We have a lot of food. They have nothing to eat.

Go and burn down all the rice granaries in the villages outside. That’ll reduce these blackguards’ strength. Watch them flying around.

Then when their supplies are finished, go out and put them to the sword. This handful of men is no match for us. We’ll kill them in less than an eyeblink.’

The officers of the four pillars prostrated and showed their approval. ‘The king’s words are appropriate as ordered on every point.

We will gain victory because of the supplies. We can cut off their support so they starve. How many *thanan*<sup>83</sup> of dried rice do they have with them. Once their rice is finished, their strength will decline. [106]

Though they set a siege, we can surround them on the outside and prevent them going for food. In a few days, they’ll run up a white flag. We can set an ambush at the entrance of the forest to get them.

Don’t delay. Deal with them. Cheer once and then storm them. Capture alive all of the five hundred who used to be our prisoners, both officers and men.’

All of the nobles discussed together and reached agreement. They came to sit and give orders on strategy. They treated the walled city, with the moat and embankment, as their camp.

---

<sup>83</sup> A volume measure based on a half coconut shell, a twentieth of a *thang*.