

30: Khun Phaen and Phlai Ngam capture the king of Chiang Mai

[III/107]

Khun Phaen, unmatched in power, watched the Lao army scatter in defeat. The Thai chased after the remnants and cut them down.

Nearing evening, the army was called back to camp. Buffalo were killed and cooked. The soldiers ate, talked, and celebrated rowdily until sunset.

Khun Phaen said to his son Phlai Ngam, 'We can't hang around here. We should take the troops to invest Chiang Mai immediately.

We shouldn't let them get organized, but attack and crush them quickly, because we don't have supplies to feed the troops. We should engage them within two days.'

Phlai Ngam agreed with everything. 'If we delay, we won't have any food because no Lao will give us anything.

Once they know the news, they'll take fright and **close the watergates**.¹ If we don't go into the city, but wait for them to come out, things will be difficult.

We must take the army to invest the city, then use **magic** to open the gates and enter at night. If we capture the king of Chiang Mai as hoped, it will bring an end to the war and our problems.'

The father and son talked until the moon rose and shone brightly, then ordered the volunteers to cut wood to build an eye-level shrine.

They made a circle of sacred thread, enchanted yantra, and arranged offerings of duck, chicken, turtle, pig, liquor, and all kinds of food.

Then Khun Phaen gathered his powers, and activated himself.² He put a sacred thread around his head, enchanted rice, inserted a spirit-doctor's knife³ in his belt, and walked over. [108]

He lit candles, placed them on the shrine, and chanted a formula to summon all the spirits, ghosts, and ghouls, including the ancestor spirits of the hills, to come and partake of the offerings.

The spirits and ghouls from every forest, saltlick, lair, and tree, including the ancestor spirits in every hill, cave, and stream, were touched by the mantra. The whole forest was in turmoil.

The Thai spirits who went as an army with Khun Phaen went

¹ Maybe this is a saying, *pit pradu nam dam pradu tha*.

² *Pluk tua*, inducing a trance or convulsions.

³ *Mit mo*, a knife owned by a spirit doctor or ritually empowered by one.

around every corner of the forest, issuing the invitation. The Lao spirits were intimidated by this power, and all came to the rite.

Spirits from all over the place arrived in thousands, and thronged around the shrine in many layers. The people sitting there could not see them,

except for Khun Phaen who saw the whole crowd. The formidable spirits showed off their tricks by transforming themselves into various fierce animals.

Khun Phaen scattered enchanted rice, and the malevolent spirits prostrated all around in the forest. Then he blew the Gem Wind⁴ formula to make the mass of spirits docile.

Khun Phaen said, 'I beg you, guardian spirits who have powers everywhere, to come with us as a spirit army to attack the principal protective guardians of Chiang In.

The king of Chiang Mai does not rule with righteousness, so the karma of the city is to fall apart. Please help us as volunteers of the realm. I invite all of you to eat these offerings.'

All the deities and spirits, touched by the gem mantra, smiled and laughed. They volunteered, saying 'Have no fear. We'll help you, all of us.'

They ate the offerings, drank the liquor, and took their leave, swarming away through the forest, transforming their bodies, and making the earth shake as if on the point of collapse.

They made as much racket as if the earth was hit by a series of thunderbolts and the city would overturn and crumble. They surrounded the city in a swarm.

The principal guardians of Chiang Mai, including the spirit of the city's welfare and the spirit lord,⁵ resided in the major and minor shrines of the city where they received offerings from King Chiang In. [109]

Seeing the approach of the adept Thai forest spirits, they conscripted and swept up the village spirits from every locality, including the spirits of graveyards under the ground, to fight against the forest spirits.⁶

All showed off their terrible powers. They hurled awesome weapons. They tossed horses and elephants at the enemy. They picked flowers as big as logs and hurled them.

The forest spirits were knocked head-over-heels, but the Thai

⁴ *Lom jinda*.

⁵ *Phra seua meuang reuangchai*, and *jao phi*

⁶ Spirits of the time used exactly the same methods as other elites.

spirits galloped up as reinforcements. They threw themselves into the battle, striking with clumps of camphorweed⁷ as if with fire.

Chiang In had been a primary ruler,⁸ but now the city's aura⁹ was weakened. He was fated to decline back to the status of his ancestors and become a vassal state¹⁰ of the Thai capital.

The forest spirits were so fierce and strong, the city spirits were unable to compete. They retreated in disorder as the forest spirits invaded the city.

The deity of every shrine ran off in disarray. The spirits of the conch, ceremonial umbrella, and Black Lord¹¹ bounded out of their sanctuaries. The spirit of the city and the spirit of the city's ruler made themselves scarce. The spirits of the royal treasure hall¹² and the *jetkuk*¹³ ran away.

All the minor spirits flew and fled. The whole city echoed with the sound of spirits crying. They carried their kids in their arms or dragged them off by the hand into the woods as the forest spirits entered the city.

⁷ หนาด, *blumea balsamifera*, camphorweed or camphor plant, a bushy herb with strong camphor smell and many medicinal properties.

⁸ เอกราช, *ekkarat*. Nowadays, the word means independent but needs to be translated here in a way which reflects the system of political relations of the time. Pallegoix gave as definition, 'King superior to others' (Pal:138). It means a king who was not subordinate and tributary to another.

⁹ อถรรพณ์, *atthap*, from Atharveda, the fourth veda, originally an Indian text which amounted to a manual of mantras. In Thai usage, *atthap* had come to the spiritual force of a place, especially relating to defence. At the foundation of a city, rituals were conducted to strengthen the place's *atthap*. Possibly these rituals included human and animal sacrifices. Most cities had shrines where rituals were regularly held to sustain the *atthap*. Commonly these were shrines with an obelisk known as the city pillar, or a tutelary deity. The spirits which Khun Phaen's spirit army is attacking resided in these shrines, and were the agents providing the city's protection.

¹⁰ *Jantapraphet*. The ambition of Ayutthaya/Bangkok to control the Lanna capital is one of the long-running themes of the history of the Chaophraya basin. In the early and mid nineteenth century, when this was written, this ambition was close to being realized. In the wars of the late eighteenth century, Lanna had slipped free of subservience to Ava with the help of Thonburi-Bangkok. It was now a truculent tributary, which would finally be absorbed from the 1870s onwards.

¹¹ พระกาฬ *phrakat*, another of the tutelary spirits of the city, full name พระกาฬไชยศรี, the black lord of holy victory.

¹² *Ho khreuang*, was the storehouse for valuables such as royal jewels. The spirit of this place was another of the main tutelary spirits of the city.

¹³ เจตคุก เจตคุปต์, heart of rule, another of the city spirits. A description of Bangkok's lak muang says the three most important are *phra suea muang*, *phra son meuang*, and *phrakat chaisi*; with *jao jetkuk/jetkup* and *jao ho klong* (กลอง) as next in line.

When his spirit army was being destroyed, the king of Chiang Mai had a premonition in his sleep. His whole family and the city people slept and had the same phantasmagoric dream,

in which the Thai army fell on the Lao, and the king, nobles, and people of the city all fled into the wilds. In every household, people awoke and interpreted the dream, amazed to find all had the same omen.

Some people said that when the time gong was sounded, they had heard a strange commotion 'as if all our spirits were fleeing.' Everybody trembled in fear.

The King of Chiang Mai awoke and got up apprehensively in the knowledge that the spirits of every house, ward, and wood had fled from the city.

He was very worried that the city would be in trouble, and the people crushed to dust. 'All because I acted badly and brought the enemy up here.' [110]

But then he recovered his royal will and again had aggressive thoughts. 'My age is already sixty-five. I won't rule this city much longer. I will not lose face and suffer the contempt of the Thai.

When one of tiger lineage dies, the stripes remain, so people know the valor of the lineage. Even though one of royal lineage is crushed to death, he does not sully the lineage's name by showing fear to anyone.

Though life is lost, reputation is preserved, to be known throughout the world, like the mighty ten-headed warrior of solar lineage¹⁴ whose beloved was stolen and given to Ram.

If I loved my own life and family, I'd hand over the princess. But I'll fight fearlessly to death so that name and reputation may appear in stories set down in writing for ever.

If I feared them, I'd send them Soi Thong and then the big problem should disappear. But I'll fight to death to retain my reputation like Totsakan, so it may be known eternally throughout heaven and earth.'

With these thoughts, he walked out front and ordered all the officers to be on guard for the enemy. 'We take the city of Chiang In as our dying home.'

The officials took the orders, crawled out, and went to inspect every person, and every camp, moat, and fighting tower. They saw

¹⁴ Totsakan, the villain of the Ramakian, equivalent to Ravana in the Indian version. The Thai kings have identified strongly with Ram of the Ramakian, especially in the Bangkok era, so it is not surprising to find Bangkok court authors have the enemy king of Chiang Mai identify *himself* with Ram's rival, Totsakan.

that every gate was closed, and buckets of hot sand placed on every wall.

They ensured that men and women attended to their duties, that the fire department provided bright lighting, and that supervisors¹⁵ made arrangements to conscript people at every location, and to inspect every department and unit.

Apson Sumali, queen of Chiang In, peak of consorts, understood that the country was in an unusual position. ‘This times, things could collapse.

I must go and beg the king to make the proper decision.’ She went to him immediately.

On arrival, she prostrated, wai-ed, and addressed the king with her head drooping and tears flowing. ‘Sire, by your grace,

I’m speaking honestly, not out of jealousy. I intend to depend on you until death. But the cause of our fate, the reason the enemy invests our city, is Soi Thong. [111]

Why keep the princess in this city, make the people suffer, and bother the dust beneath the royal foot? Please think straight.

There are countless fair and cuddlesome consorts more beautiful than Soi Thong. You should not get into a dispute with the Thai country. If you send Soi Thong with their army commander,

the Thai will take their army home because that’s what they want – to take her back. The palace and city of Chiang Mai will escape destruction. And you will be like the Buddha¹⁶ relieving your people’s hardship.

Remove this thorn and be happy. That would be the best ending. Please sire, by your grace, relieve the people of the realm of hardship.’

King Chiang In uttered a big sigh. Concern for his queen softened his heart. But in a flash, his anger returned.

‘My dear, I’ve never let anyone insult me. The King of Vientiane made me lose face. On top of that, the loathsome Ayutthayans came to invest the city.

If they’d asked for the princess nicely, I’d have given her. But they showed no respect, and use forced first – stealing horses and elephants, killing people. News has spread to the whole three worlds.

They wrote a challenging and insulting message. Even a monk in a vihan couldn’t stand this. That’s why we got involved in the battle,

¹⁵ *Sarawat* (Mc:858).

¹⁶ Not sure of this. The text is just *phra*.

and many Lao died.

It's past the time for sending them the princess now. If we don't send her, it's probably a fight to the death. Anyone born a man must die when karma wills it.'

Hearing her husband's words, Queen Apson Sumali felt desolate. He was stubborn, angry, and isolated. But it was not fitting to insist.

She made obeisance, took leave of him, and rushed away. She lay down on her bed in a state of turmoil and distress.

She hugged her daughter Soi Fa, and said through sobs, 'Your mother went to address the king. He's too stubborn, and wouldn't listen. [112]

All this has come about because of karma. He'll make the whole Lao world collapse. There'll be only tears and suffering as slaves of the Thai.

I'm so worried, my dear. You'll be their war prisoner, mother's jewel. Fate led the king astray, made him see bad as good.'

She beat her breast as if to die of distress. The little princess Soi Fa and her mother almost fainted with sadness.

Palace ladies brought fragrant water to revive them. Slowly they recovered and got up, but still beat their breasts in lamentation until they were red with bruising.

As the sun rose at dawn, Khun Phaen, whose powers made all quail and submit, drew up the army under his command.

'Harness the horses and elephants. We'll march straight through the forest and invest the outskirts of Chiang Mai today.'

The volunteers took the orders, and went to harness the horses and elephants. They rushed around finding their weapons, then formed up in a column to march.

Phra Thainam was assigned to lead the army, riding Phlai Prakai Phruek.¹⁷ Phya Kueng Kamkong came next on Phlai Phlik Phasutha¹⁸ in the middle of the army.

Khun Phaen on Phlai Si Kochadet and Phlai Ngam on Phlai Ket came at the rear. The volunteers were in high spirits, and they marched quickly,

with their hollers echoing round the forest. In half a day, they reached Chiang Mai where they halted the army. The place was crowded with officers and men.

¹⁷ Sparkling flower.

¹⁸ Overturn the earth.

They collected giant reed and wild sugar to stack on all sides, then scattered rice to transform them into a camp, with several layers at the front as protection against the city's cannon.

In the city outskirts, where they could see the Thai army had come to invest the city, there was a fearful hubbub. Throughout the city, the Lao applied themselves to their duties in fear for their lives. [113]

They placed stoves on top of the walls to heat molten lead and burning sand. They set bonfires throughout the city to bathe the whole place in red light.

King Chiang In, peak of city, came out to command officers to keep close watch and make sure nobody entered and mingled with the people.

'Bring lances, swords, guns, and other weapons. Prepare many strategic devices. Catch even cats, mice, dogs, and birds which enter the city, and kill them.'

The four commanders separated away to inspect the troops. The city was jammed with people. Every road and path was lit with fires.

Khun Phaen, whose famous powers shook the whole world, along with his son Phlai Ngam, found a good time by the manual at the third watch.

The sky was white with shining stars. The waning moon was hastening down to sleep. Father and son dressed and decked themselves. They put on the usual black lower cloth,

and tied a girdle¹⁹ round the waist, also in black. At the neck, they hung rosary beads and a golden *takrut*. They put on shirts with yantra images of Vishnu, *khamong phrai* belts,

and headbands with images of the Buddha, making them look fierce and dynamic. They applied powder instilled with yantra, and smeared their foreheads with enchanted sandal paste.

Both look serious and imposing, like the lord of the lions,²⁰ famous in battle. When ready, they made obeisance, picked up their war swords, and turned their faces according to the time of the sun.²¹

They went into the forest, activated themselves,²² and blew formulas and commands all around. They looked up for a cloud omen, and saw in the sky the figure of a powerful Vishnu

¹⁹ ราวคคค, ราวคคคค, รัศประคคค, a girdle or monk's belt (Pal:818; Mat:523).

²⁰ *Phya siharat*.

²¹ *tam yam athit*. Since this is at night, it might have a special meaning.

²² *pluk tua*, can't think how to say this

with four arms holding his weapons – the diamond mace, discus, conch, and bow. At the time to go, they both sensed the breath in their right nostril, and so set off on the right foot.

Goldchild, spirits, and ghouls surrounded them as they walked along the road. They chanted a stunning formula to make themselves invisible, and nobody greeted them with a single word. [114]

Where they crossed the embankment, moat, and camp gate, there were many Lao officers and men hit by the mantra and tumbled over one another in drowsy sleep. Khun Phaen led the way up to the walls.

They stood watching people bustling around the gate. Bonfires lit the place brightly. Artillerymen stood wearing red hats. The sound of gongs echoed all around.

Khun Phaen and his son chanted a special formula to enable them to use their spirits. They mounted the neck of the talented Goldchild, and let him display his powers at will.

In a flash, he leapt over the city wall with no difficulty. Khun Phaen blew another mantra to put people to sleep all around the city.

They went to the palace of the king of Chiang Mai. Khun Phaen sent a Lao spirit in first to unlock the locks and slide the bolts. Father and son entered the palace.

Lao women from royalty to palace guards, including the queens, consorts, and servants, could not see Khun Phaen. Walking back and forth, shoulder to shoulder,

Khun Phaen and Phlai Ngam went to visit every nook and cranny, right and left. They went up to the residence of the consort mothers,²³ to see what palace people were like.

Some were gossiping about the enemy; some beating their breasts and sobbing; some clutching cowries and praying over and over to the spirits; and some sewing waist-sacks to stuff with their gold and jewelry.

Everywhere, there was panic. In every room, more tears than sense. The father and son crept around spying, feeling compassion for their pitiful misery.

But some were making love without a care; some beautifying themselves for fun; some seeking out an old lover to fondle her cheeks, and nuzzle her breasts;

some hitting on someone in the manner of a male lover with a

²³ *Jom marada*, a consort who has given birth to a prince.

clever line in chat; some throwing fits of jealousy and spite; some quarrelling cattily with lots of noise;

some lying scratching their heads, 'If the city falls, we'll flee into the forest and die'; some saying, 'Don't be upset, we still have property so we won't be poor for long'; [115]

some saying, 'If we finish up in the southern city, explain²⁴ how **to make good?**' Some unconventional ladies told them the way. 'Don't be lazy. Respond likeably to everybody.'

A dumb one asked, 'But how to respond? If the man keeps bawling us out, we should keep responding? I'm confused.'

'Who wants to be responded to in a lewd way? You have to think for yourself how to respond suitably.'

You can't teach this sort of thing because every couple, every situation is different. If you respond to his liking, it won't take long. You must endeavor to ingratiate yourself until you're bent double.

People like us should not take a commoner as husband. It'd be like treading in chicken shit unawares. A noble is adequate. Let him feel and fondle you to his heart's content.

Fan him, massage him, comb his hair – do it well, and he'll fall for you in a trice. It's a better way to get into his heart than love potions. He'll chuck his royal wives away.

The more doddering and broken-toothed, the more they love a young girl. They'll tumble for a Lao lover, no fear. Make the effort to attend to them, and use all your tricks. The old ugly ones are best because they love their wives more.

Just beware of the young sophisticates. They're likely to enjoy you and then abandon you. If you can't help yourself, just don't go too far. If you get involved and your stomach swells up, your price drops.'

Khun Phaen and his son looked up at the stars, just at the time the Pleiades entered Taurus.²⁵

The sky was clear and the moon had set. They could see the stars shining brightly and the milky way.²⁶ According to the textbook, this indicated an auspicious time.

They scattered enchanted rice. The court ladies fell down with heads shaking. Those sitting with eyes open felt their heads spinning, and then fell over in rows all over the place.

²⁴ วิถาร, *withan*, to explain largely (=broadly) (Pal:1119).

²⁵ ดาวธง, *dao thong*, flag star, the Pleiades; ดาวรถ, *dao rot*, the chariot, Taurus, a constellation of five stars known in *saiyasat* as *robini* and sometimes in Thai as *achanai*, the horse (Red:407-8; Prachak:141-2).

²⁶ *Thang chang phueak*, the way of the white elephants.

Those coming to wash were hit by the magic and fell headlong over the bowl. Ladies who were in the middle of trimming their hairline and applying oil, dropped off holding a cotton bud.

Those engaged on embroidering lozenge patterns, slipped into drowsy sleep with the silk in their hands. Those spinning cotton, dropped the spindle and hugged the wheel. Those sitting guard by the lights, lost consciousness. [116]

Khun Phaen commanded Goldchild and the other spirits to go to the palace hall and put a spell on the Lao king, his queen, daughter, and attendants.

The spirits saluted to acknowledge the order. In an eyeblink, they went up to the royal residence. Everyone was tumbled over one another asleep under the mantra.

Because the guardian spirits and the keeper of the royal umbrella had been chased into the forest by the Thai spirits, Goldchild could enter and sit on the king to immobilize him.

Under the influence of the mantra and the spirits, the king of Chiang Mai felt deranged, as if his mind had been ripped out of his body. He lay asleep and motionless.

Khun Phaen and his powerful son chanted and blew a mantra in unison, then strode like tigers into the gilded room of the golden ruan.

It was crammed with palace maidens, hit by the magic and tumbled on top of one another. All looked fittingly beautiful, with alluring complexions.

They slept covered by quilts in votive-deity pattern. Mattresses, pillows, and mats were neatly arranged. The silk mosquito-nets were fragrant and splendid. These were the attendants for every purpose.

The father and son went up to the second level, which was brightly lit by torches. Consorts lay sleeping inside. All looked superlatively beautiful.

They were covered by scented silk coverlets. Some revealed a naked white breast. Their cheeks looked as bright and smooth as the skin of maprang. All were clearly more senior girls.²⁷

They lay fast asleep on their pillows, looking softly pretty on a velvet spread. Their little mosquito-nets were hung with tassels and equipped with doors. Everything around was fine silk in many colors.

Father and son went to the third level, resplendent with torches and lamps. They strode boldly ahead, and saw little palace ladies fast

²⁷ *Sao yai*, probably meaning they were around 20.

asleep.

All were just of age with superb figures, healthy appearance, and fair sleek complexions like celestial maidens. They wore upper cloths of colored silk, bracelets on their wrists, supple chains around their waists, [117]

and ear-rings hanging from both ears. They were slightly built with thin waists and perfect breasts, firm like swelling lotus buds. A jampa flower tucked between them would not slip through.

Phlai Ngam walked behind, glancing around, mortified that these were the king's reserve seats.²⁸ He slipped his hand among the budding breasts, as firm as tightly packed young petals.

Khun Phaen saw his son going for a fondle. He clenched his fist and thumped his son's back. 'This is royal property! Don't fondle! If you get carried away, we'll fail.

We shouldn't do this, see, we're commoners.²⁹ These are ladies who are forbidden to others. What's more, to be expert in warfare, you shouldn't dally with women.'

Phlai Ngam replied, 'I just came for a peek and a little feel while they're asleep. They're pretty. I'm not forgetting myself and getting carried away.'

'Hey, we only have to sacrifice one night – just help one another to go all out and succeed. When the war's over, whatever ladies you want, except for the princess,³⁰ you're welcome to them.'

Father and son went along to the gilded room where the king slept. They magically unlocked and unbolted the door, and went up to the half-moon platform on the living level.

They entered under the golden spire and saw the palace hall with a bedroom befitting the king's status. Two golden curtains were fastened with draw strings. The walls were carved in a floating pattern.

The ceiling was painted in a linear golden pattern. A glittering crystal chandelier hung by a chain. Hanging lamps added to the brilliance of the light.

In front of the royal bed there were many young palace ladies, the shift on forward duty. They were petite with slight figures and fair complexions, dazzlingly beautiful.

Eyes, brows, cheeks, and hair were splendid. Breasts nestled tightly together in beautiful pairs. They had mattresses, pillows, carpets,

²⁸ See chapter 21 (last page). A contemporary expression for women other than the major wife.

²⁹ Khun Phaen has been given official rank but he still considers himself a phrai.

³⁰ It could be read as 'a princess', any royalty.

and bedspreads trimmed with embroidery. Their upper cloths were colored silk with trimming.

They had gold bangles on their upper arms, rings on little fingers, soft ten-inch necklaces, and ruby ear rings. Their faces were as delicate as nutmeg. [118]

Beside the bed was a group of musicians, all beautiful, graceful, fair and as alike as dolls in the same costume.

The ranat player slept tumbled over the gong player, the singer on the lutist, the fiddler on the castanet player, and the drummer lost to this world.

Father and son walked up to the beds in the room on the left. They pushed aside the superb golden curtains, and entered the bedroom.

They saw two ladies asleep. Caught by the lamplight, their skin looked radiant, soft, and fair as white cotton.

They examined the elder one. She had the supreme elegance of nobility and her complexion was still clear and fine, but her bosom was no longer full.

They saw she was the mother, and the other young beauty was the royal daughter. She was just of age with the figure of a young lady, and two full breasts like heavenly flowers,

or red lotuses just emerging above the water, so inviting to pick. Phlai stared unblinking. His father whispered to warn him to restrain himself.

She lay on the pillow like a crystal log. Her radiant face had no wrinkle or blemish. Her eyebrows had a beautifully soft curve. Her eyes were wonderfully pretty, even in sleep.

Her nose was like a royal goad,³¹ her lips freshly gleaming as if painted with rouge,³² her cheeks like the skin of maprang, her neck and chin nicely rounded.

She was strikingly beautiful, neither fat nor thin, gorgeous from head to toe. Her hair was drawn into an attractive chignon, held by a gold cloisonné³³ hairpin.

She wore ear-rings, sparkling with diamonds; a breast chain studded with jewels of many colors; gold bracelets in the shape of a female naga; and rings set with glittering colored gems.³⁴

She wore a lower cloth with embroidered kanok pattern, and a silk

³¹ *Phrasaeng kho*

³² Literally *fāng*, sappanwood, but probably this means a red make-up here.

³³ ราชาวดี, *ratchawadi*, from Persian *lazuverdi*, name for a blue chemical (Red:686).

³⁴ Did royalty always dress for bed so heavily? Or were they prepared to flee? Or is this just poetic imagination?

upper cloth with a bright golden stripe. The queen wore a lower cloth with a *klai*³⁵ kanok pattern, and an upper cloth of yellow silk with a pattern of gold jasmine. [119]

‘The queen’s daughter is just of age. She looks around sixteen if I’m not mistaken. She’s cute and her skin is perfectly soft, just right to be hugged and stroked as a royal wife.’

They walked towards the master bed and wrenched the curtain aside. Everything was resplendently golden. Beside the bed lay several swords.

They saw King Chiang In, peak of kings. In sleep, he looked imposing. He was fair and had a full, rounded figure befitting the head of the city’s royal clan.

He was covered all over with golden material in a splendid pattern of Garuda clutching a naga. His sleeping garments had an offertory-rice³⁶ pattern on a red base, looking appropriately fine for the status of a king

Phlai Ngam walked in on his left, and Khun Phaen on his right. They picked up the swords placed there so he had no weapons to attack them.

Then they stood beside him on left and right like bold lion kings.³⁷ Khun Phaen blew a mantra to drive away the king’s *kuman* spirit, which crawled down and left the monarch.

Khun Phaen stepped up on the golden bed and bellowed the Power-of-Lord-Garuda mantra at the top of his voice. **The monarch started awake like the prince frightened by the imposing Garuda.**³⁸

He opened his eyes to see the Thais in his chamber, and felt a shiver of deep fear. In the manner of a king, he resolved to fight. He grasped around for his weapons, but found none.

He felt as if someone had come to lop off his head with a trident. His mind seemed on the point of breaking apart. ‘My life has fallen into the hands of demons. I’ll be dead before long for certain.’

He was about to open his mouth and plead for his life, but felt ashamed and changed his mind. He raised himself and sat, mute and unmoving, resigned to a probable death.

Khun Phaen saw that King Chiang In was shocked silly yet

³⁵ กลาย, don’t know what this is

³⁶ เฝ้านิมนต์, *khao bin*, offertory rice, popped rice for offerings, a pattern based on thbis rice, similar to lotus buds (RI:185; Pal:56; Mat:133).

³⁷ *Phya siharat*

³⁸ not sure of this line at all

maintained his royal manner and sat silent and unmoving. Khun Phaen bellowed out loud,

‘Ha! Hey, king and foe! You’re an evil fellow, guilty of envy. The King of Ayutthaya didn’t come to crush your city. [120]

The King of Sattanakanahut presented his daughter to the Thai city willingly. But you acted villainously, seized her, and ruined friendly relations.

You also captured the Thai who went to escort her, and had them imprisoned, flogged, and mistreated grievously. Then you sent a provocative missive to the city to bring up an army for an elephant duel.

You don’t act humbly like a vassal state, but are arrogant and devious in every way. Hence the king has sent us – just middle-ranking soldiers – to put an end to your life.

Don’t sit there with your face bowed, mute and still. Do you agree to die or will you change your mind?

Who will this Lao country belong to? Whatever you have to say, then say it without delay.’

The King of Chiang Mai felt his chest was being destroyed by a raging fire. He had no chance to fight back because the Thai soldiers were right upon him,

and he had no weapon. He was powerless and exasperated. If he tried to flee, he would not get away. He kept quiet and felt sorry for himself.

Fearing death, he decided to relax his royal manner and his pride. He said, ‘Now, you two gallant soldiers, I made mistakes in my thinking.

If you have the mercy to spare my life, I’ll be a servant of the crystal lord. I haven’t had a whiff of Soi Thong. I haven’t harmed her or touched her sexually.

I agree to submit and offer myself to the king, along with my daughter and beloved wife, the queen. I also offer my capital and its people under the dust of the royal foot.’

Khun Phaen and Phlai Ngam heard King Chiang In out, but still had doubts. They could see he was overcome by fear of death, and agreed to submit because of fright.

So Khun Phaen responded, ‘Are the king’s words honest and truthful for sure, or are you accepting defeat because you’re in a tight spot, and will later go astray perhaps?’

The King of Chiang Mai replied, ‘I won’t back away from the word I’ve given. Everything is true. The word of a king is like that of

a tusker. [121]

If in future, I crookedly retract like a turtle's head, may I lose my life and be overwhelmed by hardship in the great Lokanta³⁹ hell from the day of my death for a whole era.

I won't listen to my wife and daughter if they press me to break my word. I'll uphold my promise until death. I beg you two officers to believe me.'

King Chiang In's promise overcame Khun Phaen's doubts. The two relaxed their aggressiveness immediately, and went to sit close beside him for a talk.

'If you're straight and keep your oath, leave the matter of your punishment to me. I'll plead your case with the king so you should not be at risk of losing your life.'

Then they gave him back his swords. 'Please cheer up and don't be upset. We'll take our leave of you and return to where the Thai army is staying.'

King Chiang In saluted to accept the swords. His gloomy red face brightened up. 'If you have mercy as you say, I'll escape death because of you.

Let me entrust my life to you. Please plead with the king to pardon my fault, so whether I live or die will be because of your grace.'

Khun Phaen and Phlai Ngam felt mercy for the king, and so replied that they had no doubts.

'Everything we have said to you is true. If you keep your word as you've said, you shouldn't be in danger.'

Father and son apologized, got up, took their leave, and walked down from the spire, glancing around. They whispered orders to their spirits, ghouls, and Goldchild.

'Stay close to here and spy on the palace. Keep watch on the king of Chiang Mai in his room. Follow his tracks and keep an eye out. Let me know how he's thinking.

When his wife and daughter come to plead with him, if he holds firm, just stay here quietly. If he listens to his wife, breaks his word and becomes an enemy, come and tell me quickly.' [122]

He lifted the sleeping spell on people. Khun Phaen and Phlai Ngam became invisible, exited the gate through the keyhole, and returned to the Thai army.

³⁹ See note in chapter 28.

They walked smiling into the camp and sat down. Phra Thainam, Kamkong, the volunteers, and all the soldiers saluted their commander and asked about the fight.

Khun Phaen related how he went with Phlai Ngam, laid a sleeping spell, and crept up to the king. They woke him and could have taken his life.

‘He almost died of shock, and agreed to offer Soi Thong and his daughter, along with all the officials and people of the Lao country, including the commoners, royalty, his wife and the ladies.

He humbled himself as a servant and asked to be a vassal of the capital of Ayutthaya. His only request was that he be spared death, and he swore an oath that his word was true.’

Hearing Khun Phaen’s account, all the officers and men, Lao and Thai, were over the moon. The war with Chiang In was over, and their hardship too. They would sing and dance all the way home.

Officers and men talked and laughed until almost dawn. Khun Phaen and Phlai Ngam retired to sleep.

At dawn the sun rose and shone in all directions. King Chiang In, peak of the city, went to the residence of the queen.

He seated himself on the jewel throne, and told her, ‘While I was asleep last night, enemies came right up to me.

I was startled and my mind was racing. I grasped for my weapons but they’d disappeared. I was ashamed to run away, so I offered the Lao city to the Thai king,

along with Princess Soi Thong, the main issue. I also presented the consorts, all the palace ladies, including Soi Fa, and the city’s people under the royal foot.

I admitted fault, humbled myself, offered tribute of gold, and begged only for my life. I’ve given my oath on everything. [123]

I’m grateful to the enemy soldier who came. When I gave my promise, he went back to his main army. My darling, don’t be disheartened. This is the result of karma made in the past.’

Listening to her husband, Queen Apson felt the Prince-of-Hell was destroying her. She beat her breast in lamentation.

‘My lord and master, I told you already but you wouldn’t listen. I knew for sure things would be dangerous from the moment the Thai brought the army to our city.

They used powers to open the jail, released prisoners, stole horses and elephants, and killed people. Just thirty-five of them could do all that! If they weren’t good, they wouldn’t have attacked so boldly.

Our five commanders who went to do battle were defeated, killed, and piled up like logs. Even our spirit army ran away and hid. But you were too stubborn.

If you'd just compromised and handed Soi Thong over, their army would have returned to the Thai city, and Chiang Mai would have survived to flourish.

But how can we avoid disaster now? Though we may not die yet, we'll become vagabonds. Our people will be battered about and suffer terrible hardship, both noble and commoner.

It'll be like the old episode about Sida. She was born to have Lanka devastated. The ten-faced one was so infatuated with her, that his own family died and the bodies chopped dead mounted up in piles.

Queen Montho made the ten-faced lord so angry by challenging him that he had the people of the city killed miserably.⁴⁰ Similarly here, you were infatuated by Soi Thong and so led your family to death.

Soi Thong is like Sida. She was born to have the city of Chiang Mai devastated. When I opposed you, I was accused of jealousy and at my wit's end.' She sobbed and cried herself senseless.

Queen Apson's words made the king of Chiang Mai as hot as if his heart was on fire. He replied, 'Why do you keep going on like this?

I wasn't infatuated by Soi Thong. I was angry at Vientiane. That was the main issue. They showed no respect and gave her to the Thai, making me lose face. So I had her seized and brought here. [124]

If I'd really fallen for her, how come I haven't made love to her? It's half a year now and I haven't gone to her. What a pity you keep going on at me.

I knew our city would have a war, and I aimed to defeat them. It's like a gambling game. You play to see who's good, who'll win.

Against my hopes, I lost to them. And now you keep sticking the knife in to hurt me. But the error's made, and all this is too late. Why be sad for nothing when it doesn't achieve anything?

Even if you cry tears of blood, the mistake won't go away. We've come to this trouble in the passage of time. When it's time to die,

⁴⁰ In the Ramakian, Totsakan, the ten-faced lord, abducts Sita to Lanka where he suffers a fearful assault by Rama, his brother Lak, Hanuman, and his monkey army. Totsakan's brother Kumphakan, son Inthorachit, and many other are killed. Totsakan's queen, Montho, revives some of them with her magical mother's mix, but is then tricked by Hanuman, who also steals Totsakan's house and thereby undermines his invulnerability. Now matters are hopeless, Montho pleads with Totsakan to surrender Sita so that Totsakan's family and the giants in Lanka may survive, but Totsakan stubbornly refuses: 'If I were to do this, my name would be scorned in all the Three Worlds.' (Premseri, Ramayana, 477-8)

you must die.’

The king went out front with all the nobles, and related from start to end how the city had been offered to the Thai.

‘Go and tell the officers and men to dismantle the camps, open the Chiang Mai city gates, drag the guns back to store, and disperse the people out of the palace.

Level the sward and build twenty lodges⁴¹ and an oblong central hall with walls. Make a bamboo fence around.

Prepare a playing field for elephants and horses. Make things splendid both outside and in, with white cloth for the ceiling, and curtains hanging. Then invite the two commanders and their men to come.’

Phraya Jantharangi got the idea in his head and awkwardly crawled out backwards. He gave orders to many officers to divide up the work.

They fetched the guns, decommissioned them, and put them in store. They opened the city gates, sent away the people who came from outside the city, and built the row of lodges inside.

The ground was cleared and leveled, and twenty oblong buildings constructed, enclosed by a large fence, with large and small stables for the elephants and horses.

Then orders were given to officials to invite the two commanders and their army, including both officers and men, both Thai and Vientiane Lao, to stay in the lodges inside the city. [125]

Old Thao Nu with the officials arranged palanquins. They hurried along to the Thai army, and made obeisance to the two commanders,

saying ‘King Chiang In, peak of kings, has sent us to invite you and all the Lao and Thai soldiers to stay in comfort in the city.’

Khun Phaen, whose powers were as strong as a lion, watched the nobles crawl up, pay their respects, and invite them to stay in the lodges.

He summoned Phlai, Thainam, Kamkong, and all the volunteer troops. Khun Phaen and the two other officers sat in palanquins.

Kamkong rode his horse at the rear of the mass of troops. They reached the lodges and went to stay inside.

They came out to sit and lie around, overflowing the area. They

⁴¹ *Thamniap*, which conveys the idea of an official residence

dressed specially according to rank, and were billeted accordingly.
Food was provided for the Thai army at every meal.