

40: Phra Wai is routed

[III/329]

The king, pinnacle of the city and regions, resided in a glittering crystal palace, packed with palace ladies and inner consorts,

all beautiful, fair, delicate, and bright, who recited and played fiddle music harmoniously, adding to the royal pleasure. When the sun brightened the sky,

he bathed, put on his costume and regalia, and went out to the window at the front. All the high nobles in attendance prostrated.

The minister of Mahatthai, paid respects to the king. ‘My liege, oh righteous king. My life is under the royal foot.

A report has come from the governor of Suphan, brought by several local officials. It says that a bandit troop of almost one thousand has appeared,

and has created great confusion and nuisance by attacking village people. Spies sent to investigate say they have established a camp in the forest at Doembang.

The governor has made preparations to defend the town, but the bandits have not approached and invested it. The governor would go out to engage them, but thinks that, as he has not yet informed the royal foot,

he could be held seriously at fault if officers and men are killed in the fighting. Anybody who saw the troop that has come would be wrong to call it an army,

as it has only marched here but has not put up a fight. Hence it should be called a gang of simple forest bandits. Seeing so many men, it does not look good.’

Hearing this, the mighty king smiled. ‘This report is a lot of mumbling. Doembang is almost to Suphan.

If this other army came from somewhere far away, why would it wait there? If it has the opportunity, it should make a secure camp and take the town. [330]

The governor of Suphan doesn’t go out to fight, but is hiding in the forest, and wrongly informing us this is a gang of forest bandits.

The governor of Suphan is a coward so he doesn’t want to go out to fight. He sends this report to excuse himself for fear of me. I understand this silver-tongued fellow completely.

Get Phaen to go and take a look. He'll capture them easily in an instant. Have this Suphan governor serve in Phaen's army.' The window was closed.

The minister came out of the palace, and had sealed orders prepared, one to send to Suphan, and the other for Phan Phao¹ to take to Phra Kanburi. Phan Phao took the cylinders and went by boat, reaching Kanburi in three days.

Khun Phaen received the order with the Ratchasi seal.² In the presence of his local officials, he unfolded and read the message.

When he knew the contents, a smile spread across his face. He told Phan Phao to go quickly. 'What's the fuss with only these few forest robbers?

They won't be able to put up much of a fight? If I go, I fear they'll run off. If they dare to hold their ground, we'll finish them off and should get rich.

We'll catch a lot of war prisoners to use as servants, as well as elephants, horses, gold, and silver. We'll get a lot of lovely new Mon girls with chignons for the officers!'

He ordered the palat, yokkabat, registrar, and others to quickly organize troops to march to battle on the following day.

The palat, yokkabat and officials busily arranged matters. Lists were drawn from the recruitment rolls, and the registrar promptly issued the call-up.

Those who fled, were thrashed without discrimination. Oxen, horses, and elephants were collected, along with all kinds of weaponry. [331]

Kaeo Kiriya heard there would be a war, so prepared and set out supplies. Khun Phaen came into the inner room and summoned Kaeo Kiriya and Laothong for a talk.

'You both stay back here and don't be alarmed. This campaign will take some time. Chumphon, our darling son, is now very knowledgeable. I had him come in disguise in the hope of luring Meun Wai out to be killed for revenge.'

Kaeo Kiriya was distressed to hear this, and could not stay quiet.

¹ Phan Phaonurat, who appeared in chapter 2.

² The seal of Mahatthai.

‘You’re angry at your own child enough to threaten him! Where do his flesh, blood, and innards come from?’

For better or worse, you could beat him up for his wrongdoing, but don’t think of taking his life. Have sympathy for the lovely Wanthong. On the day she died, she entrusted

the now motherless child to depend on his father. Still you want to go this far? Tell Chumphon to take his troops back. Don’t create more anger and confusion.’

Khun Phaen clenched his teeth in anger. ‘How many hundred days before I’m gone? I’m angry that Thong Prasi stopped me out of compassion for my son.

You think Phaen is old and will die soon. You want to depend on Phra Wai’s kindness in the future. From way back, you’ve loved Wanthong greatly.

And you were always on at me too, which I why I agreed to bring her back to live with me. But now you’ve fallen in love with her son and wish to protect him. Though he’s being arrogant, you refuse to hear it.

Don’t try to stop me. I’m not listening. Things are all over between Wai and me. If I fall down dead on the ground, please turn to depending on Wai.’

Kaeo replied, ‘Oh, sir! Don’t make such accusations. They disgust me. I try to stop you out of pity and concern. If you won’t listen, that’s up to you.

Why not go off and kill one another. But don’t bother me with this sort of talk. You can make accusations the whole year, but don’t keep on at me because I’m too lazy to reply. [332]

I fear your mouth. I don’t want to argue. Fly away, I don’t want to talk to you. The supplies are all set out ready, including food. Go off and have fun killing one another.’

Khun Phaen snapped his face away, and went off into the main ruan. He dressed, decked himself with amulets, and walked out. He mounted Color-of-Mist, and left at an auspicious time

with crowds of local officials following behind, and the troops hollering loudly and banging gongs. They quick-marched away from Kanburi.

The governor of Suphan got his order, and prepared troops, both officers and men. He waited for Khun Phaen then marched to join forces with him.

They proceed to Nangbuat³ where they planted a flag and set up camp with units arrayed by rank, trenches around the perimeter, and detachments posted as guards.

Chumphon saw the camp being established and was not afraid. Using his powers and expertise, he posted a line of dummy troops as guards.

He had Phlai Phet⁴ and Goldchild enter into the bellies of two of the dummies, disguised as Suphan villagers. He sent them to the other camp,

with orders for them to act like villagers who had been captured. 'Tell them I sent you with a letter to their chief officer.

If they enquire, tell them we are new Mon from Hongsa.⁵ And ask them who is leading their troop.' The spirits took leave and hurried away with the letter

to the front of Phra Kanburi's camp. They kept their distance, pretending to be scared. The troops were surprised to see them coming from afar, and swarmed out to meet them.

Phlai Phet and Goldchild sank down on their heels and cried out, 'We're villagers from around here. That army captured us,

and sent us with this letter to the chief of your army. Two of us had to come as we're afraid. I wai you. Please take us to him.' [333]

The soldiers tied their arms tightly, not knowing they were spirit dummies. They took them to report to Khun Phaen who asked, 'Who are they?'

The soldiers informed him, 'We caught them. They say they came from the new Mon. When asked, they told us in Thai that they're bringing a letter.

Phan Phao and the governor of Suphan interrogated them menacingly. 'What village do you come from? How many troops have they got?'

The mantra dummies pretended to fear a beating, and raised their

³ Now merged with Doembang as one amphoe. Judging from the position of the wats Doembang and Nangbuat on the army maps, and from the early nineteenth-century royal maps, Nangbuat was about 6 kms south of Doembang (RSM: 92, actually readable only on the maps themselves).

⁴ This name is perhaps the most glaring of several mistakes which suggest this chapter is a cut-and-paste job using material from later episodes of the sepha. Phlai Phet is the son of Phra Wai and Simala, born in chapter 42 below.

⁵ Hongsawadai, Hamsavati, Pegu, main city of the Mon region of lower Burma.

hands in wai. 'We come from the forest village of Banyan Landing.⁶
We got caught because we didn't run away in time.

Their troops are about a thousand plus. We overheard them saying
they came from Hongsa, far away.

They had us bring this letter.' They handed it over. Khun Phaen
put on his glasses, unfolded the letter, and read the contents.

'I, the army chief, by name Saming Matra the splendid, from the
region of Hongsa, am not a royal servant,

but chief of my own troops, and feared by people for my power
and bravery. I am no villain, but uphold compassion towards
people.

I have heard news that all the people of Ayutthaya villainously
fight and kill one another, doing evil and creating karma. They
attacked Chiang Mai in the north.

I think this is wrong and I'm concerned. If I close my eyes to this,
people will be buried in suffering. So I brought my troops here with
the intention to teach you a lesson. If you act sensibly, supplicate,
and do not resist,

I will not kill you. My only aim is to impart instruction. If you do
not surrender and play tricks, I will get my troops to attack and slash
you.

You have come here and set up camp. If you want to fight, say so.
If you want to surrender, come out immediately. Don't try
anything, or I'll slash the lot of you.' [334]

Khun Phaen made an angry show of throwing the letter away. He
clapped his hands, 'These shameful Mon! He's from far away and
never been here, so he speaks haughtily at length,

like a puppy who's never had a sniff of a tiger. If someone told
him, he wouldn't believe it! He boasts of his military powers like a
winged termite⁷ flying into the fire without knowing it.

Reply to him to come out in the morning. If he lazes around, I'll
go and chop his skull. If he has eight thousand, I'll slash the lot of
them. Don't let them be stupid enough to believe they'll survive.'

The mantra dummies saluted, took the letter, and hurried away
into the forest. Coming to where Chumphon was, they fell down.

⁶ *Tha don sai*. No sign of such a place. Probably this is an internal literary reference to the place where Wanthong and Khun Phaen fled in chapter 18. That would be far south of the current position.

⁷ *Malaeng mao*.

Phlai Phet and Goldchild handed over the letter, saying. 'The talented Phaen is the head of their army.'

Phlai Chai Chumphon gave orders to all the mantra dummies. 'This evening, I'll attack my father's camp. Don't kill anybody.

Just capture Phra Kanburi and send him to me.' They made preparations. At dusk,

the two armies were drawn up ready. The sound of their gongs and cheers echoed round the forest. A bright moon lit the scene. Cicadas trilled plaintively.

At around ten o'clock (*sip thum*), the wind changed direction and the sky became overcast. Chumphon saw this was an auspicious and appropriate time. He had the dummies drawn up in a column.

He harnessed Blueblack and put a yantra on him. He leapt onto the horse, and they made their way forward until they were close to the enemy. He had the troops keep silent,

and creep through the forest without making sounds underfoot, until they arrived in front of Khun Phaen's camp. Then they sent up a hollering and fell on the camp. The soldiers were shocked.

They were asleep and unaware of the enemy. They jumped up in chaos. Nobody was able to grab anything. The figures attacked them hand-to-hand, [335]

hitting them with handles of their lances, thwacking them lightly with the flat of their swords, and landing kicks and punches not hard enough to kill them. The troops cried out in pain, and fled stumbling and scrambling away to find somewhere to hide.

The governor of Suphan trembled all over and fell flat on his back. He called out to all his grandmothers and grandfathers, lords and officers, 'Come and help me!'

His cloth slipped off. He crawled naked and bent double under a shelter where he hid, curled up. Phan Phao squatted on his heels looking around as the figures swarmed over the army.

He picked up a lance and stabbed a dummy, which roared, grabbed the lance, and kicked him. Crying 'I'm dead!' Phan Phao fell over with his head buried on his chest. Khun Phaen called out, 'Defend! No retreat!'

I'll slash any coward who turns tail, without exception!' He rode his horse at the attackers. His troops recovered themselves,

sent up a cheer, grabbed their swords, and piled into the attack, slashing and stabbing. Hollers and gunshots rent the air.

But their weapons did not pierce the dummies or missed them altogether. The dummies spun around and leapt forward again. The

troops brought powder bombs, lit the fuses, and threw them, but the figures still swarmed towards them.

Khun Phaen rode his horse into the thick of the fray, chopping and slashing. The dummies came in waves, pushing and driving him until he arrived in front of his son. They were happy to see one another.

The troops began to break. 'This lot aren't human. You can't fight them.' They took to their heels. The governor of Suphan came up to Phan Phao.

'My eyesight's no good,' he said, nodding his head, 'Please let me ride on you, sir.' Phan Phao angrily threw him off. 'This oldie will be the death of me.'

All were afraid and bent on saving themselves. They plunged into the forest and disappeared. Khun Phaen and his son summoned the dummies and spirits.

They gathered in a great mass and sent up a cheer that echoed around the forest. They set off across the plain towards Ayutthaya, passing Suphan town. [336]

The villagers with houses and shops close to the road were scared senseless. Every single household scattered and stumbled away in fright.

Khun Phaen and Phlai Chai Chumphon led the army of figures and crowd of spirits to Talan,⁸ and set up camp at the edge of the forest.

The inhabitants of Talan abandoned their houses and fled trembling into the forest. Khun Phaen and his son were pleased. 'Here's where we'll see what Wai will do.'

After the army had scattered, Phan Phao ran through the forest, trembling with fear. He sank down to hide in the undergrowth, but was frightened by rustling sounds.

Two of his men were with him. They pushed on through the forest without stopping, and nearing dawn, exhausted and heaving for breath, they reached Ayutthaya.

He went to his house and called out to his wife from afar, 'Come and get me.' In alarm, his wife lit a torch and came out. Phan Phao shouted, 'Don't use the light!'

She shone the torch on her husband. 'Oh, you look truly frightful. There's not a scrap left of your lower cloth.' Phan Phao called out, 'Hey! I almost died!'

⁸ About twenty kms northwest of Ayutthaya, near Phak Hai, a crossing point on one of the north-south waterways (now Khlong Phak Hai).

At dawn, he wound a cloth round his belly and went straight to the sala. He informed the officials who were shocked into confusion.

When the king came out, they went in to audience. Phan Phao stumbled in like a madman. The king saw him enter and asked,

‘Hey, why did Phan Phao come back? Did Phaen catch the bandits or not? Your face looks pale. What’s up? Why didn’t Phaen come?’

Phan Phao prostrated elegantly three times. ‘My liege, almighty king. I took the order

to Phra Kanburi and Phra Suphan. Both brought troops which joined together as a big army. We hastened to Nangbuat. Just when we made camp, they sent a letter. [337]

He said he was a Saming from the Mon country, the region around Hongsa. His name was Saming Matra. He’d come to subdue the Thai.

Phra Kanburi replied challenging him to come and fight. That day at dusk, torch time, our army slept with guards placed. In the quiet close to dawn, suddenly

they invaded our camp, swarming all over us before we knew it. They attacked, slashing at our people. The camp broke and scattered.

Phra Kanburi went out to defend, and rallied the troops to strike back at them. We slashed at one another in the forest, but they had great martial powers.

They were invulnerable to piercing. We lost many men. Only Phra Kanburi had the powers to ride into the attack, slashing at them.

But they swarmed all over him. He was captured and has not returned. It’s not known whether they killed him or not. Allow me to inform the royal foot, oh victorious king. My life is under the royal foot.’

The king was furious. He stamped his foot and bellowed like thunder, ‘This doesn’t sound like a skilled army.

The camps were close together, but they trustingly put down their heads and nodded off to sleep, letting them creep up and slash them dead without time to defend! All the torches had gone out so there was no light to see them.

I’ve never seen anything like this. It looks like they were lazy and had no intention of fighting. Before long, this lot will have the idea of playing around with me, and making trouble.

Phan Phao came back first. He ought to be thrashed with two canes. This is going to escalate into a major matter. They’ll have the

idea of advancing on the capital.

The more I think, the more I'm infuriated that they were able to capture my Phaen. I've lost a valiant soldier. The likes of him cannot be found.

He was lost because he's now old. If he was like before, this could never have happened. Struth! These toasted turds will bare their teeth in glee. We've lost position to them. They'll get above themselves. [338]

They'll probably come to invest the city because they think we don't have any good people. Summon Wai immediately. I'll send him to catch these Mon.'

An inner guard took the order and rushed out of the palace. He found Phra Wai and told him the king had ordered him to appear.

Phra Wai heard the matter was urgent. He was stirred by the news of a war. He wrapped a cloth round his waist, and went to the palace with his servants following behind.

He put on a *sombak*, crawled in, made obeisance, and waited with face bowed. The king turned his face and said suddenly,

'The more I think, the more I'm furious. It's wrong because of Phaen for a start. He was sent to command the army but he carelessly got defeated.

He ceded the position and let them capture him. Officers and men have been lost. The Mon have advanced to Talan. Who will go out to repel them?'

The king looked at Phra Wai and thought sadly of his father. Tears bathed his face. The loss of such a supreme warrior riled his anger. Furiously he ordered Phra Wai,

'This Saming Matra has killed your father, Khun Phaen. Raise an army and go to capture him. You will leave at dawn tomorrow.'

Phra Wai thought for a time and then told the king what he thought. 'I think there's something wrong. What martial powers do these Mon have?

If they'd defeated anyone else it would be understandable, but it seems too much that they should have defeated Phra Kanburi since he's skilled in magic.

Even it was beyond his powers to defend himself, he should've become invisible and gone into hiding to return later. Now that he's dead, why should I live. I'll go to engage them.'

With that, he made obeisance to take leave and returned home. He completed the arrangements for the army, using the troops who earlier had gone to Chiang Mai. [339]

He ordered supplies, horses, and elephants, then went to inform Thong Prasi. 'This black-hearted new Mon has killed father Phaen.'

Thong Prasi beat her breast. She fell down from the central hall, rolling on the ground as if dead and not breathing. People helped her but it was a long time before she recovered and could get up.

'Oh, Khun Phaen of mine! You've abandoned your mother. My heart is trembling. I think this is the end of me.

You've been fatherless since you were small. I raised you until adulthood. I was happy that you went to eat Kanburi. I intended to entrust you with my corpse.

But now you've fled away from me again. If only I could cremate your body, I wouldn't complain. But you've died far from my sight because of this new Mon. You've lost all your dignity.

Now my son is dead, and my grandson has disappeared from my sight, there's only me left and how long will I last? Day and night I see only Phra Wai. I don't know if it's good or bad that he'll lead this army.

Oh, I'm sorry for you Wai. It's disheartening. Your little brother has run off. There's nobody to turn to. If I could go with you, I would.

The Mon killed your father, and there's nobody to help you fight. You're still a small kid that needs instruction. Your grandfather, Khun Krai, was a great teacher.

Before you lead an army out, study the position. When you halt to sleep, be very watchful. Study the enemy. If it's possible to attack and kill them, then attack.

If the enemy forces are formidable, build fortifications for a strong defense. In battle, beware of dangers. If it's possible to surround an enemy, then do so.

If you're under heavy pressure, make an opening to break out. If your troops scatter and flee, slash at them with your sword to drive them back into the fight. Before retreating, find an opportunity, don't just take fright.

As your grandfather Khun Krai was an old teacher, put your hands together at your head to ask his blessing. Go well, and be victorious.' Wai made obeisance and left. [340]

He went into the room to give orders to his two wives. 'Don't be afraid. Listen to what I have to say. Act properly as the senior, Simala. Soi Fa is not a tricky person.

She's just a Lao hillbilly. Help to instruct her. If she makes small mistakes, don't reprimand her. Let me return home first. Don't forget this.'

Soi Fa and Simala raised their hands in wai. ‘Go. We’ll get on and not be thorns in your side. well. We’re fearful only because you’re going to battle.

Even Khun Phaen lost to them. Be careful and don’t go astray. Look out for their magic and invulnerability. Keep your emotions under control, and defeat them.’

Phra Wai walked out, glancing back at his two wives. He picked up the sword he had formerly used in battle. He went up to the shrine hall

and chanted special formulas. He bathed an image of Narai with fragrant water infused with *wan* herb in a bronze bowl. He chanted a formula to summon his spirits.

He blew a conch as worship to the great power.⁹ When finished he dressed elegantly, poured sacred water on the Narai, and walked away.

Simala was concerned and upset. ‘Who is the foe my beloved husband is going to fight? Father Khun Phaen is angry enough to be his enemy. Phra Wai should realize this is a trick.

He’s infatuated with Soi Fa, and still under the influence of the mantra. If he goes to fight in this state, his father will kill him. My Phlai is unaware of this.

Oh lord of honesty and purity, please deflect the weapons from my husband.’ She trembled in fear that Wai would be killed by his father.

Phra Wai found an auspicious time to march. The hollering of the troops echoed around. The way was packed with elephants and horses. Phra Wai soon felt randy for Soi Fa.

‘Oh, my love partner, far from my breast. You’ll be worrying and grieving. I’m suspicious that Simala might do something to you. [341]

Even when I was there looking after you from morning to night, she still got at you, Now you’ll be alone and lonely. The servants will pile in to hit you.

If I didn’t fear the king, I’d abandon this campaign and return to the capital.’ Then his angry thoughts returned and multiplied. ‘These new Mon killed my father.

⁹ บูชาวราฤทธิ์.

It's good I have the chance to play with them. I'll clench my teeth in fury and attack!' He rode his bay, driving the mass of troops along to halt at Wat Lat.¹⁰

The troops steamed rice and grilled fish. When they had eaten, it was time to light the torches. Dummies were trussed together, and Wai scattered enchanted rice.

The dummies turned over and wriggled but did not get up. Wai had to enchant rice many times to activate them, before they got up straight like people. In addition, they oddly had no weapons.

Wai was alarmed. 'Am I going to die because of these Mon?' He looked at the horoscope. 'Today is Wednesday with an inner blockage.

The moon intrudes into the centre. The remnant of Saturn creates an obstruction, meaning a big enemy. In the manual it says it'll not be strangers but people close in flesh and blood who'll face each other.'

He again chanted and scattered rice. The figures now all had weapons. Under a bright moon, he led the troops off in uproar.

After Wanthong was found guilty and the king ordered her execution, though dead, she still missed her son. Her fate caused her to become an *asurakai*.¹¹

On the day Phra Wai went to war, Wanthong had a fearful premonition that he would be killed by his father. She transformed herself into the body of a woman

around fifteen years old, with clear skin, a fair face as radiant as a full moon and exactly the manners of a palace lady.

She wore a Tani yok lower cloth in two bright colors with golden thread, an outer jacket embroidered with lovely flowers in glistening purple-dyed silk thread [342]

in a *kanyaeng* pattern with seven-sided diamond lantern, a *kruaicheung* border¹² with flower sprays that look real enough to pick, ruby red overlaid on orange and fragrant with *sat*.¹³

She wore jewelry and ornaments to look delicately seductive, a belt

¹⁰ Near the Pak Khu customs house, west up the Chaophraya from the city (Red:584).

¹¹ A being reborn into the *asura* netherworld, 'the realms of loss and woe, or the realms of misery,' on account of carrying too much past evil-doing to be reborn in the human world. The *phret* or suffering ghosts are one type of *asurakai*. They are headless and immensely tall, but have the power to assume false forms (R&R, 49, 107–13, 272).

¹² A border pattern (Mat:12, pix).

¹³ *Trigonella foenum-graecum*, a fruit with seeds used to make dye and fragrance (RI:379; Mat:286).

around her slender waist, and a glittering golden breast-chain studded with sparkling diamonds.

Her breasts were firm. She cradled flowers wrapped in a cloth, and threaded them on a necklace to fasten to her breast. She sang plaintively

a slow *phatcha* about a lamenting prince, dew dripping down, and birds crying in the west. She sang sad *sakkawa* and *doksoi*¹⁴ songs, sounding sweet and lonesome in the forest.

Under a brightly shining moon, Phra Wai rode up to the place and heard the sound of a woman singing. He halted the troops on the road,

and dismounted. He walked softly into the trees, and saw the figure of a woman, as slender as if she had been cast in a mould.

Her skin was as radiant as if painted with liquid gold. The ten fingers on her beautiful hands looked soft. Her hairline was neatly and prettily trimmed. Her whole body was attractive.

Her sweet singing soared around the forest like the calls of swans flying across the sky. Surprised to find her, he hid in the trees and admired her beauty lustfully with unblinking eyes.

The *phret asurakai* craftily pretended not to see Phra Wai. She strung flowers for a garland and sang joyfully to the forest.

She pretended to be picking flowers unawares, and casually walked backwards without turning to look. When she reached the tree where Phra Wai stood, she startled and shrieked in fright.

She threw away the flower garland, shouted in alarm, hugged her own soft breast, and made a pretence of running off. She hid in the foliage, pretending to be scared, in order to lure him on.

Phra Wai was absolutely delighted. He walked after her smiling broadly. He talked softly to seduce her. [343]

‘Eye’s jewel, don’t be scared and upset. Where is this shrieking and wandering off going to get you? I fear your skin will grow pallid from anger, and your soul will fly far away from fear.

Come here and I’ll bring back your soul,¹⁵ which has gone bounding off into the forest, to return to your body. Don’t be scared and miserable.

It’s lonely on your own in the forest with no companions to talk

¹⁴ *phatcha*, *sakkawa*, and *doksoi* are all traditional song genres.

¹⁵ Pun here as *rap khwan*, receive soul, also means hugging.

to. Sleeping in the forest will be chilly with nobody to hug you and keep you warm.

Some good deed has sent me to meet you. Let me embrace you and stay close by your side. I'll stay with you for around a hundred years. Darling, don't be alarmed.'

He spoke soothingly, and walked slowly towards her. He ogled her as he came up close. 'Give me your hand. Don't turn your face away. May I have some of the flowers you're threading.'

The lady *phret asurakai* was unmatched in craftiness. Seeing her son courting her, she pretended to burst out in a roar that shook the forest.

She bellowed, 'Hey! Phlai Ngam, my son. You come to force yourself on me without respect out of lust and infatuation. I'm not just anyone. I'm your mother,

Wanthong, who was punished with execution by royal order. Though I died, my heart remained attached to my son. I came after you to warn you.

The army you're leading is likely to be defeated and put to flight. The enemy will attack you fiercely, and the battle will be heavy and momentous.

Hang back and be careful. Don't rush forward out of bravery and lose position.' With that, she leapt up into the air making a racket that shook the whole forest.

She disappeared and was transformed back into a *phret* as high as the heavens, standing with an awesome body and no head. Then she turned around and disappeared from sight in a flash.

Phra Wai realized the apparition was certainly his mother, and he was very scared. He shivered and his head swelled from fear of her. Tears streamed down, glistening. [344]

'Oh, mother and mistress of mine. Your corpse was consumed, but you've not disappeared. I made a lot of merit to send to you, yet this hasn't yet overcome the evil that you did.

You're now in the form of a *phret asurakai*, but you can transform yourself back at night. You always had kindness to teach your son since the time you were human.

You've been dead and gone for many years. Today in this forest is the first time you've appeared to me. You warn me not to go to battle as I'll lose my life because of the skills of the Mon.

But my father Khun Phaen has already died, so it's beyond me to duck this. If I take the army back to the city, the king will have me chopped dead.

Whether I'll live or die, as a soldier I can't withdraw. I must avenge my father. Don't be worried, mother.' He prostrated, sobbing and swallowing his tears.

He remounted and led the troops across the plain and into the forest. When the moon dropped and disappeared, they marched into Bang Kating.¹⁶

They cut wood, and made a camp complete with trenches, fighting towers, fences, and spikes driven in for defense. A horseman was sent to investigate.

Chumphon heard the sound of hollering echoing around the forest. He talked with his father how to fight and win against Phra Wai.

From investigation, they knew he had set up camp at Bang Kating out of fear that they might attack and take the city. The powerful Khun Phaen arranged to make offerings.

He set up paper flags, put a ritual balustrade fence around, and strung sacred thread around the pillars of the shrine. He lit incense and bright candles, and placed their saddlery and weapons on the shrine.

Khun Phaen scattered enchanted rice to gather together the deities of all the quadrants, netherworld giants,¹⁷ *kruta-wasukri*,¹⁸ swarms of spirits and skilful *khamot*,

rishis, hermits, *withayathon*,¹⁹ and crowds of deities. He invited them to take the offerings, and then sacralize the weapons. [345]

The saddlery jumped up and down. The swords jiggled, turned over, leapt up like young chicks, and circled around in the air. Khun Phaen lit a flame for coating his son.

He extinguished the flame in herbal water then sprinkled the water on Chumphon to make his body tougher, more resistant, and invulnerable to all kinds of weapons. He also used it to make the horses invulnerable.

When they had done, he dressed Phlai in disguise to look like a new Mon, and blew a mantra onto him. Then he prepared himself to go to battle.

¹⁶ Now Bang Krating, about 7 kms south of Talan down Khlong Phak Hai towards Sena.

¹⁷ *Asurayak*.

¹⁸ Garuda is the bird mount of Vishnu, Wasukri is lord of the naga snakes. In Hindu mythology, the snake and bird are opposed as they stand for death and rebirth respectively. This opposition is most dramatically portrayed in a massive battle between Garuda and Kaliya, a scene often rendered in pictorial art (*Hindu Myths*, 222-8)

¹⁹ A non-human being, ranked below *thevada*, with the ability to fly through the air, attendants on Siva.

When Venus rose in a white sky, both the armies equipped with strong powers left their camps, hollering loudly through the forest.

Phra Wai, riding a horse at the head of his troops, chanted a sacred formula. Chumphon rode his horse to engage him. Khun Phaen hid to watch.

When the two armies met, they slashed and stabbed at one another noisily, with both sides aiming for victory, fighting bravely without ceding ground.

The dummy troops from each side closed on one another, spinning around, slashing and stabbing back and forth amid loud hollering. They rushed at one another, leaping and hitting relentlessly, but were all invulnerable.

The thirty-five soldiers danced into the attack using lance and sword with no thought of retreat. But the dummy troops engaged them spinning, chopping, and slashing, until the humans were forced to retreat in frustration

at such a lethal attack. 'I can't take it. These Mon are terrible.' Phra Wai saw his men were withdrawing, so grabbed rice with his right hand and scattered it.

When the enchanted rice touched Chumphon's dummy troops, they changed back to grass and collapsed down. Chumphon drove his horse at the head of his men and blew a formula

at Phra Wai's magical dummy troops who also collapsed back into bunches of grass. The two commanders signaled to their soldiers to halt the fighting.

Phra Wai caught sight of the little Mon, but could not recognize him because of the mantra. 'Tiny! A slim waist but very soldierly. Only just of age, and not yet aware of my skill. [346]

He's puffed up with arrogance, doesn't fear anyone, and boldly thinks he can fight me. I'd like to hear what he has to say for himself, so I can see just how much knowledge he has.'

He called out, 'Hey, little Mon! You're body is as tiny as a kid, and doesn't match your big overblown ideas. What's your name? Tell me the truth.

What monk was your teacher, and how many things did he teach you? If you truly want to fight me, you'll end up running off to hide.

What are the names of your father and mother? What city are you from? Tell me everything. Who urged you to be so bold, rash, and fearless as to come here, and why?

You slashed Khun Phaen dead. What did he do to annoy you? Did he attack *your* city and capture *your* parents?'

Phlai Chumphon cleverly spoke with a Hongsa accent. ‘Me? I’m Saming Matra. My father was a powerful soldier

called Saming Maengthayakala-on. In the Mon country, nobody went up against him. His fame spread to every city. My mother’s name is Moei Maengthaya.

My teacher of magic power was Phra Sumet Kaladong from Hongsa city. I came to try out the skill of the Thai. If any dare, I’ll slash them dead.

I’ve no desire for the treasure of Ayutthaya. Khun Phaen brought troops to fight me, so I caught him and slashed him down.

You, who the Thai king employs as a top soldier, what’s your name? What monk was your teacher? What’s the name of your father

and your mother? Don’t try to deceive. Tell me so I have no doubts. What power and daring makes you bold enough to oppose my skill?’

‘Hey, Mon Saming Matra! I dare to bring these troops to fight with you, and shortly you’ll know my powers. You ask about my teacher. [347]

For knowledge, I wasn’t the pupil of a monk, as my father came from a lineage of soldiers. His name is Khun Phaen Saensathan. He gave me knowledge.

My mother’s name is Wanthong. My own name – I do not lie – was originally Phlai Ngam, but by appointment I am Jameun Wai.

Don’t let catching Khun Phaen make you bold and careless. He was old and his powers were failing. I don’t fear you as much as a fingernail!’

Chumphon slapped his leg and said. ‘What you say isn’t true. I understand something different that Khun Phaen told me.

I asked him about the past, and he told me before I killed him that he has one son who is just of age, called Chumphon, son of Kaeo Kiriya.

He fled off somewhere I don’t know. He told me the story from the beginning that there’s another *stepson* who the king appointed as Meun Wai.

His mother’s name is Wanthong. He’s not the son of Khun Phaen, but of the villainous Khun Chang. Your father lives in Suphan.

He has a mess of hair on his chest up to his chin, but a spirit scraped the top of his skull bare. Perhaps you’re ashamed to say this

and so claim Khun Phaen's your father.'

Phra Wai was as angry as a blazing fire. 'My! You tricky Mon, picking at me with lies.' He flew into a black-eyed rage. Forgetting to chant a magic formula first,

he brandished his sword, and surged quivering into the attack. He spurred his horse forward wildly, and charged at Phlai Chumphon. They engaged and exchanged cut and thrust.

Sword clashed against sword. Horse reared up against horse. The dummy troops leapt spinning and soaring into the attack, charging their opponents.

Dummy attacked dummy, stabbing and parrying, pushing and pulling, clashing lance against lance, wrestling hand to hand in uproar. The thirty-five soldiers had had enough. [348]

They fought the dummy troops to the end of their strength and fell rolling on the ground. The dummy troops spun towards them, grabbed them by the hair, and pounded them with the backs of their lance blades until their bodies shook. The soldiers slipped away to hide in the undergrowth.

Chumphon and Phra Wai charged one another but missed, fell, and lost grip on their swords. They wrestled together, hand to hand, chest to chest, staggering around chaotically.

Khun Phaen was as angry as if lightning struck. He spurred his horse to race forward like a windmill, and shouted out from a distance, 'Hold him tight, Chumphon! I'll slash him myself!'

Phra Wai looked up and saw his father. In fright, he released his brother's neck, and leapt onto his horse to race away. But he lost his balance, and Chumphon stabbed at him.

The lance hit his chest but broke without piercing. Phra Wai rode his horse away. Khun Phaen furiously charged in from an angle. The dummy figures spun and stabbed at the troops.

The thirty-five soldiers lost their clothing and all blundered fearfully into the forest, stumbling among the thorns and being scratched all over their bodies.

Rustling sounds made them dash out again crying 'Forgive me, oh lord and master!' When the light dimmed at dusk, they cried, 'We've survived, sir!' and hurried onwards.

Phra Wai rode his horse straight across the plain. His face was drawn. He was hungry, aching, and out of breath. He went straight across [the river] at Wat Thamma.

People who saw him ran away in shock crying, 'Catastrophe!'

‘We’re really dead!’ ‘Phra Wai’s army is routed!’ The whole of the city was in fear.

They had no word or sign to know which direction the enemy would come from. They raced around chaotically. Phra Wai arrived at the gate of the palace.

King Phanwasa came out before the crowd of officials. He heard the loud sensation outside and listened without knowing the cause of such a babble of shouts and cries. ‘Has Wai been routed and returned? Hey! Someone go to find out.’ At that moment, Phra Wai dismounted and entered. [349]

He prostrated, shaking with fear. His face was drawn, and he was hungry and aching. He waited in silence without saying anything.

King Phanwasa watched Phra Wai enter but make no address, and so roared like a lion. ‘What happened to make you return?’

Jameun Wai Woranat was terrified at the king’s authority. He raised his face, and said, ‘My liege. Dust under the royal foot. Lord Vishnu, royal creator. May I offer my life as penalty for error. My life is under the royal foot.

I led the army against the Mon enemy. There was a great battle. When we attacked and killed them, their bodies changed. They were grass figures which were clearly created by some device.

Their army chief and I fought one-on-one, slashing and chopping one another many times at close range. I did not realize it was my own brother Phlai Chumphon until I saw Khun Phaen run out, and call out for Chumphon to capture me. My father intended to slash me dead. I managed to get away and survive. But I can’t escape the royal authority.

This Phlai Chumphon is not my brother by the same womb, but is the son of Kaeo Kiriya. Khun Phaen is his father.’

The king listened to Phra Wai’s account. He pondered back and forth, and then gave his command.

‘What Khun Phaen has done this time, I don’t know what to say. He has sworn loyalty. I do not think he’s in revolt against me.

His mother Thong Prasi is still here, so I doubt he’s acting disloyally. Why would he change into my enemy? I think there’s something strange going on.

I’m the pillar of the land. Though someone may have powers, he can’t compete with me. It’s known throughout the city that the deities protect the royal lineage. [350]

How can those who are mere servants of the royal dust crave to be the protector of the world! If they had ideas of seizing Ayutthaya, they'd have come to the capital by now.

Perhaps this fellow Phaen has a wish for revenge. He's not in revolt. What do you have to say? He's angry so he employs some trickery.

If he had dishonest and evil intentions, he would've killed the troops, but in this case not a single person died. It was just the father and son trying to kill you alone.'

Jameun Wai Woranat made obeisance, thought quietly, and saw clearly. 'The king suspects the truth about everything. I can't squirm my way out of this.'

He made obeisance to the Great Brahma.²⁰ 'My liege. The royal foot covers my head. At the very beginning, this matter arose when I beat Simala.

Chumphon tried to stop me and, because I did not recognize him in my anger, there was a fracas in which he was also hit. He became angry and ran away through the forest to Kanburi.

He spoke to his father Khun Phaen who came down here and made a big fuss about Soi Fa having put a love charm on me. I had doubts about that.

My father was angry that I didn't believe him. He waved Skystorm around and attacked me. If I hadn't escaped in time on that day, I'd be dead. He must've been angry enough to play this trick.'

The king listened to Phra Wai's account. 'I think you look dark like someone affected by a potion. In the past, your father was never crazy.

If the dispute was only about this, it shouldn't have resulted in a battle. It's not enough to cause fighting and killing. There's still more to this.

I'll have him sent for, so we can discuss this, make a decision, and clear it up. Who can be sent to get him? Think up some appropriate ploy.'

Phra Wai Woranat took the royal order on his head, and prostrated immediately. 'I don't think there's anyone who'll go.
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²⁰ บรมนารถ, *borommanarot*, *Narot*, sometimes spelt นารถ, and derived from Narata, ss an appellation of the Buddha or a name for Brahma.

When Khun Phet and Khun Ram went after Khun Phaen, there was a big battle.²¹ This time somebody he likes must be found to get this father and son to come in.

I can think only of Simala, his daughter-in-law. Whether she does right or wrong, Khun Phaen never complains. May the king have the grace to send her.'

The king listened carefully and then commanded the palace guards to summon Simala immediately. Nai Jong²² ran off and brought Simala back.

She saluted and made obeisance to the king. She saw Phra Wai angrily throw her a cold, sharp look. She backed away to put some distance between them, and averted her face to avoid looking at him.

The king looked to left and right and saw there was something up between Phra Wai and Simala. He called them to come forward close together.

'Their manner somehow doesn't look normal.' With this thought, he smiled. 'This lady's manner is good. How are things between you and Soi Fa?

You must go and fetch Phaen and Chumphon here. Inform them that I ordered this, and that I'll not punish them with death.'

Simala wai-ed and bowed her head. 'As the king has the grace to send me, may I request royal power to protect me from danger, and ensure father Phaen and his son moderate their anger.

I'm scared. Even Phra Wai had to run all through the forest. I, as a woman, have no knowledge. I'll steel myself to volunteer because the king commands.'

She prostrated to take leave. Phra Wai hastened out to the front. She walked along trembling with shyness. At the house, Phra Wai went straight in

and strode up the stairs. Thong Prasi watched, not knowing if the news was good or bad. 'Young Wai, why did you flee from the army?'

Phra Wai spoke to his grandmother with tears flowing. 'Who do you think the enemy was? I'll tell you.' Tears of anger flooded his eyes. 'How could my father act like this? [352]

²¹ In chapter 20.

²² A title (*tammaeng*) used by various positions in the royal pages (Sup:590).

He and his wild son, Phlai Chumphon, meant to kill me. I survived because I fled. Now the king has ordered Simala to go and fetch Khun Phaen and Chumphon back here.' He was so pent-up and choked with fury that he could say no more.

Thong Prasi listened to her grandson. She shook convulsively, gnashed her gums, rolled her eyes, and trumpeted loudly.

'These were thought to be new Mon from somewhere! I didn't know that you could kill one another? Having a son and grandson fighting one another with lances and javelins is galling? They didn't care there was only you alone,

but piled in to attack you like a pack of dogs. You'd be dead if you hadn't fled. Those two teamed up to attack you with no respect for me. If I could, I'd have gone with you

and bashed their heads in like chopping up fish. Your mother's clan should flow with tears! Hey, Simala, what do you have to say? Where have you disappeared to?

You're the darling of your father-in-law. You flaunt your flesh, flaunt your body so much – stirring things up by sticking out your bottom beyond wisdom. You're in favour now! Hurry off to get them.

I can see you're in league with them. Wai fled in time and managed to come back. If he hadn't fled in time and been slashed to death, you'd be delighted.

Go fetch your lord. But if they don't put their heads at risk, this isn't me!' She slobbered saliva. Pounding betelnut, she raised the pestle then dawdled and forgot to put in the lime.