

The Revenge of the Scorpion

The afternoon was blistering hot without even a light breeze to move the leaves of the bamboo and banana trees. It was the middle of the hot season and the earth was baked to a hard crust deprived of rain for many months. All of the inhabitants of the yard were either sleeping or sheltering in their burrows in the ground to avoid the fierce glare of the sun – all except one. The scorpion was hungry and sun or no sun it needed sustenance and it had to feed. Slowly its feelers removed the hidden door to its lair and it left its home to find food.

The card game started late that day. It was played hidden from watching eyes at the back of the house in a rice barn sala. The wooden table was laid with a full ice bucket, bottles of lao kaow moonshine, Singha beer, glasses and of course the cards. A revolving fan was plugged in to an extension cable and aimed at the table. Gradually the family and friends took their seats around the place of battle. A radio played in the back ground Bee Mai Muang – North Thailand, Chiang Mai music.

Lek had been on duty for several hours manning a police road block on the super highway. His wallet was full as there had been no shortage of motorbike riders without helmets or Farangs to intimidate with threatened prosecution for alleged speeding offences. Still, his pistol holster was new and rubbed sorely against his hip and the hot saddle of his motorbike burned his upper thighs. He turned his motorbike into the yard and parked under a palm tree. The group at the table called out to him “Lek you bad boy! How many poor people have you shot today?” Lek, loved his Colt .45 Revolver and was still paying installments through the Police Cooperative but he had never aimed the gun at anyone – let alone shot someone. Still his day would come. He walked over to the table and placed his 2-way radio on the table

next to him. He was still on duty and it was possible that a call could come through at any time.

Kek poured himself a Singha, put some ice in the glass and sat back

“Well Lads... whats the game to be? I hope that you have brought lots of money for me to take from you – no doubt stolen from your wife’s hiding place in the empty *Nam Bpla (fish sauce)* bottle !”

By this time the others all had glasses in front of them. They grinned at each other. Somchai an old rice worker from the fields and owner of the house said

“Come on Cowboy Lek. What are you going to do if you lose? Shoot us?”

The rest of the group laughed uproariously. Somchai called out to his wife to bring some Kow Soi Tad– *crispy rice* for the table.

One of the younger men who worked with the old man in the fields pointed to the house at the other end of the garden

“How is your son – the Farang - *Westerner*?”

This brought new laughter as they all knew that the Farang was well into his seventies.

“Farang Bah....he’s crazy. All day long he rides his bicycle, some say all the way to Laos and back. And in the night time when I want to sleep he plays his music or television at full volume”

Not that they had a way of knowing but the Farang in question was an ex-Buddhist Monk and nearly totally deaf. He was cared for by his Thai-Japanese wife and son-in-law.

“Well... you know what they say Somchai” said Lek “Farang-Kee-Nok” A very insulting expression which meant Western Bird Shit.

“Now whats the game to be?”

The group all replied unanimosusly –

Bpauk-Daeng – *Red Tree*

Bpeauk-Daeng – similar in play to the Western Baccarat - one of the most the most vicious of all Thai card games, where no prisoners are taken, small fortunes won and lost and sometimes lives also. Lek leaned forward brushed a small fly from his face, slowly looked into each face at the table and slyly asked if they were sure. All of them nodded their heads. Disagreement ensued as to who would be dealer. The dealer holds a small edge of just over one per cent to the other players. Ultimately Lek picked up the deck, shuffled and started sealing counter-clockwise for high card to be dealer.

Nok, one of the rice field workers and Somchai's friend received an ace and the deck and became 'The King' - Dealer. He waited until the other players had laid their bets on the table. In a public place these would just be spoken but the sala was located in a concealed spot in the garden. The bets ranged from 20 Baht to 100 Baht laid by Lek. Nok rifled the cards in a horizontal shuffle and again dealt counterclockwise – two cards to each player, face down, one at a time.

Lek surreptitiously looked at his cards – a glorious 4 and a five, Bpauk-Gao, and turned them over. Nok stared at Lek's cards in amazement.

“Lek...are you cheating?”

“No need when I play cards with you!” Lek sneered.

Nok shook his head and went around the table asking the other players if they wanted a further card. Two of them nodded their assent and Nok dealt the extra cards. As for himself he held an ace and a two obliging him to draw another card as points lower than three require a further draw. A ten! A useless card, which did nothing to increase his total points. One by one the other players turned their cards up.

The players with three cards had a flush and a set awarding them three times the amount of their bet. The other players all had points

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