

SPICE

Copyright © Robert A. Webster 2016

The author or authors assert their moral right under the Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author or authors of this work.

All Rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, copied, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior written consent of the copyright holder, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser. A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

ISBN-13:
978-1493641079

ISBN-10:
1493641077

www.buddhasauthor.com
www.stormwriter.com

A darkness will settle on the people of Cambodia.

There will be houses, but no people in them.

Roads, but no travellers

Barbarians with no religion will rule the land.

Blood will run so deep as to touch the belly of the elephant.

Only the deaf and the mute will survive.

-Chapter One-

Fear and Loathing

Rotha peered out of the hut's doorway. She smiled, pushed strands of black hair behind her ear, went down the wooden steps, and over to her sons.

“Ravuth, you and your brother go get the *tror bek for supper,” she said.

The teenager looked up from where he and his younger brother were playing and groaned.

“Now, Ravuth,” said his mother, wagging her finger.

“Okay, come on, Oun.” Said Ravuth and grabbing his brother's hand they headed towards the jungle.

The air felt humid and Ravuth wiped his arm across his moist forehead. He turned back towards the village and looked up the Cardamom Mountains. “I wish I was a bird and could fly above the mountains, it would be cool up there,” he said, smiling at Oun.

The year was 1975. Unbeknownst to the secluded village, Cambodia was in turmoil. The country was at the end of a war but the beginning of a nightmare, leading to a period of genocide affecting every Cambodian.

Pearls of perspiration now trickled down Ravuth's face. The sores on his hands stung pitilessly as the salt in his sweat rubbed against the worn handle of his machete. Once again, he lifted his aching arm and hacked into the foliage. His thirst raged and exhaustion threatened to overwhelm him, but he had to keep going for the sake of his younger brother.

“We’re lost, aren't we?” The fear in Oun's voice made it tremble.

Ravuth glanced back at the small dirty face behind him. It was his fault that they were lost; they should never have wandered off the trail. His mother told him repeatedly never to leave the recognised paths, but he thought he knew better.

The boys knew this jungle well. It was close to their secluded village, where their family had lived for generations, living off the diverse plants and animals found around their jungle domain.

Collecting fruits and vegetables from the jungle was a daily task that the teenage Ravuth and his younger brother, Oun, had carried out for years. The route was always the same. However, today the boys decided to explore and maybe discover a new area that may contain more vegetables.

Ravuth and Oun had been roaming around lost for over an hour in this dense unforgiving undergrowth.

With his last ounce of energy, he hacked through a thick branch and the two boys emerged into a glade.

Ravuth smiled, “We’ll be fine,” he said with a jauntiness he didn’t feel. “We can rest here and then retrace our steps.”

“Look at that Ravuth,” said Oun, pointing to a strange plant nestling between small rocky outcrops. “And look at that hole near the rocks. It could be a cave entrance.”

The boys went over to the plant. Ravuth bent down and peered into the hole.

“What’s in it? How big is it?” Oun asked.

“I don’t know. It’s dark, so I can’t see far inside,” said Ravuth with his head inside the cave entrance. “I think I may be able to squeeze in, but it’ll be tight.”

“No way,” said Oun panicking, “Let’s just go, we don’t know what’s inside.”

Ravuth put his head and shoulders into the narrow entrance. He could fit inside, but heeding his younger brother’s advice didn’t enter.

Oun’s attention then shifted to the plant, which he uprooted. The plant was a golden-brown coloured poppy, but instead of a flat corrugated disc top. It had a small yellow coloured sack that looked like a cushion. Its long slender stem surrounded by large green leaves appeared similar in shape and size to a Chinese lettuce with a small, carrot-shaped white root.

“I’ve never seen this plant before, what is it?” Oun asked and handed the plant to Ravuth.

“I don’t know. I’ve never seen one either. I’ll take it home, mother will know. Perhaps it would taste good,” he said, sniffing the plant’s top.

From what his parents taught him at an early age about identifying poisonous plants, Ravuth knew the plant was safe to eat.

“It tastes bitter.” He said, chewing a leaf and grimacing, “Maybe it will taste better cooked.”

Suddenly, they heard several twigs crack and the surrounding foliage shook. The boys felt terrified as a young male tiger crashed through the undergrowth and stopped several feet away from them.

Indo-Chinese Tigers roamed the jungles of the Cardamom Mountains. They distanced themselves from humans as much as possible as they considered them annoying and did not appear as if they would taste good. However, two of these small beasties had disturbed this tiger’s favourite sunshade spot.

Ravuth stuffed the strange plant into his pocket and he and Oun raised their machetes, pointing them at the young tiger.

The tiger growled and paced back and forth in front of the boys.

Back away slowly,” Ravuth ordered with every muscle fibre, every sinew alive and ready to react to the moment.

While watching the tiger pace around growling and looking at them with disdain, the terrified brothers edged their way towards the thick undergrowth.

Noticing that the humans were now away from his cave entrance, the tiger walked to it, cocked his leg, and sprayed his domain with his scent. He glanced at the boys and then crawled into the cave.

Ravuth and Oun watched the tiger going into the cave and rushed into the jungle.

Stumbling through jungle terrain for twenty-minutes, they came upon a clearing covered in familiar vegetation. They stopped, caught their breaths, and smiled. “Tror bek! Great, I know where we are,” said a relieved Ravuth.

“Good, let’s just get some and go home,” said an even more relieved Oun.

The bedraggled boys reached their village late in the afternoon. They expected to receive a scolding from their mother. Instead, they noticed that all the villagers gathered inside the large wooden communal hut in the centre of the village. Confused, Ravuth and Oun sneaked past the large hut and went home. They knew that their father had gone to *Koh Kong early that morning to sell his trinkets and did not expect him back until the following day. However, when they reached their wooden stilted shack they saw their father’s bicycle outside. They went up the steps, walked inside, and saw a square black canvas bag on the table. Unsure what was happening, they put the strange plant along with the vegetables into a bowl and headed for the communal hut.

“What’s happening?” asked Oun.

“I don’t know. I am confused too. Why’s father home so early and I wonder what’s in that bag on the table?” Ravuth asked.

The brothers made their way to the large communal hut. From the doorway, they saw their mother sitting on the floor. Their father, with tears running down his grimy face and a look of terror, addressed the shocked looking villagers. Ravuth and Oun went over and sat on the floor beside their mother.

“What’s wrong mother, why does father look so afraid and covered in scratches, and why is he speaking to everyone as the village chief instead of Ren?” asked Ravuth. He looked at his frightened mother, who whispered,

“Ren’s dead and your father’s telling people about what happened in Koh Kong, so be quiet, and listen. He’s almost finished and we would explain to you later.” Although afraid, Rotha tried to appear calm for the boys’ sake.

Bemused, Ravuth looked around the gathered villagers. Ren’s children huddled around their weeping mother on the opposite side of the room consoling one another, along with other families whose relatives had not returned. Ravuth and Oun had missed most of what their father had told the villagers, but seeing the faces of those present, they realised that it must be something serious. Once finished, their father made his way over to join Rotha and the boys.

“What happened, father?” asked Ravuth.

“We all have a lot of work to do,” said their distraught father, Tu. “Let’s go home and I will explain.”

The family left the communal hut as the others inside dispersed and went to their homes.

The siblings and their father sat on a kam-ral, a straw rug, and while Rotha tended to his cuts, Tu related his horrific tale to his sons.

“I went with Ren and the others to the Thai-Cambodian border to sell the trinkets we have been making. Everything seemed normal at first. We stopped behind the border post, where we leave our bikes.”

Tu winced as Rotha put a stinging balm on a deep scratch and then continued.

“There were no military at the post, instead, several young men and women dressed in kheaw aeu chout and krorma (black pyjamas and red and white checked scarves), stood at a large barrier under construction at the checkpoint. They carried rifles and ordering workers to build a fence. I saw Thai armed soldiers stood at the Thailand border looking anxious, so I stayed with the bicycles while Ren went over to find out what was happening and the others went to wait for the tour bus. I saw Ren approach a boy, who, upon seeing him, aimed his rifle at his body.

Ren looked scared as the boy yelled at him and said he was a *Khmer Rouge soldier, and now in charge of Cambodia.”

Tu looked at his sons and told them,

“The boy looked around the same age as you, Ravuth.”

Oun and Ravuth saw their father trembling as he said,

“Another young Khmer Rouge soldier shouted as a bus approached and the Khmer Rouge scurried around, waited until the bus stopped. A group of terrified foreigners got shoved off the bus into the waiting Khmer Rouge, their belongings hitting them as they were thrown off the bus. The foreigners grabbed some of their belongings before they the Khmer Rouge pushed them over the Cambodian border into no man's land. I saw the Thai soldiers aiming at the approaching party of foreigners, Khmer Rouge, and our villagers who went to help, so I stayed where I was.”

Tu took the black bag from the table and said.

“I saw several items left by the tourists, so I went over to the empty bus and rummaged around the scattered items. I have seen similar ones to this carried by tourists.”

He opened the bag, pulled out a Polaroid camera, and showed it to his inquisitive sons.

“I walked back to my bicycle, strapped the bag to my handlebars, and continued to watch what was happening at the border. The group neared the Thai soldiers and stopped. The Khmer Rouge pushed the trembling foreigners forward. They were shouting at the Thais, but I could not hear what. The tourists ran to the soldiers, who, still aiming at the Khmer Rouge, let the foreigners through and they ran behind the soldiers. The Khmers turned around and marched back through no man's land and back into Cambodian territory, laughing and joking.”

“Are you okay dad?” asked Ravuth as his father went silent and rubbed his eyes.

Tu nodded and told them,

“Ren and the villagers now seemed to get on well with the Khmer Rouge. They laughed and joked with one another as they walked back to the Cambodian side of the border. I felt relieved and was about to join them, hoping that they had not seen me taking the camera.”

Tu, with a quake in his voice, then told them,

“My relief turned to horror as the young Khmer soldier walking behind Ren, put the muzzle of his rifle to the back of his head, and pulled the trigger.”

Ravuth and Oun gasped.

Tu shook his head, “Ren knew nothing; he was talking to another Khmer Rouge when his face exploded. I saw the bullet exit his head and his body fall to the ground.” Said Tu and wiped away tears.

Rotha brought them over cups of water and put her hands on her husband's shoulder.

Tu gulped the water, composed himself, and continued,

“I hid behind the border guard’s shack and could hear the Khmer Rouge soldiers laughing and chattering, with our friends and neighbours now pleading for their lives. I knew I had to get away from there, even though it meant leaving them.” He sighed, “But there was nothing I could do.”

Rotha went outside to the kitchen area as Tu continued,

“Wheeling my bicycle a few yards away from behind the border guard shack, I ripped my trinkets off, and peddled as fast as I could. I hadn’t gone far when I heard people behind me, yelling at me to stop. Terrified, I ignored the shouting and carried on riding. I heard a shot, and a bullet whistled past my ear.”

The boys looked at one another, and then at their distraught father, who continued.

“Pedalling frantically, I veered off the road, and headed across fields, and into the jungle. I rode until the track became too rugged for the bicycle, so I ran into thick undergrowth and hid behind a clump of trees. I waited for what seemed like ages. After not seeing any sign of the Khmer Rouge, I retraced my steps, picked up my bicycle, and rode home.”

“What’s the Khmer Rouge?” Ravuth asked.

Tu shook his head.

Unaware of events happening in Cambodia, he only knew they should be afraid and make themselves scarce, so replied,

“I don’t know son, but we need to stay hidden until we could find out what happened. We will be safer deeper into the jungle and tonight we can organise our belongings and find a new site and in the morning. Then we will break down our dwellings, vanish, and rebuild elsewhere,” said Tu. The boys could see how concerned, confused, and afraid their father appeared.

“What’s this?” interrupted Rotha, holding up the plant that Ravuth had placed on top of the tror bek.

“I don’t know. We found it along the track and thought that you would know. Maybe we could eat it, right Oun?” said Ravuth, looking at his brother for backup.

“Yes,” agreed Oun, who was looking inside the camera bag.

“I’ve never seen anything like this before,” said Rotha who held the strange plant and inspected it.

Rotha went ignored; the two youngsters seemed more interested in the instruction and demonstration their father was giving on the Polaroid camera.

Rotha went over to their clay rainwater trap, filled a bowl of water, and placed it alongside a bubbling pot containing vegetables and a small broiling chicken. She studied the plant and knew by the leaves shape and colour that the plant was edible, so she plucked a leaf, tasted it, and put the rest into the boiling pot. She

pierced the yellow sack on top of the golden-brown ovule seedpod and tasted that. Rotha could not imagine how the sweet tasting white milk that oozed from the seedpod would taste with the leaf tasting bitter, but she would experiment later. Rotha noticed that the round seedpod had a strange sheen and its primary gold colour appeared as a lustrous mosaic of vivid colours; the effect created with motor oil on water. She decided not to open the pod.

Disturbed by a sudden bright flash, she looked up to see the smiling faces of her two mischievous sons and her even more mischievous husband holding the Polaroid after taking a flash photograph of her. The camera's machinery whirled as a film popped out of the front. Tu removed the photograph, peeled away the first layer of film, and put the picture on the table to develop.

Rotha glowered at her husband as he once again focused, pressed the button, and took another snapshot of her and repeated the development process. Tu then motioned them all to get together to take a picture of the three of them. They alternated and took turns at taking pictures until they finished off the six remaining films in the camera's cartridge.

They watched the photographs developing under their solitary light bulb and looked amazed as the images appeared. The family gazed at the first photographs they had seen of them all, forgetting for a moment about the tragedy that had befallen the village. Rotha removed a banana leaf woven box from a shelf and placed it onto the table. Everyone in the village had several of these boxes. These interwoven strips of dried banana leaf, coated with a resin from the sap of palm oil bark, gave the box a hardwearing-varnished sheen. The small shoe size boxes, apart from sold to tourists, the villagers used them to store knick-knacks and anything unusual. She opened the box and placed the photographs inside.

"You can look at these again after we have eaten. Ravuth, get the dishes ready Ravuth and I will serve supper," she said.

Rotha was about to close the box's lid when she saw the plant on the table. She cut away the most of the stem and put the golden-brown pod into the box, closing the lid.

The family sat down to eat. Rotha served the strange plants leaves in a broth and they all agreed it tasted horrible, it was too bitter. Fortunately, the chicken and tror bek went down well, and after supper, they packed away their meagre belongings for the next day's move. The village's noisy two-stroke generator went off at 8:00 pm., whereupon they went to bed.

Shouting and gunfire abruptly woke the family at sunrise.

Panic ensued and Tu, Rotha, and the boys went onto the balcony and saw a group of young Khmer Rouge soldiers marching through the village, firing AK-47s into the air and hollering at the villagers. They stomped to the dwellings, whose residents now stood either on their balconies or at the foot of their steps.

A girl, about the same age as Ravuth, came to the foot of the stairs and yelled for them to come down and go to the village's communal hut. She pointed her rifle at Tu.

"Immediately!" she screamed.

The family did as ordered, went to the communal hut along with the other frightened villagers, and commanded to kneel. A Khmer Rouge soldier, who looked around 18-years-old, walked to the front. The villagers gasped. Dragged along on a rope leash was Dara, a middle-aged villager who had gone into Koh Kong along with Tu and the others to sell trinkets the previous day.

"Dara's alive, Rotha," whispered Tu. "I thought they'd all been killed."

With swollen cheeks and eyes, dried blood staining her lips and nose, Dara looked badly beaten. The villagers watched as the Khmer Rouge commander tugged her like a dog. The other Khmer Rouge paced back and forth behind the audience as their commander spoke.

He explained about Pol Pot: Brother Number One, their leader, and how the Khmer Rouge now controlled Cambodia, saying,

“Every *Khmer citizen now belonged to Angka, (The Organisation.) You are our property and if you want to live, you must prove your value.”

He told them about their children’s role within this new order, who would be trained and taught by Angka to become soldiers for the organisation and honoured by all. They would no longer need parents, as adults were menial workers, therefore beneath them. Angka would now be their family.

The commander continued for over an hour with his well-rehearsed speech.

The terrified villagers listened but felt bewildered by this indoctrinated youth. Dara swayed as she struggled to stand up in front of him. Occasionally, the boy tugged at her rope and she snapped back to attention.

Once the commander finished, he focused his attention on Dara, and said to the villagers.

“This woman led us to you. She is weak and we do not accept the weak.” He tightening the noose around Dara’s neck and dragged her towards him. Taking hold of the knot, he lifted her chin to extend her throat and sliced it open with a small sharp knife. Dara was too weak to put up any fight, and as sputum, blood, and air gurgled from her throat, she went limp. The commander threw her body to the ground, bent over, and wiped his knife on her clothing before sheathing it. He shouted orders to his soldiers, pointed to Dara’s corpse, and issued a stark warning to the villagers,

“Obey Angka or die!”

The villagers stared in horror as the other Khmer Rouge screamed at them to get their belongings and to meet back there.

The stunned villagers left the hut and went to their respective residences to pack with the Khmer Rouge buzzing around the terrified families, hurrying them along.

Rotha, Tu, Ravuth, and Oun went into their hut. Tu spoke to Rotha, who, although shaken by the events, agreed with him. Tu, his voice quaking, told the boys

“You two need to escape and hide in the jungle. When we’ve gone, come back and stay here. When we find out what is going on and when it was safe, we can return for you,”

The boys, although frightened, agreed, and hoped it would only be for a short while.

Rotha looked outside, saw a Khmer Rouge walking away from their hut to check on another family, and could not see any others close.

“Quick, Ravuth! You go first,” she whispered.

Ravuth gingerly made his way down the steps and ran the short distance to the jungle, hiding behind the first clump of trees and looking back to await his brother.

He saw Oun at the foot of the steps, but marching towards him was a Khmer Rouge soldier, who stopped at Oun's side. The boy waved his rifle towards his mother and father, ordering them to come down immediately. Ravuth's heart beat wildly and he hid behind the thick trunk.

The Khmer Rouge's shouting faded, so he peered out. He saw his mother, father, and brother led away.

Realising that he had gone unnoticed, Ravuth skirted around behind the village using the jungle trees and foliage for cover as he observed what was happening within the village.

The villagers stayed corralled inside the communal hut for another hour before emerging.

The Khmer Rouge went into the crowd of people and dragged out four elderly villagers. Ravuth hoped that they would remain in the village. He thought that they would take care of him until his parents and Oun returned.

The commander smirked as his soldiers pushed the four elderly villagers to the ground and shot them in the head.

The villagers screamed as the Khmer Rouge pointed their rifles at the panic-stricken crowd, screaming.

"Silence or die!"

The commander addressed the crowd,

"Be quiet!" he yelled, waiting until he had their attention. "These people were old so cannot produce anything for Angka. Their lives are of no benefit to Angka and their deaths are of no loss."

Trembling and afraid, the crowd appeared a dejected and broken group of refugees. They shuffled along the trail that led to Koh Kong to join the exodus of the rounded up populace to be processed and sent to work camps.

The Khmer Rouge let the villagers carry their meagre belongings, which they would take possession of at the end of their journey should they survive the ordeal.

Two Khmer Rouge soldiers remained. Ravuth watched as they dragged Dara's corpse from the communal hut and dumped it with the four others. Taking a can of gasoline from the generator shack, they doused a little over several of the shacks and the corpses. They giggled as they ignited the incendiary, setting fire to several huts and incinerating the bodies. These merciless, ruthless killers were teenage children, who showed neither emotion nor remorse.

One soldier, having fun beating the heads of the burning corpses with a stick, looked up and saw a movement in the jungle. He shouted to his comrade, who grabbed his rifle, and ran towards Ravuth's hiding place and stopped.

"You imagined it. There was nobody here," said one youth.

"I'm sure I saw someone," said the other, sounding indignant.

"Do you want to go further into the jungle and look?"

"Not likely. I don't know what's in there, maybe a wild animal. Come on let's get back and catch up with the others."

“Okay. Because you’re afraid, we will go,” mocked the other youth. They turned and ran back through the village and onto the track.

Ravuth trembled. He backed his way further into thick foliage. The Khmer Rouge had been standing only inches from his face.

Ravuth returned to the village at sunset. He had been too afraid to move throughout the long, hot, humid day.

Dazed and confused, he walked into the deserted village, passing the smouldering corpses; he made his way to his home. Although the Khmer Rouge had burnt down some of the shacks and the communal hut, they had left his relatively unscathed. He went inside but nothing remained, having either been ransacked or took by his parents. Ravuth crouched down and wept.

Ravuth stayed there throughout the night wondering what had happened and what to do. Daybreak came, and as the room got lighter, he noticed something familiar in the corner. Ravuth saw the banana leaf box tucked into a hole in the corner. He realised that his parents must have been trying to hide it from the Khmer Rouge. He took the box and opened it. The strange poppy seedpod was inside, along with a few small trinkets underneath the photographs of his family. He removed the pictures and with tears in his eyes, stroked the individual images, wondering what was happening to them

Ravuth felt alone, afraid and confused. He replaced the photographs in the box, left the hut, and wandered around the village searching for food, water, or useful items left behind. Passing the grisly remains, he went from hut to hut, scavenging and collecting anything useful. He found a machete, ate, and drank a little water. Wrapping food in a banana leaf, he collected water from rain-catching containers and filled gourds. His knowledge of edible plants and sources of fluid would assure his survival in the jungle terrain. Taking the box, machete, and other items he had found, Ravuth walked through the village and along the track that led to the road to Koh Kong.

Ravuth had been walking along the jungle track for two hours. He had trekked this route several times with his brother and father, but once Tu went onto the road along with the other villagers and rode away the brothers would return to the village.

Ravuth left the jungle, went to the unfamiliar road, and walked along the verges in case he came across any Khmer Rouge patrols. His long walk into the outskirts of town was uneventful, seeing neither traffic nor people. He saw several wooden homes along the roadside destroyed and plundered.

Making his way to the outskirts of Koh Kong town, Ravuth headed toward the town centre, which felt eerie without people. He continued for a few kilometres until he reached the border patrol hut. He hid behind the hut after seeing Khmer Rouge sitting against a newly constructed fence covering the border into Thailand.

The child-soldiers lifeless features put a renewed fear into Ravuth. He crept away from the border post and walked back into the deserted town centre. Ravuth went inside a small abandoned café and replenished his food and water from the small scraps that remained. He sat and pondered his situation.

Night fell and Ravuth had still not figured out what to do. He heard a vehicle approaching. Terrified, he hid under a table as an old truck stopped in front of the café. Six, Khmer Rouge came in and sat at a table.

Quaking with fear, Ravuth remained motionless as the young soldiers started up a small generator to illuminate the café and sat down. Ravuth trembled as he hid under a table in a dark corner of the café.

One soldier brought in several bottles of Mekong whisky and they drank.

Ravuth listened while the Khmer Rouge bragged about their daily atrocities, who they had slaughtered, and descriptive details about how they did it. They spoke of their spoils of war and what items they had pilfered. One of them said something that Ravuth wanted to hear.

“My group went straight to *Choeung Ek, but we picked out the ones who will make young Khmer Rouge citizens and good fighting comrades,” he said,

“We rounded up four groups today, they went to the Koh Kong province commune to swell our ranks,” said another.

“Most of ours were undesirable old folk, so we disposed of them,” said a third, adding, “But we had fun re-educating them.” He grinned and showed the others his blood stained machete.

The gruesome details between the boys went on for a short while; Ravuth heard their voices slurring, and childish giggling as the strong whisky soon took effect on the youngsters.

Thirty-minutes later, the Khmer Rouge staggered out of the café, got back into the vehicle, and it screeched away.

Ravuth came out from under the table. The lights were on, so he looked around the now silent cafe for any information on the commune and on Choeung Ek. He knew of neither and unable to read or write, he found leaflets with pictures, which he placed into his box.

Staying in the cafe overnight, early the following morning Ravuth trekked out of Koh Kong town and headed back to his jungle village to await his family. He didn't realise he was followed until he neared a road outside Koh Kong.

A voice behind him hollered,

“You... Stop there!”

He turned around and a young Khmer Rouge girl pointed an automatic pistol at him as she tried to balance on the crossbar of a bicycle.

“Come here!” she snapped.

Ravuth approached the grimy-faced girl who glared at him. Although she looked to be a younger and smaller than Ravuth, looking into her eyes sent a cold chill down his spine.

“Why are you not with the others? Where is your village?” she snapped

Ravuth’s trembled, and with his hands together, pleaded, “I'm very sorry, I was left behind.”

The girl glared at Ravuth. “Follow me,” she snapped and got off her bike to turn it around.

Ravuth felt terrified and saw four more Khmer Rouge approaching on bicycles. He panicked, took the machete from his waistband, and hacked at the girl's arm with all his might. The girl could not react to protect herself as she struggled with the bicycle's handlebars. She squealed in pain as the blade tore deep into her flesh hitting bone and she dropped the pistol. Ravuth pushed her away from the bicycle, stuffed his machete into his waistband, got on her bike, and peddled for his life across hardened paddy fields. He headed towards the Cardamom Mountains and the safety of the jungle as bullets whistled past him.

Peddling for what seemed like an eternity, and no longer hearing gunshots, he stopped at the outskirts of the jungle, pushed the bike into the foliage, and hid behind a clump of trees. He peered out to see if he could see his pursuers. Ravuth saw four small dots in the distance still heading towards him. He had a good head start but knew that he must get to safety within the dense foliage. Ravuth ran through the jungle, finding small tracks that he followed until he hit a thick, rugged, impassable terrain.

‘They would never find me now.’ He thought and ran into the dense undergrowth.

Exhausted, Ravuth had been running through this unfamiliar section of the jungle for over three hours. Coming into a clearing with a thick tree top canopy and a little light penetrating through, he decided to hide there. Knowing he would be safe and spot intruders, he sat at the base of a giant Dipterocarp tree on the lookout.

Ravuth stayed there for two days, living off the bountiful vegetation surrounding him. Realising that he had eluded his pursuers, he tried to find his village.

Ravuth felt safe in the jungle and trekked throughout the night while the moon shone overhead. He rested throughout the hot, humid days, trapping and foraging early evening until sunset.

Without directions to follow, unlike around his village, where he knew the tracks, trails, and familiar vegetation, he was lost. On the dawn of the tenth day, he came out from behind a row of trees onto flat open ground. An embankment dropped into a shallow valley, where he saw a large corral, surrounded by a wire fence.

There were several rows of canvas bivouacs, along with a few military field canvas tents ranging in size. Ravuth saw people ambling around behind the fence; some groups were cooking on open fires. Ravuth could smell the aromas of Cambodian food, which made his mouth water.

‘This must be the compound that the Khmer Rouge had been talking about. I wonder if my family's here?’ he thought.

He crept around the perimeter watching the camp’s inhabitants until he reached a gated area at the front. He felt exposed in the open, so he hid at one dark corner and observed.

Ravuth saw several military vehicles and soldiers come and go throughout the day. He noticed that the military personnel weren't Khmer Rouge. They were older and dressed in camouflage uniforms.

Ravuth went back and forth along the perimeter fence, watching the goings-on within the camp. He occasionally clambered back up the embankment to get a better view from the jungle, but could see none of his family members or his fellow villagers. Night fell, he edged his way along the fence, found a clear spot, and using his hands, dug a small trench underneath the wire. He pulled himself through and crept towards the closest tent. Ravuth crouched down, looked ahead, picked out a spot and...

“Who are you?” came a man’s voice behind him in an unfamiliar language, “stand up and turn around.”

Ravuth saw a bright light flashing around him.

Terrified and unable to understand the instruction, he instinctively stood, spun around, and stared into a torch’s beam.

*Appendix

-Chapter Two-

The Baking Phenomenon

“The 2015 Baker of the Year Award goes to...,” the master of ceremonies announced. He paused for effect and glanced at the name written on the back of a gold coloured card.

“...for the third consecutive year,” he faced the audience and smiled.

“...the pâtissier representing the Avalon Hotel...,” he again paused and announced, “...Mr Ben Bakewell!”

He applauded along with the audience in the plush Park Lane Hilton conference suite. Many cheered while a few mumbled as a man in an ill-fitting suit sauntered towards the stage.

“Well done, Cake,” said the M.C. as the baker stepped onto the platform and shook his hand.

Although Cake had won this prestigious award three years in succession, he still felt awkward as he held up the small crystal effigy. His acceptance speech echoed those from previous years.

“Thanks,” he mumbled into the microphone, blushed, farted, and left the stage, rushing over to the table to join his colleagues.

The awards ceremony was almost over, much to the relief of Cake. Several food critics were on stage discussing the various dishes that won prizes. Cake loathed these events and considered the critics to be idiots who were incapable of boiling an egg and didn’t belong in the industry, even though he always received rave reviews from them. The last one stated his *Avalon Nest Egg to be an explosion of flawless flavours creating an oral orgasm.

Every dish he created tasted perfect. However, Cake always felt they were average and considered his food lacked something, but unable to figure out what it was.

Cake arrived home at around 11:00 pm, after a long commute through the capital city. Jade had already arrived back from her five-day jaunt to Lincoln. Cake, excited to see her, wanted to find out how their bakery was progressing. He flopped into an easy chair in the living room while Jade fetched him a glass of wine and they got cosy. She showed him video footage of the work in progress.

Benjamin Bakewell, known as Cake for as long as he could remember, had an impeccable reputation within the culinary world. Every top chef and high-end dining establishment knew of Cake.

He had held the top position as head pâtissier at the Avalon for three years. His signature cakes and pastries were the envy of every top chef and not only unique in their preparation, but difficult to replicate. Many tried but failed.

Despite lucrative offers of employment from other top restaurants, and the Avalon’s offer of a generous pay increase. Cake, at the pinnacle of his profession, decided to branch out and run his own bakery business.

He was happy that this would be the last time he would have to attend any awards ceremonies as only sponsored chefs from top restaurants and hotels entered. Cake always felt uncomfortable and realised he looked awful in a suit with his stocky body balancing on thin spindly legs. Even though top class London tailors made his suits to measure, they hung off him as if a cack-handed blind person had made them. He'd always felt it unfair on his peers entering these competitions because his heightened olfactory sense, perfect palate, and exceptional talent gave him an indisputable advantage over them.

Cake and his fiancée, Jade, had been planning their new venture for several months. Jade was a hair stylist and had worked in a top salon close to the Avalon Hotel in the greater London district. They found premises in the Lincoln city centre and converted it into a bakery and pâtisserie, which had been Cake's dream for a long time. He wanted to bring his flavours and delicacies from the South and its decadent clientele and make them available in the North.

Cake and Jade had been together three years. She wanted to venture north to be with Cake and help him in his endeavour. Although content with her life and would miss the adulation given to her around London by being with her cooking superstar fiancé, she knew Cake was unhappy working in large hotels. Jade's job paid well and Cake received a high salary along with the prize money won from various competitions and bonuses. Cake and Jade used their savings to finance their new Lincoln venture, which was almost complete. Jade regularly commuted to Lincoln to check the building's progress. Cake was due to finish at the Avalon in a few weeks' time, when he and Jade would move to the Northern city.

Benjamin Bakewell was born on the outskirts of Louth, Lincolnshire, a rural farming town, forty-kilometres from Lincoln City. His family owned and operated a 200-acre arable farm on the small town's fringes, growing wheat, barley and hops. His nickname – Cake – was partly due to his surname, Bakewell, and for his love of baking. He attended Grimoldby Primary School and while the other kids used their break time playing sport and recreation, he would be in the school canteen helping the school cooks.

Cake's parents always knew he had an unusual sense. He could detect every ingredient of any dish and would add components that he considered the dish lacking to enhance and elevate its flavour until his perfect palate found it acceptable. Cake would not eat nor handle meat, as the smell contained no fragrant aromas and the texture felt grainy and rough, and the taste made him vomit. He tolerated certain seafood, but only if it was fresh and mildly flavoured, such as monkfish or scallops, to which he could add herbs and spices to disguise its fishy smell and taste.

Nobody could understand this boy's unusual gift, and it would be many years before anyone discovered the reason for his heightened sense of taste and smell. Only Cake could perceive how the world smelt and tasted to him detecting odours and fragrances in the air. During his younger years at school, he used his unique talent to earn sweets and other goodies from his school chums by guessing what they had eaten for breakfast that morning from a whiff of their farts. This also became a handy party trick.

Cake had a happy childhood and many friends, although girls avoided him due to his proclivity for sniffing the surrounding air, which was off-putting. His mates always found this a great form of entertainment, but he stopped doing this after his mother told him it was not a polite thing to do, and one day he would need a girl and shoving his nose up their arses was not the way to attract them. Cake helped around the farm with the crops and his favourite time of the year was spring when the flora and fauna pollinated and blossomed and the odours exploded his world into ecstatic overdrive. He also helped his mother and grandmother bake fresh bread, cakes, pies, and pasties for his family and the farms labourers. Cake focused his unique talent on baking, as the savoury, sweet smells and tastes pleased his senses. Young Cake felt at home in the kitchen and chuckled with delight each time he removed a tray of his new confectionary from the oven.

The mouth-watering, oven fresh smells drifted around the hot farmhouse kitchen as his grandmother stopped fluttering around and went to see what new or improved confectionary Cake had come up with.

His grandmother saw a sparkle in his eyes when he said. “Gran, one day I will be the most famous baker in England... maybe even the world.”

His grandmother would sigh and then smirk. “Yes Cake, we know, you remind us many times a day.”

He had accumulated cookbooks and magazines throughout the years and replicated every cake in the journals, adding herbs and spices that he blended to enhance the flavours, making them unique. Although there always seemed to Cake as if something was missing, his grandmother, Pearl, assured him that one day he would discover HIS perfect spice.

Cake took up kickboxing in his early teens. He was tall and slim and the martial art developed his body to be muscular, but his legs and arms remained scrawny however how hard he trained.

Cake was a handsome lad with a thin face, hazel eyes, and dark, brown, short hair. He resembled a young Kevin Costner, although his gangly odd shape gave him a Coco the clown appearance and throughout his mid-teens girls started noticing him, now he had stopped sniffing them.

His family assumed that on leaving school, Cake would join the family business and become a farmer. However, his dreams and ambitions were a world away from theirs and he wanted to attend culinary school. His parents forbade it and offered a compromise. He, along with his mother and grandmother, could start a small market bakery business and the three of them would bake, while his sisters sold their products to businesses in and around Louth.

Cake agreed to this compromise, knowing how this would mean working long hours and the forfeiture of his kickboxing training, but baking was his passion.

His grandfather let them use an old barn and purchased two second-hand gas-baking ovens, along with the large AGA cooker in the main kitchen.

The family bought a dough-mixer and other baking machinery, including shelves, refrigerators, and storage as per Cake’s instructions, and they set up a quaint rural bakery. His father had given them one of the farm’s Land Rovers to use and he and his sisters travelled around the small town to find factories and shop outlets to sell their bakery items.

Cake kept the menu simple. Although he loved to experiment, the family decided that bread loaves, rolls, baguettes, cakes, and tarts would suffice.

After harvesting the crops, Cake's business got underway. They baked early morning and the first batch left the bakery at 6:00am. The sisters made deliveries before going to school and Cake would bake and deliver any further batches.

This routine worked well and within a short time, they became inundated with orders. The bakery business became a lucrative extra income for the farm. Cake, although happy, didn’t feel content with his lot. The more he read cooking magazines about new techniques and recipes created in the big bakeries, restaurants, hotels, and with the adulation written about the master chefs, the more Cake yearned for the glamorous life.

One warm summer’s morning, as Cake removed a fresh batch of crusty ploughman’s rolls from the oven, he received a phone call from Bill, the landlord of the ‘Rising Sun’ public house.

“Morning Cake,” said Bill, “I have a customer who wants a word with you. Can you come here?”

“What does he want?” asked Cake.

“I don’t know, but you might want to meet him,” said Bill, sounding vague.

Cake, intrigued, looked at his watch and said, “Okay Bill, give me about twenty- minutes.”

Cake changed out of his baker whites and drove into town.

He went into the Rising Sun and over to Bill, who smiled and told him about the customer. “He ate a gourmet sandwich with a slice of Gateau on the first day, and today he ordered several of your sandwiches and slices of cakes. I saw him take a bite from each, savour them, wrap them up in a napkin, and place them into a holdall.” Bill scratched his chin and continued, “Today, he asked me who supplied my bakery products and when I told him it was a local baker, he introduced himself and insisted that he spoke to you. I wouldn’t have bothered, but he claimed to be famous, although I have never heard of him.”

“That’s strange,” said Cake and puckered his brow, “what’s his name?”

Bill thought and said “Jimmy, something. I forgot his surname, but he is sitting over there.”

Bill pointed to the man sitting in the lounge reading a newspaper.

Cake went over to the man, who peered over his newspaper and smiled. He placed the paper down on a table and asked Cake to sit.

Cake gasped and looked surprised when he recognised the man. He had read articles about him in British Bakery magazines, and well aware of the prestige surrounding the small, round-faced individual, with a receding hairline.

“I’m Jimmy Constable, the head pâtissier at Harrod’s bakery,”

Cake shook Jimmy’s hand and with a tremble in his voice said. “Yes, I know who you are; everyone calls me Cake.”

“I am pleased to meet you Cake,” said Jimmy,

“What can I do for you, was there something wrong with the food?” asked Cake looking concerned.

Jimmy smiled and said, “No the food’s perfect.” He then told him, “A few days ago, while I was travelling to Hull to interview a candidate for a position at Harrods, when I stopped here for a snack. I expected bland, dry, roadside food.” He leant forward and said, “Instead, the flavours and textures of the roll and Gateaux blew me away; I could not believe the taste sensations. I came back the next day to sample other items on the menu and again delighted with the unique, distinctive flavours.” He looked over at Bill smiling and whispered. “It tasted a lot better than the awful beer.”

Cake, thrilled to hear Jimmy Constable sing his praises, explained how he got his nickname, told him about his family’s bakery, and invited him to visit. Jimmy agreed, they left the Rising Sun and went to the Bakewell farm.

Jimmy looked around the small bakery and sampled a few more of Cake’s products, a look of pleasure spreading across his face with every bite.

“Have you any baking qualifications?” asked Jimmy.

“No,” replied Cake “Sorry.”

Jimmy smiled. “Never mind, I have tasted nothing this good for a long time, so we can get around the paperwork. I would like you to do something for me.”

Cake, looking confused, asked, “Get around paperwork for what?”

Jimmy ignored his question and took a magazine from his bag. He showed Cake a glossy photograph of a white icing topped custard slice and asked,

“Can you make one of these?”

Cake looked at the photograph. ‘Why would a top pâtissier want me to make a simple custard slice?’ he thought, looking puzzled.

“Sure,” replied Cake.

“Please make me one,” said Jimmy and smiled.

“Only one?” asked Cake.

“Yes, Just one,” replied Jimmy.

Jimmy sat and watched as Cake, who, like a whirling dervish, went through his jars and containers of ingredients. Using no weighing scales, he dolloped, sifted, folded, spooned, and mixed ingredients together, smelling and tasting it until he appeared satisfied.

After the slice looked a perfect match to the one on the glossy page, he placed it into an oven. They spoke for a while about London and baking until Cake knew that the custard slice was ready.

Once baked, he removed the flaky pastry custard slice from the oven and spread icing across the top. Jimmy inhaled the delicious aroma and smiled.

While waiting for the pastry to cool, he asked Jimmy, “Why did you want me to bake you a simple custard slice?”

Jimmy looked at Cake and smiled, “They aren't so simple and can taste bland. I always look for someone who can produce a unique flavour, turning a bland item into something special,” Jimmy replied.

“Look for what?” asked Cake, sounding confused.

Jimmy looked at Cake, and said, “An assistant.”

Cake was dumbfounded, as Jimmy told him, “There was a position at Harrods for an assistant head pâtissier, but so far I haven't been able to find a suitable candidate.”

Confused, Cake handed the warm custard slice to Jimmy, who took a bite of the sweet, crispy, pastry. The flavours exploded in his mouth with a blend of subtle tastes that enhanced the vanilla custard and icing.

'This kids talent's phenomenal,' thought Jimmy before announcing, "The job as my assistant is yours young Cake."

Cake's heart pounded, he knew he would never be presented with another opportunity like this. It was his dream, but he knew one thing stood in his way.

He then sighed and said. "I would love come to London and work for you Jimmy, but I have to run the bakery for the family."

Jimmy, sounded disappointed, looked at Cake, and said, "If you want the job, I will speak with your family," he smirked, "I can be very persuasive."

Cake smiled and looking like an excited puppy said. "Thanks Jimmy," he looked at his watch, "the family will be upstairs."

Jimmy and Cake walked into the large bakery section of Harrods a week later after Cake's family, knowing it had always been his dream, agreed.

Jimmy gave Cake a tour of the prestigious store. Cake gazed at the contents of the glass display cases in Harrods pâtisserie section, which looked like works of art. Jimmy showed him to his room in the staff quarters at the rear of the building and issued him several sets of chefs' whites with the small gold Harrods motif.

Cake felt a million dollars as he changed into his whites and went into the pristine, well organised, and efficient bakery, with each pâtissier knowing their routine. Cake felt overawed as he wandered around looking at the modern ovens and equipment.

"Okay Cake," said Jimmy, "Have a look around and get your bearings, then I need you to make two dozen chocolate éclairs."

"Yes, Chef!" replied a happy Cake, setting to work.

It took a short while for Cake to settle into his new life. Harrods bakery staff at first was cold towards him. They were jealous and couldn't understand why a young farm boy with no qualifications had landed the enviable position as the head pâtissier's assistant. However, once they tasted his cakes and pastries, they realised that he was special and deserved the post. Cake worked hard and spent most of his time at the bakery.

Cake's reputation spread throughout the culinary world around London. Harrods bakery sales increased and Cake was soon in demand by competitors. He earned good money and was doing what he loved, baking.

Jimmy became his mentor and taught Cake invaluable trade tricks and techniques. However, Cake felt limited from experimenting at Harrods. The fixed menu rarely changed and there was no room for innovation. Cake felt unchallenged and the job soon became mundane. He took up kickboxing again to break the monotony.

Although turning down jobs in other prestigious bakeries and restaurants, Jimmy encouraged him to advance his career, advising him to take another job should the right opportunity come along. That opening came when Cake was twenty-four-years-old. The Savoy Hotel approached him to be their head pâtissier, which Cake considered.

They offered him a generous salary increase, but more importantly for Cake, he would control the cake and pastry menu. He had the freedom to experiment with his own recipes, but the success of the department and responsibility to make the pâtisserie a success rested on his shoulders.

Cake discussed the offer with Jimmy, who advised him to accept the position.

The Savoy, although built in the late eighteenth century was a modern 5-star hotel with its opulence and grandeur impressing Cake.

He wasn't so impressed with the bakery, which, unlike the Hilton, was next to the main kitchen. Cake's first day came as a shock as he was used to a quiet and efficient bakery. The chefs in the kitchen buzzed around like headless chickens, while bawled and screamed at by either a small, fat, head chef or Gordon Ramsey when he visited his restaurant there.

Cake went into the bakery section where a baker was shouting at his harassed looking staff. He introduced himself to the assistant head pâtissier, who looked unimpressed at his new boss and, while barking out orders to his underlings, showed Cake around.

Cake wasted no time in getting the bakery into order and after a short time, reorganised the bakery section and trained the bakers to his techniques and recipes.

At last, he felt free to experiment with his own innovations and involved in creating every item that left his bakery. He fired the assistant pâtissier and the work area became serene and well organised, unlike the main kitchen, with its disorganised chaos and megalomaniacal head chefs yelling at their minions. Albeit they spoke respectfully to Cake, as they knew that unlike him, they were expendable.

Cake enjoyed strolling along the river Thames, and often wondered about his extraordinary senses. He wanted to find out more about it, so went to see Doctor Arnold Sagger, an eminent Harley Street clinical genetic specialist and physician, who took DNA samples for parenthesis and susceptibility.

The results astounded the doctor. Cake had over a third more olfactory receptor genes than other human beings and more than most other mammals.

The doctor had researched cases of individuals and thus far on record, the most was found in a wine sommelier in Italy, with 980 receptor genes, slightly more than the average in human beings of less than 900.

Cake had in excess of 1400, slightly less than mice, which have the highest with 1500 olfactory genes.

The doctor sounded excited when he asked to study Cake and research his unique mutation, but looked disappointed when Cake declined because the doctor made him feel like an X-Man.

He was just a normal chap with a heightened sense and now that he had found out the reason behind it, that was as all he needed to know.

Cake remained at the Savoy for several years, his name becoming synonymous with great confectionary. His reputation spread with articles written about him in baking journals and magazines referring to him as 'The Pâtissier Phenom.' Prince Charles regularly had Cakes confectionary delivered to Clarence house.

He had been on a few dates with female chefs, whom he'd found boring and smelt of cooking fat.

Several years later, the Savoy's ownership changed and the new owners were a corporation. Their only concern was money, profit, and setting targets and budgets. Cake spent more time with paperwork than

doing what he loved, so he became disheartened. He'd received many other job offers and after again discussing his situation with Jimmy, he accepted an offer from a new hotel in Richmond, Greater London, The Avalon. He would earn the same as the Savoy with bonuses, and still be running the bakery, but would not have to do any paperwork as they allocated him an administrator. The Savoy offered Cake a substantial wage increase and a large bonus to stay, but Cake refused and left the Savoy.

Cake enjoyed working at the Avalon. Now thirty-years-old, he felt comfortable with the freedom and responsibility.

Gaining a kickboxing black belt qualification before leaving the Savoy, after starting with the Avalon, he went to the Tojo Kickboxing Club, based in the gymnasium of the nearby Kings Leisure Centre.

He saw a few kickboxers training, put down his holdall, and wandered around the gym waiting for someone to acknowledge him.

An attractive woman came over and smiled at him.

Cake smiled at her and thought. 'Ooh, she's nice and too pretty to be a kickboxer. Probably a groupie,' he smirked.

"What do you want?" asked the woman in an abrupt cockney accent.

"I want to join the kickboxing club," replied Cake.

"Why?" asked the woman, "D' ya think you're tough?"

The others around the gym looked and smiled.

"Tough enough," said Cake, taken aback by the abrupt woman, "I'm a bla..."

His sentence cut short when she thumped him on the nose.

Cake looked shocked as she again went on to punch him. He blocked her shot, so she kicked his leg and stood back into an attacking stance.

"First lesson," the woman said, "...always be prepared." She then launched a vicious assault, kicking and punching Cake, who, although blocking most of the attacks still got hit. Now angry, he retaliated, punching and kicking back at the woman, who blocked each strike and punched him again on the nose. Cake was becoming irate. The woman, noticing this, stood back, and smiled.

"Yeah okay, you can join. But we need to work on your defence and karma; it was too easy to rile you into making mistakes."

Cake glared at the woman and looked at the other kickboxers, who were giggling as they watched the pair.

"I'm Jade," said the woman, extending her hand, and smiling. "...the head instructor."

Cake, still feeling perturbed, said, "So you attack all new members, do you? What would happen if I couldn't defend myself? Luckily I am a kickboxer."

Jade chuckled and replied, "I don't attack everyone, only the cocksure ones, Mr Blackbelt." She pointed to Cake's bag and the large cotton embroidered badge, showing the Zendo logo on his black belt tied around the handle.

Cake looked at his bag and then smiled at the woman.

“Oh!” he stammered, feeling embarrassed. “My name’s Ben, but everybody calls me ‘Cake.’”

After their initial contact, Cake and Jade hit it off. Cake found Jade intriguing, down to earth, and didn’t smell of cooking oil. Jade found Cake to be a kind, humble and attractive man. Everyone realised by the way they looked at each other and their lingering glances that the pair were falling for each other and had bets on which one would have the nerve to ask the other out. Although they had strong feelings for each other, they were both shy, neither realising how the other one felt.

Cake couldn’t take his mind off Jade and the kickboxing sessions became the highlight of his week.

The hair salon where Jade worked met at a nightclub for its Christmas party and Jade invited the kickboxers. Cake felt a little uneasy in the large nightclub. The party was the usual affair with people separated into their individual little groups. Jade could see that Cake looked uncomfortable and out of place, like a lost puppy. She left her group of hairdressing colleagues and went over to him. Cake stood alone with a bottle of Bacardi Breezer, looking at the crowded dance floor.

“Glad you could make it,” Jade shouted above the noise of the music.

“Thanks for inviting me,”

There was an awkward silence between the two as music blasted out. Neither knew what to say next and both stared at each other for several moments, until Jade asked, “You smell nice, what’s that you’ve got on?” referring to Cake’s aftershave.

Cake looked thoughtful, smirked, and replied, “A hard, but I didn’t think you could smell it,” he laughed.

Jade looked confused and then figured it out. That broke the ice and Jade giggled and said, “Well it would be a shame to waste a good hard.” She took the bottle from his hand and placed it on a table.

“Let’s get out of here and go somewhere quieter,” she said, suggesting, “Let’s go to my place.”

The couple walked hand in hand out of the nightclub, with the kickboxers cheering them on.

Jade was a few years older than Cake, with brown wavy hair, brown eyes, and impish features. She resembled a smaller, stockier version of Catherine Zeta Jones. Cake marvelled at her feminine, well-defined body as they lay entwined, naked in each other’s arms on a cold Christmas morning in Jade’s single bed at her flat above the hair salon.

Cake felt nauseous by the overpowering smell coming from the chemicals in the salon, which he also could smell on Jade, but thought she smelled a lot more pleasant than female cooks did.

It was the first serious relationship for both of them. Cake and Jade became inseparable, spending all their free time together. Cake explained to Jade about his heightened olfactory senses, informing her that he wasn’t being a cheeky twat by saying he couldn’t stay the night at the salon because it stank. The smell of ammonia in the hair dye made him retch.

Although they both had good incomes, with the astronomical price of property in London, Cake entered baking competitions to make purchasing an apartment possible.

The couple raised a sizeable deposit and took out a mortgage on a swanky apartment, midway between the Avalon and Jade's salon in Knightsbridge. Madly in love, they enjoyed their life together, planning to marry when both felt settled enough to start a family.

However, for the time being, they were content living in the limelight that the Pâtissier Phenom had been thrust into, winning everything across the baking board.

Jade surprised Cake frequently. She was a successful hairstylist with a wicked sense of humour and a strange interest in horror, as Cake found out when she wrote a novel about a cocaine addict, who sniffed the ashes of an unknown disintegrated vampire and turned into Keith Richards, which she got published.

Cake had now been working at the Avalon for three years, building a top class reputation. The owners sold out for a massive profit to a corporation and Cake, remembering his experience with the Savoy, decided it was now time for him to move on. His own business would give him the freedom to express his creativity.

The big day arrived when 'CAKE'S Bakery & Pâtisserie' opened its doors to the public. For Cake and Jade, it was now time to see if the fruits of their labour would pay off. They stood in the pâtisserie like proud parents waiting to show off their newborn to the world.

"The place smells delicious." Said Jade and kissed Cake

Cake looked nervous and glanced over at the staff stood in front of the glass displays filled with decorative cakes and pastries. He looked at his two bakers smiling through the glass partition of the bakery and asked, "Does everything look okay?"

Jade took his hand and said, "It looks perfect, don't worry."

"I can't see any people queuing outside," said Cake, looking through the windows. He glanced at the wall clock. "It's almost 8 o'clock,"

Two men came to the door.

"About time they got here said Jade," and unlocked the door.

"Sorry we're late," said Kris Pinyoun, the Lincoln city FC goalkeeper, who arrived with a photographer from the Lincoln gazette to open the establishment.

Jade looked outside, sighed, and locked the door.

Cake, Jade, the serving ladies, and Kris went to the centre of the shop and stood around Vuitton cake on display. The photographer took pictures of Jade cutting the cake and handing a piece to Kris, who took a forkful off the plate. The photographer snapped away as Kris placed the small chunk into his mouth and chewed. His expression changed as the delicate cake dissolved in his mouth as he savoured the flavours.

'Great acting,' thought the photographer, who continued snapping away at the happy footballer.

"It's now eight o'clock," said Cake, again looking at the wall clock.

Jade smiled and instructed, "Okay, open the doors."

Things had not gone to plan for the couple. Due to unforeseen expenses, they had far exceeded their budget with building regulations and slapdash building contractors, whom they had to change. With the shop opening three months late, the extra costs dug deep into their savings.

The pâtisserie and bakery looked stunning. Located in the centre of the Monks Road shopping area in Lincoln, the two-storey building had a large open space on the first floor, which Jade and Cake converted into plush accommodations. The shop front stood out amongst the neighbouring row of shops with large green sign and gold leaved logo.

The pâtisserie's interior resembled a decadent 1920's London restaurant with small imitation gas lampposts and other Art Deco fixtures and fittings and lemon green marbled columns in each corner. With the colour throughout subtle green jade, everything matched, crockery, upholstery, paper serving bags, and doilies.

The pâtisserie section has a large glass display cabinets along the walls and divided from the bakery section by a glass screen to enable customers to view the bakers working.

Although mainly a takeaway establishment, there were several Stamford wrought iron round tables and chairs for customers to sit and enjoy the ambience. They employed three serving staff and two bakers.

The experienced bakers, chosen from the many applicants who applied for the job, wanted an opportunity to learn from the legendary Cake.

Dave Smith and Dave Jennings were the two bakers Cake employed. To avoid confusion, Cake decided to call Dave Smith 'Big Dave' for being tall, while Dave Jennings was 'Small Dave' because he wasn't. Sarah, Tracy, and Jackie were the serving ladies.

One section of the temperature-controlled display case contained breads, sandwiches, and rolls, such as Roquefort and almond sourdough, shepherds loaf, gourmet sandwiches, parmesan and oregano submarine bread rolls with vegetarian fillings. Another section contained pastries including Latin puff pastry and other shortcrust and flaky delicacies. The final section of the refrigerated glass case contained cakes and desserts such as crème de la crème, which would be the envy of every fine dining establishment in the world, let alone a street bakery in Lincoln. Cake and his small team created delicacies, such as white chocolate and amaretto truffle, strawberry Arnaud, and macaroons haute couture. The pièce de résistance for the opening was Cake's interpretation of the Louis Vuitton patchwork cake. The Daves' heads had not stopped spinning since they started working with Cake. He truly was a master, although they found him a little eccentric. Every time he completed a dish, he would smell it several times, frown, and announce that there was still something lacking. They couldn't understand why, because everything Cake created tasted delicious and looked spectacular.

The bakery had new equipment, stainless steel baking ovens, dough mixers, dividers, and other speciality equipment. It gleamed with stainless steel sheeting on the walls, sinks, and sections of the floor. With air-conditioners and other temperature control machinery in storage compartments for specific products, it looked like an ultra-modern 21st-century bakery looked upon from a 19th-century pâtisserie.

Cake and the Daves' had been baking and preparing since 5:00 am and delicious aromas drifted around the establishment. The contents of the display cabinets had been set out with each product symmetrically laid out.

Sarah opened the front doors. The staff went behind the counters to their respective workstations and the Daves' went back to baking.

Cake and Jade stood with their arms around each other next to Kris Pinyoun, who helped himself to another slice of cake as a few people walked in. The photographer took pictures of the first few customers, as Jade gave them a slice of the Louis Vuitton cake.

Kris helped himself to another slice from the diminishing cake display and after eating that, announced, "We're going then."

Cake handed Kris his £300 fee.

"That cake tasted delicious," said Kris, licking the crumbs off the green paper doily. "Good luck with the business." He looked back at the diminishing Vuitton cake, but after receiving a scowl from Jade, he realised he'd overstayed his welcome and left.

A few customers trickled in and out over the next hour.

"I thought it would be busier," said Cake sounding disappointed.

"It will be fine," said Jade, assuring him, "The first day is always hit-and-miss so don't worry. Besides, it's only nine-thirty."

"I still think there is an ingredient missing," said Cake sniffing the aromas.

"You always think there's an ingredient missing: the elusive missing spice. Maybe I will ask Big Dave to fart. That usually sends your senses into fits," said Jade, chuckling.

"Do you think we have done the right thing? It cost us a lot more money than we thought," said Cake

"I'm sure we have," replied Jade, kissing him on the cheek. "Now bugger off into your bakery and work your magic on a baked Alaska."

Cake went into the bakery and watched through the glass wall as customers trickled into the pâtisserie, with Jade and the girls serving. He knew his family would visit later in the day and felt sure they would be proud of him.

-Chapter Three-

Safe Haven

Ravuth shielded his eyes against the bright beam shining in his face. The man wielding the torch spoke, but Ravuth couldn't understand him. The man lowered the torch and Ravuth could make out a large silhouetted figure. Two soldiers came running over also shining their torches at him.

One soldier spoke to Ravuth in Khmer, "Who are you and where did you come from?"

Ravuth replied with a quake in his voice, "My name is Ravuth. I am looking for my family and I came from the jungle."

The man in the background spoke to the soldiers, who ordered Ravuth to go with them. Terrified, he did as instructed and they went into a well-lit tent. A soldier told Ravuth to sit.

He could now see the man who was a large rotund foreigner with a grey beard. He wore a black smock with a white circular collar and a smiling old face that put Ravuth at ease.

The man said something to a soldier and left the tent. The Thai soldier told Ravuth that he was in a refugee camp near Chantaburi, Thailand that housed Cambodians fleeing from the southern province Khmer Rouge. He told him that the man who just left the tent was Father Donal Eggleton, an English priest who ran the camp.

Donal returned to the tent with a hot bowl of noodles. He laid it down on a table, motioning for Ravuth to eat.

Ravuth ate, while the soldiers and priest spoke amongst themselves.

When they'd finished, the Khmer-speaking Thai soldier told him, "You are safe and can stay here." Then the soldier noticed something.

"What's that?" he asked, pointing to the banana leaf box tucked into Ravuth's shirt.

Ravuth took out the box, removed the photographs, and handed them to the soldier.

"These are of my family," he said,

The Thai soldier looked at photographs and showed them to the priest, who looked and then handed them back to Ravuth. He then said something to the soldier, who advised Ravuth,

"Keep them safe. We don't get many people coming through now. This camp is only a transit stop. It is the first port of call and from here we relocate the Cambodian people to permanent camps in Thailand or send them abroad if eligible." He looked at the bedraggled youngster, smiled and said, "Good luck finding your family, Ravuth."

The priest again said something to the soldier, who translated, "We will take you somewhere to sleep and come see you in the morning."

They took Ravuth to a small bivouac and then left. Feeling confused, but safe, Ravuth lay on a thin grass mat under a canvas roof canopy. He held onto his box, which he placed on his stomach and fell asleep.

The next morning Ravuth awoke at daybreak and wandered around the camp. The Cambodian refugees were starting their day, and pots of rice bubbled away on open fires. Ravuth gazed at his country-folk, who, although happy to be safe, had a look on their faces, which Ravuth could only later describe as fear and despair.

A family invited Ravuth to join them and share their food. They told him how they and others had escaped the Khmer Rouge when they overthrew Phnom Penh. The father, told Ravuth of their horrific journey to the Thai border both in their motorcar and then on foot. Ravuth could see the fear in the parents and the trembling children's eyes as they told him of the atrocities they had witnessed en-route, their narrow escapes, and the chilling accounts of what had happened to the others in their party who never made it to the camp.

Ravuth listened and after hearing similar stories from the other refugees, he felt trepidation for the safety of his family and cried himself to sleep every night for the first few months.

Ravuth spent the next few years at the transit camp. He learned that the Church of England, who still had several missionaries and clerics in Cambodia who they now believed slaughtered, had set up the camp. With only a few Cambodians who had escaped the Khmer Rouge coming in, word permeated through the camp of the genocide and atrocities committed in Cambodia.

After showing his photographs to the Cambodians who came through, and with no one recognising his family, he became disheartened, fearing that he would never see them again.

Ravuth settled into a lonely unrewarding life. Father Eggleton and the occasional visiting missionary taught him English, while the Thai soldiers taught him Thai. He could now speak three languages although he could only read and write in Thai and English. Ravuth made himself useful in the camp, both as a cook and a translator; an invaluable asset with the new refugees brought in. He put the terrified individuals at ease, by cooking them Cambodian food, although he noticed the later arrivals looked so malnourished they only sipped water and most died soon after arriving. Father Eggleton and Ravuth grew close. Donal had spent his life with the clergy and never married or had children, so he cared for him like a son. Ravuth never knew his date of birth, as birthdays were not something rural Cambodians knew or celebrated. Father Eggleton knew this could pose problems for Ravuth. With birth certificates made in Thailand for Cambodian refugees repatriation, the priest applied for one, giving Ravuth the same day and month as him, guessing him to be around his late teens. Several weeks later, Donal handed Ravuth a small brown-paper wrapped package, smiled, and said, "Happy eighteenth birthday, Ravuth."

Ravuth eyes widened as he opened the present and flicked through the small bible, which he later put in his treasure box.

The year was 1978. Now in his late 50's, Father Eggleton's health deteriorated due to damp climate, poor hygiene, and diet, along with the tropical diseases exposed to over the years in the dirty camp. The English church council decided that Donal had done enough in his lifetime to help the underprivileged and needy. It was now time to replace him for a younger priest. They wanted him back in England to spend his remaining years at a quiet country parish. He agreed, but insisted on one stipulation.

The young Cambodian had never seen nor heard of an aeroplane before, let alone been on one. Ravuth sat on board a DC-10 Thai International aircraft, bound for Heathrow Airport, London. He squeezed father

Eggleton's hand as the plane went airborne but once they flew above the clouds, Ravuth felt excited but nervous. He stared out of the plane's window, overawed by this strange new world on his way to a new life.

Ravuth drank a Coca-Cola and enjoyed the fizzy sensation and the taste of the first cold drink he had ever had.

The flight was a long tedious thirty hours with several refuelling stops along the way, giving Ravuth time to wander around different airports and see other races. It was a journey filled with wonder for the Cambodian boy.

'Wait until I tell Oun about this.' He thought, and although feeling sad when thinking about his family, he smiled.

Father Eggleton, with help from the church's legal departments, waded through the red tape in Thailand and got temporary custody for Ravuth. Once in England, they went to the Parish of St. Wulfram in Rutland, near Grantham, and moved into the vicarage.

Ravuth loved his new home, which felt strange at first.

Father Eggleton chuckled after showing him the light switch and Ravuth stared wide-eyed as the power came on and off.

"What's that?" he asked, pointing to a large radio.

Father Eggleton tried to explain and Ravuth asked,

"And what's that?"

For the first few days, Ravuth questioned everything. He found it difficult at first to sleep on a bed, preferring the hard floor, but he soon became accustomed to the mattress as the stone floor felt cold.

Father Eggleton regained his strength and took up his position as the parish vicar.

Because he didn't feel confident enough to speak English at first, Ravuth was shy and reclusive, but the small English community took to the little lad from Cambodia to their hearts. The townsfolk were unaware and uninformed of Pol Pot and Cambodia's plight. These were sleepy little English country folk, with no interest in events taking place 7,000 miles away. They had their own concerns, trying to get their local heroin, Maggie Thatcher, into the Prime Minister's spot.

Ravuth lived in a small room at the vicarage and assisted Father Eggleton with his clerical duties. The priest was a kind man, but the church paid him little, so the congregation rallied around to help with clothing for Ravuth, who spent his days in the church cleaning and helping organise events. He was too old to attend school, so father Eggleton would spend afternoons educating him in English history, current affairs, and mathematics, which, with Ravuth's thirst for knowledge, he soon learned. His language skills improved and as he became more confident, mingled more with the community.

One of his duties was to go to the local bakery to collect sandwiches and Cakes for the weekly parish meetings. He loved the smell of the bakery with the aroma of fresh bread making his mouth water. The woman who owned the shop always saw the look of delight on Ravuth's face when he came in to pick up his order. One day she asked,

"The baker is preparing a new batch. Would you like to see how bread's made? "

Ravuth smiled, “Yes please.” He said and the woman took him through to the bakery and over to a man in baker's whites.

“My name is Patricia and this is my husband, John, he’s the baker.” She chuckled and said, “I know you have been coming here for a long time, but I don’t know your name.”

“My name’s Ravuth.”

Ravuth watched John as he mixed the ingredients, put the bread dough in baking tins, and popped them into the oven. He showed Ravuth how to make cake sponge and Ravuth loved the silky aroma the fresh baking products.

Ravuth went back to the bakery the next day at 6:00 am, and every day after, to learn and help John before returning to the vicarage at 9:00am.

The bakery was a quiet workplace, with Ravuth’s permanent smile brightening up John, Patricia, and the customers.

After a while, John let him experiment with various ingredients, and impressed with the results, he used Ravuth’s recipes

John paid Ravuth £2 a week and let him prepare the morning stock of products, with the morning customers complimenting on the new baker’s fresh tasting treats.

Ravuth spent lonely nights shivering in his cold room at the vicarage, clutching his banana box to his chest and remembering his family. His life and struggle in Cambodia now seemed like a lifetime away.

They had no T.V. and keeping abreast of world events had been difficult because Father Eggleton rarely listened to the radio. However, one parishioner informed Ravuth in 1979 that they’d seen on the TV that the Khmer Rouge had lost power to Vietnamese liberation forces.

After hearing the news, Ravuth felt elated, but knew that Father Eggleton did not have the funds for him to return to Cambodia and find his family. Despondent, he cried himself to sleep but remained hopeful.

It had taken time for lawyers, bureaucrats, and embassy officials to sort out Ravuth’s legal papers. In 1980, the necessary paperwork came through and Donal adopted him. Ravuth Eggleton was now a citizen of the United Kingdom and his old legal guardian was now his dad.

He spent the evenings with the ageing priest, learning the Gospels and reading his bible. Although Ravuth had no religious beliefs, he liked the stories of Christ and the Virgin Mary. Donal baptised him on in his 20th birthday.

The long years ticked by.

Patricia and John sold the bakery realising that supermarket bakeries and their cheap products would push them out of business. Ravuth continued baking at the vicarage for the weekly meeting and for his father. With more variety of ingredients becoming available in supermarkets, he experimented with foreign food, especially Thai and Cambodian cuisine, which he had made at the transit camp.

Ravuth was forty-two when Father Eggleton died. He was devastated. The old priest was his only family, mentor, and friend. His Cambodian family and roots were now just a distant memory. The two companions

had been together as father and son for over a quarter of a century and once again, Ravuth felt a lost and desperate soul, with no family or friends.

They buried Father Donal Eggleton in the small cemetery at the side of the church. On the day of the funeral, Donal's replacement handed Ravuth a large brown envelope containing the priests gold crucifix on a chain, a cheque from the church's lawyers that represented Father Donal Eggleton's estate, and a notice to vacate the vicarage. Ravuth hung the crucifix around his neck and read the letter.

"What does it mean," He asked, frowning

The vicar smiled and said,

"Sorry Ravuth, but you have to leave the vicarage. My family will arrive tomorrow, so there would be nowhere here for you to stay."

The following day Ravuth packed his bags and moved into a room in a bed and breakfast in Grantham. The small room had a shared bathroom, although there was a sink in the room, there were no cooking facilities. Ravuth only owned a few clothes, his crucifix, old bible, and his banana leaf box, which the years had aged, but although now tatty, it gave off a sweet pleasant aroma. Other than that, he had no other possessions to show for 42 years of life. His skin was now a lighter shade of olive due to harsh English winters, but he had remained active by walking everywhere and his healthy diet and lifestyle while at the church,

Ravuth spent the first few days in his B&B room watching T.V. During the time he had spent at the vicarage he had never seen a T.V., as Father Donal never had one, telling him that it took away the ability to learn from books and conversations. Ravuth read many books and became knowledgeable in many things, except for life in the big mad world. One day, during breakfast, he met another long-term resident, a young unemployed Indian man. After several hours of talking, the man mentioned the internet, email, and computers and took Ravuth along to a nearby internet café to show him how to use the technology.

After learning about the wonderful World Wide Web, Ravuth spent most of his time in the internet café, glued to the screens. He researched events happening in Cambodia and found a renewed purpose in his life.

With the world now at his fingertips, he became intent to search for his lost family.

One day, Ravuth sat on his bed, opened the banana leaf box, took out the faded Polaroid photographs, and stroked them. He removed the archaic leaflets he'd found in the Koh Kong café and studied them. He then took out the seedpod. Memories of the adventure with Oun flooded back and made him smile as he recalled his last happy memory of his family. He sniffed the now brown shrivelled plant.

'It still smells pleasant, like a honeydew, vanilla, air-freshener,' he thought, as he looked at the gnarled shrivelled up pod. 'Although old and looks like a lump of dog turd, it keeps my box smelling nice.' He chuckled.

He stood up, looked over at the mirror above his sink, and smiled.

"Old and rough looking, just like me," he said and chuckled to himself as he rubbed the dark patches under his eyes. He put the seedpod back into the box along with his bible, closed the lid, and placed it on a shelf.

Taking a folder from the bedside drawer, he put the old leaflets alongside sheets of printed out instructions, directions and information that he had found on the internet. He hoped they would help him with his quest, and he would take them along with him the following day on the flight to Phnom Penh.

With his thoughts in turmoil, many things went through Ravuth's mind. 'Would I be able to find the village and were my family still alive? Maybe Oun now has a family of his own. Would they remember me?' His stomach then churned and his ears drums popped as the plane descended.

2002. Cambodia felt unfamiliar to Ravuth Eggleton. He landed at the Pochentong International Airport in Phnom Penh and after getting glares from the customs officials after looking at his UK passport, caught a taxi into the city. He smiled as the warm air and familiar smells of Cambodia brought back fond memories as he looked out of the taxi's window. They drove past large modern buildings and small open food restaurants filled with smiling Khmers eating and chatting.

He checked into a hotel recommended by the taxi driver on the Riverside. During the time Ravuth lived in Cambodia, apart from the short, unnerving, visit to Koh Kong, he had never left his village, so he knew nothing about the country he used to call home. Having been a long time since he had spoken Khmer, he struggled to speak or understand his native language as the taxi driver spoke to him.

Arriving mid-afternoon, his plan was to visit the registry and records offices in the Council of Ministry buildings on Confederation de la Russie, but first, he wanted to get a taste of home. He left the hotel and went into the first open air Cambodian restaurant, ordering plates of Cambodian food.

"Ahh," Ravuth sighed with pleasure as he crunched on fresh Cambodian vegetables. He smiled, 'Beats pot noodles' he thought after living on Pot noodles and any other dehydrated food that he could cook with his kettle in the B&B. He spent the rest of the day contacting various departments and making appointments for the following day.

Ravuth went out in the evening and strolled along the Riverside. The large, still, Basaac River glistened, and Ravuth watched the lights of small boats flitted back and forth. He had brought pounds sterling with him and after the bank teller advised him to use US dollars instead of the Cambodian Reil, he kept a little sterling to go home with, the rest he exchanged to USD. 'I would use my ATM card from now on.' He thought, knowing he had more than enough in the bank to cover any costs he might incur.

Tourists and locals walked up and down the pavement, while noisy tuk-tuks and moto-dop taxis drove up and down looking for customers. The noise of the big city at night made Ravuth feel uncomfortable

He noticed several Khmer and foreign-owned restaurants and watched Khmer touts and beggars approaching foreigners, who tried to ignore the nuisances. He sat in a restaurant, ordered a meal and a beer and after finishing his food, he returned to his hotel room and sifted through his information for the next day's meetings. Realising the first obstacle he had to overcome was to find out his family's name. Living in a small village, the family's details only got recorded at the local Sangkat (district council) and they issued family books to each family as a record. His father took care of all those details as none of the family could read or write, Ravuth was unaware of his family's surname or real date of birth. He realised it was going to be a hurdle after spending the next day shunted around different sections and achieving nothing.

Over the next few days going through the archives, his search came up fruitless. He spent the night time walking along the Riverside and a few hours at an internet café before returning to his hotel. His week in Phnom Penh disheartened him, he'd uncovered nothing. Ravuth had hardly spoken to anyone since the Khmers seemed standoffish and cold toward him, considering him an outsider who had escaped the Khmer Rouge. The foreigners also ignored him assuming he was a tout wanting to sell them Killing Fields tours or sexy massages. He felt alienated and lost and kept himself to himself, concentrating on his seemingly impossible quest. He looked at the records of the genocide museum at Tuol Sleng. Surprisingly, the Khmer Rouge that had controlled the central provinces kept meticulous records; including photographs of any

unfortunate individual that came through the hellish place. Ravuth sifted through every photograph, knowing the demise of the individuals whose emaciated images now stared back at him. He felt relieved that his family were not amongst the victims of this nightmare. Ravuth had studied several articles on the website about the atrocities committed by Pol Pot and his indoctrinated band of murderers. Now that he was in Cambodia, the facts became a lot clearer and realised that his parents were probably dead, but hoped Oun had survived. While alone in his hotel room, he tried to imagine how that terrifying period could have affected Oun, and remembered his brother's happy, smiling, grimy face as they played and went on adventures.

Haunted by the horrific images he had seen over the past few days, Ravuth spent long sleepless nights at the Phnom Penh hotel, with both happy memories of his childhood and turbulent and frightening thoughts about the possible demise of his family.

A woman administrator, who saw Ravuth's daily pilgrimage to her offices, handed him a piece of paper giving him information about the province offices where his family would have gone through.

"Maybe they can help." She said, "All the people from that area went to that commune to be processed. Perhaps they would know where your family were sent from there."

Ravuth looked at the address and cringed.

"Would you like me to make you an appointment?" asked the woman.

Although unnerved by the thought of returning to Koh Kong, Ravuth took a taxi to the border town the following morning for his appointment with the head administrator. The journey took almost eight hours in the old Toyota corolla with the air conditioner not working and the four stops by the rivers to await the floating pontoon to ferry them across, Ravuth felt uncomfortable. However, speaking with the driver, throughout the journey, slowly his understanding of the Khmer language returned.

He went to see Ny Ngem, chairman of Dang Paeng Sangkat, the commune offices that covered the Koh Kong province during the Khmer Rouge period.

Ravuth and Ny's English speaking assistant, Rom, went through records. The problem was that there were many unnamed villages and sporadic residences herded together, so the only records that the Khmer Rouge had noted down, were the number in the group, the destination camps, and the surnames. Unlike the meticulous records kept in Phnom Penh, these were sketchy. After a few days of mundane searching, Ravuth realised this was not the way forward and fed up with having to pay the chairman daily coffee money, as he liked to call his back-handers. He felt he had no other choice but to pay after noticing that ever since he arrived, the Cambodians did nothing without money, especially from foreigners, which he now was.

Ravuth gleaned nothing with his time with Rom, but it had been useful because they spoke Khmer, with Rom correcting his mistakes. After a few days, his Khmer improved.

Although large plush casinos had sprung up near the border; with only people passing through Koh Kong, the few guesthouses in the sleepy grimy town were mainly Khmer-owned and dingy. Ravuth stayed in a guesthouse near a market in the town centre. He didn't feel comfortable or safe in Koh Kong and his room smelt damp and musty. Not wanting to venture out, after finishing at the commune, he stayed in the guesthouse. He had eaten in the restaurant every night and the owner stared at him with disdain as he served him cold Cambodian food.

Ravuth had used the same moto-dop taxi every day to travel the short distance to the offices. The driver was a cheerful young Cambodian called Tik, who had been hanging around at the guesthouse for the past few mornings. Ravuth hired Tik to take him to the offices and bring him back late afternoon. Ravuth had now been in Koh Kong for four days and knew that he was wasting his time, not knowing what to do next. He decided to return to Phnom Penh the following day and spend his last few days there.

“See you in the morning,” said Tik as he dropped him off at the guesthouse.

“Tomorrow, I need you to take me to the bus, Tik,” said Ravuth.

Tik frowned and looked disappointed, “You’re not leaving are you?” he asked

Ravuth nodded and said, “Yes, I haven’t found what I came here for.”

Tik had not asked why Ravuth was there, but seeing the disappointment in the old Cambodians faced asked, “What are you looking for?”

Ravuth smiled and said “My family. We were separated and I believe they were brought here many years ago.”

Tik smiled and said, “I know people who have lived here a long time. I will ask around. Have you got any photographs?”

Ravuth had made photocopies of his old photographs and handed Tik two A4 sheet’s with them on. Although the black and white prints were poor quality, he pointed at the figures.

“This is my mother Rotha, that’s Tu, my father, and he is my younger brother, Oun.”

“You look a lot different now, Ravuth” said Tik, who chuckled as he saw the young Ravuth’s grubby young face smiling back at him. Tik folded up the copies and put them in his pocket. “I will try to find out something before you leave.” He said, before driving away chuckling.

A creaky old fan squeaked as it slowly rotated, swirling hot muggy air around the small tatty guesthouse room. The dimly lit room made reading difficult for Ravuth. He spent a few hours going over more literature, discarding most of it as rubbish. There came a knock on his door. It was Tik with another Khmer, who appeared of similar age to Ravuth.

“Ravuth, meet my father, Sok,” said Tik, introducing the Khmer man who greeted Ravuth.

They sat on the bed while he related his story to Sok. Ravuth noticed that Tik bore no similarities to his father. Sok was a short, chunky, hard-faced individual, who wore a large amount of gold jewellery around his neck and chunky gold and ruby rings on each finger. He spoke with a harsh, intimidating tone.

Sok pulled the folded copies from his shirt pocket, unfolded them, and said,

“I remember this family... and the village they came from.” He looked at the sheet and pointing to the picture of Rotha and said, “Yes, I know this woman and her husband and son, your brother, he is about my age.”

Ravuth’s heart leapt as Sok continued,

“I know their village... I will take you there tomorrow. Oh, but I will need to hire my friend’s Range Rover. He will want \$500,” said Sok

Ravuth knew this was well over the odds, but didn’t care, he felt elated and would have happily paid a lot more.

“Fantastic, thanks,” said Ravuth. “Although I will need to go to the bank first, I only have \$300 on me.”

“No problem,” said Sok and grinned.

A shiver went through Ravuth as Sok grinned. He looked into his menacing eyes that brought back terrifying memories of the last time he saw evil in a Cambodian’s eyes, but this man had found his family so he ignored his instincts.

“Okay,” said Sok “let’s celebrate,”

“Yes, yes, and thank you again,” said Ravuth with a beaming smile.

They walked a short distance to a dimly lit Cambodian karaoke and entertainment bar. Ravuth noticed how much respect people paid to Sok in the establishment and many ‘taxi girls’ (hookers) came and sat with them and Sok ordered them drinks. One pretty girl, in particular, caught Ravuth’s attention. She was a young Khmer called Anni. Ravuth felt uncomfortable in the bar and not used to women, never having any experience with the fairer sex, was still a virgin. Anni and Ravuth chatted over the loud thumping music, and she could feel his nervousness. Anni kept receiving stares off Sok and the *mamasan, which was her signal to get on with her job and seduce Ravuth.

The mamasan came over, whispered to Anni, and then asked Ravuth, “Do you like Anni?”

“Yes,” Ravuth mumbled, looking timid.

“She wants to take you somewhere a little quieter,” said the mamasan sounding aloof.

Ravuth, being naïve and unsure of what the mamasan implied, shrugged and said, “Yes, okay.”

Anni led Ravuth to a block of five dingy apartments outside the rear of the bar and they went inside a small dirty room. There was a bed and a shower room, with a hole in the floor for the toilet and a square concrete container full of dirty water, which the girls and customers used for ablutions. Noticing several rails of clothes, Ravuth realised that many girls must live in this shabby hovel and it had a strange smell, which Ravuth never having sex was unfamiliar to him.

They sat on a thin filthy mattress. Anni smiled and said, “I will shower Ravuth,” she pulled off her t-shirt Jeans and bra; Ravuth looked away as she wrapped a large threadbare towel around herself and removed her panties.

Ravuth was nervous and apprehensive, but as he watched Anni naked throwing small pales of the water over her head and lathering herself in soap, he became aroused. Anni came from the shower wrapped in the scruffy towel, looked at Ravuth, smiled, and let her towel slip.

Anni was so thin he could see her ribs, but she had small pert breasts, and a shaven chalice. She grabbed his hands and eased him to his feet. Ravuth felt nervous and excited, but became embarrassed when Anni removed his Y-fronts and he stood with a boner, which he covered with his hands.

Anni smiled, knelt down, and took a condom from the pile on the table. She moved Ravuth's hands away and rolled on the thick rubber sheath; having to replace it several seconds later.

"I am sorry," said Ravuth as Anni smiled and caressed renewed vigour back in his old totter.

Once his old totter stood to attention, Anni directed him to the bed and he lay down. Anni straddled him, thrusting herself up and down on his little soldier.

Thirty seconds later as Anni took another shower, Ravuth lay on the bed smiling, in his blissful heaven,

Anni felt pleased that it was over so quick, she still had a long night ahead and Ravuth was her fourth customer already.

Ravuth returned with Anni into the main bar and sat with Sok, Tik, and several girls. They drank and chatted for a while longer and noticing Ravuth looking tired, Sok said, "Okay Ravuth, pay the bill and we will take you back to the guest house."

"Thanks a lot," said Ravuth "I want to get a good night's sleep. Tomorrow's a big day."

"Som khet loy, the bill please," said Ravuth said then asked Anni, "Can I see you tomorrow evening?"

Anni nodded and smiled. "I will be here if you want to see me," she said.

The mamasan brought a small folder containing the bill and handed it to Ravuth. The total was \$300.

Ravuth paid the exorbitant bill. He knew it was far in excess of what it should be, but didn't care.

Tik and Sok escorted Ravuth back to the guesthouse and arranged to pick him up at 8:00 am. Ravuth went to his room and lay on his bed, feeling ecstatic. 'It has been one of the best days of my life.' He said and thought about Anni.

Sok and Tik returned to the karaoke bar, the mamasan handed Sok \$200, delighted at having made \$100 for herself. Sok took Anni for a free short time shag.

Sok then got into his Range Rover and took the photocopied sheets from his pocket. He laughed as he tore them up, threw the pieces out of the window, and drove home.

Ravuth had a restless night, excited by his thoughts of reuniting with his family after all these years. Unable to settle, he sat on the concrete benches outside the guesthouse, watching the sunrise, swatting away mosquitos, and looking at his watch, willing the hours to pass until Sok arrived.

It was a hot muggy day. Sok drove Ravuth to an ATM and smirked as he watched him withdraw cash. He, Ravuth, and Tik drove to the outskirts of the town and headed towards the Cardamom Mountains. The Range Rover's air conditioner was a welcome relief to Ravuth, who still hadn't acclimated to his old country's weather.

Sok explained that after the Khmer Rouge were ousted and Cambodia liberated, most survivors returned to their old towns, cities, and villages. Although the Khmer Rouge still had sporadic bands of fighting factions in and around the areas, once Pol Pot died in 1999, they had integrated back into society. He assured Ravuth that he knew the whereabouts of his village and family.

"I bet you are excited," said Sok looking at the smiling Ravuth, "Not long now, we're almost there."

Sok got onto a dirt track off the main road. Ravuth looked at the terrain, but he could still see the Cardamom Mountains some way off, so he became concerned.

They drove along a dry muddy track for 30-minutes and into a small village. This was unrecognisable to Ravuth. There had been no familiar landmarks or anything along the route that he'd recognised and still nowhere near the jungle.

Sok pulled up in the village centre and Ravuth got out and looked at the communal hut. The inhabitants came out to greet him, laughing, smiling, and welcoming him home.

A middle-aged man in shirt and trousers went over and * wai'd Ravuth.

Sok introduced him as Boran, the village Chief.

"Welcome, home Ravuth." Said Boran.

Ravuth looked around the small gathered crowd but recognised nobody.

"Your village has a problem," said Sok "They needed money for a new generator and building materials."

"Where are my parents?" asked Ravuth, feeling perturbed and upset.

Boran smiled and said, "Come eat, we have prepared food."

"But it's not my village." Said Ravuth and frowned as Boran led him inside the communal hut where a feast of vegetables and rice laid out on a straw mat.

While they ate, Ravuth leant over to Sok and repeated, "I know this isn't my village and where are my parents?"

Sok appeared shocked, and said, "Sorry Ravuth, I felt certain it was where I last saw your family. That was a long time ago, so maybe I was confused with another village. Eat up and we will look there. You need to pay the Chief and the villagers here a little money, please help, give them a small amount, \$600 would keep them happy."

Ravuth had withdrawn several thousand dollars from the bank that morning to help his family when he'd found them. He had already given Sok \$500 he'd requested for the loan of his 'friends vehicle' and now handed over \$600 to the village elder; followed by two more payments to village chiefs after taken to the wrong villages... again.

They returned to the guesthouse at dusk after driving around in circles on the outskirts of Koh Kong all day. Disheartened and angry, Ravuth realised that Sok knew neither his family nor the whereabouts of his village, and this wasted excursion had so far cost him \$2,300.

While eating his evening meal at the guesthouse, Sok turned up, went over to Ravuth, and said, "Sorry about today. I was sure that one of them was your village. Never mind. We can try again tomorrow. I am sure that we will find it. I think I know where it is. Look."

He unfolded a black and white photocopy of a map with areas circled on it. Ravuth stopped eating and looked, as Sok told him, "You said it was in the jungle by the mountains." He pointed to three hand-drawn circles and said, "It must be one of these villages, I came off the main road too early."

Ravuth looked, but could see nothing apart from a black and white photocopy with three pencilled in circles. He frowned and continued eating. Sok sat down and smiled, “Do you want to go to see Anni?” he asked

Disgruntled, but looking forward to seeing Anni, Ravuth went along with Sok to the karaoke

“Where's Tik?” asked Ravuth.

“He had to work tonight,” said Sok and took a gulp of Johnnie Walker.

Tik had taken the back roads and shortcuts to the three villages nearby to collect Sok's large cut of the money extorted off Ravuth.

Anni came from the back room several minutes after Ravuth and Sok arrived. She had just finished with one customer who had taken ages and looked happy to see Mr two-stroke Ravuth in the bar. The mamasan encouraged Ravuth to take her now because she would be busy later.

While in the shabby room and after satisfying Ravuth, he asked, “how long have you been working here, Anni?”

Anni looked taken aback, customers never asked questions, she was only there to give them relief and once finished that was it. No one had ever shown any interest in her as a person. She looked at Ravuth smiling at her. Sok had told her that Ravuth was now a rich foreigner, but realising he was also a kind man, related her plight.

It had been four years since the mamasan went to her village on the outskirts of Koh Kong. She offered to loan the villagers with daughters \$200, telling them to use the money to improve the village and their lifestyle.

She told them that they could pay her back anytime, but they must pay interest. In the meantime, she would employ the girls, who would receive \$40 per month salary and given food, clothing, and accommodation, which she would deduct from their salary, along with the loan's interest. These simple country folk thought \$200 a godsend. They could buy machinery to help with their land, new generators, TV's and hire machines to dig deeper wells for when the annual droughts hit and their shallow wells dried up.

Anni told him, “We were all happy and I couldn't wait to start work,” Anni frowned and continued, “The mamasan told us that it was a simple job to ‘service the customers’. Although nobody understood what the work entailed, our families were delighted. The families agreed and took the money. What she didn't tell us was our cost of living in the back rooms was \$20 per month and the interest on the loan was \$20 per month; so until the families could raise the \$200 to repay mamasan we were stuck here. Our job was to entertain the local Khmer customers every night, who were usually drunken moto-dop taxi drivers and border touts who had made money that day from the foreign border crossers. They wanted to get drunk, play with the girls, and get a quick relief. Sometimes we get the local mafia coming in, people like S...” Annie paused and hoped Ravuth didn't work out the end of the sentence as she said. “But they don't pay. The mamasan is an unkind and unpleasant tyrant, who terrified us girls into undertaking any sexual act the customer desired,”

Ravuth saw tears in Anni's eyes as she looked embarrassed and told him, “we get paid \$1 per customer.” She looked around the shabby room and her rack of scruffy clothes and said, “Which doesn't buy much.” Anni then wiped away her tears and smiled.

Ravuth felt sad for the pleasant young woman, who had now gratified him on two occasions. He could only imagine what kind of miserable life she led.

He smiled, took \$50 from his wallet, handed it to Anni, and said, “Sorry, I am short of cash until I get to the bank in the morning and I still have to pay the bill here.”

Anni, looking stunned, but feeling delighted said,

“I never told you about my family to get money from you. I think they’d robbed you enough... You are a kind man, Ravuth. Thank you, I will hide this money and give to my family.”

She and Ravuth went back into the karaoke bar.

The following morning, Ravuth felt a little happier after Sok convinced him that he would find his family today. He withdrew more money from the bank and paid Sok another \$500 for ‘his friend’s motor.’

On the way back to Koh Kong, Ravuth sat in the Range Rover feeling depressed and dejected. He knew that Sok had again swindled him. He had taken another route and driven around in circles, returning to the same villages they had visited the previous day, with Ravuth having to pay them again.

“Never mind,” said Sok smiling, “we can try again tomorrow.”

Ravuth had never felt so enraged. “No, we cannot. I have had enough of your lies.” He pointing at Tik and snapped, “and you are not his son. I know who you are Sok, you are the Koh Kong mafia, and you have both robbed me, but no more. Take me back to the guesthouse. Now!”

Sok sneered at Ravuth as he dropped him off at the guesthouse and drove away agitated and angry. Ravuth ate and decided to head back to Phnom Penh the next day. He was due to return to the UK in a few days and felt angry about wasting his time, spending a lot of money, and no closer to finding his family. He no longer wanted to stay in Koh Kong. Looking around the dingy room, he felt unnerved and stared out of the window. With only a few hundred dollars left in his pocket, he stayed in his room. It was now night and he knew he would not get a taxi to take him in the dark because of the un-lit windy mountain road en route to Phnom Penh and the river crossing pontoons would not run at night. He decided to leave as early as possible in the morning. Ravuth lay on his bed and watched the creaky old fan rotating until he dozed off.

The guesthouse owner and an armed policeman banging on his door at midnight woke Ravuth. The policeman ordered him to go to the reception. Confused, Ravuth slipped on his trousers and followed them downstairs, where a drunken Sok and a sullen Anni stood.

“That’s him!” Sok screamed, pointed an accusing finger at Ravuth as he came into the reception. “That’s who beat, Anni!” he slurred.

Anni looked beaten and embarrassed. She held her swollen jaw as the policeman asked her, “Was this the man who beat you?”

Anni nodded.

Ravuth felt shocked and clasped his hands to his mouth.

The policeman growled, “You beat this lady, you must pay!”

“But I never touched her,” pleaded Ravuth.

“You beat this lady, you pay or go to the ‘monkey house’ (prison),” the policeman snapped, producing a set of handcuffs.

Sok glared at Ravuth, grinned, and slurred,

“Pay \$5,000 or get locked up for a long time. It’s up to you,”

Ravuth looked at Anni staring at the ground.

“Please... tell them the truth, Anni,” he beseeched.

Anni remained silent while the police officer moved toward Ravuth to handcuff him.

Ravuth realised he could not win against this setup,

“Wait,” he said. “Okay, I will give you the money, but I will have to go to the bank to withdraw it in the morning.”

The policeman looked at Sok for direction. Sok stared at Ravuth’s crucifix, hanging around his neck.

“Give me that as a guarantee,” he snapped, pointing at the gold cross and chain.

“No, this was a gift from my dead father!”

Sok nodded at the policeman who moved closer to the frightened Ravuth with the cuffs.

“You will get it back once you pay the money,” said Sok, grinning

Ravuth, knowing his position was hopeless, removed his crucifix and handed it to Sok.

“I want it back when I give you the money,” demanded Ravuth.

“Of course,” Sok replied, smirking as he looked at the gold crucifix and hung his new prize around his neck along with his other jewellery.

“I will be here to take you to the bank at 9:00 am,” he slurred.

He then grabbed Anni’s arm, and along with the smirking policeman, left the guesthouse; leaving the irate owner and Ravuth standing by the reception.

“Pay your bill in the morning and leave,” said the owner sounding abrupt, who then went to his room.

Ravuth went into his room shaking and sat on the bed. He cupped his head in his hands.

Ravuth knew this would be a long sleepless night and he was correct. He sat on his bed staring out of the window all night, dozing off for a few minutes at a time.

Around 6:30 am, he heard a motorbike pull up at the front of the guesthouse. Anni appeared at the window, startling Ravuth. She looked worried and motioned for Ravuth to open the window, which he did and she climbed into the room. Ravuth felt angry, but he could see Anni looked in pain as she explained.

“I am sorry about what happened, Ravuth. Yesterday Sok came into the karaoke late afternoon, He was furious about something and I heard him tell mamasan it was your fault. He drank several shots of whisky in quick succession and groped me. As the night wore on, he became more intoxicated and abusive. He told

me that he wanted to get more money from you before he would allow you to leave Koh Kong and I must help or he would go to my village and hurt my family.” She sighed and continued, “I tried to calm him down and took him to the back rooms to relieve him, but he was too drunk to do anything so became angrier. He punched in the face and kept punching me until I fell, and then kicked me. I screamed for help, when mamasan came he stopped kicking me.” Anni grimaced as she told Ravuth what had happened. He could see she had been through a hellacious beating as she said, “Mamasan called one of their police friends and between them concocted the story about you beating me.” Anni coughed and winced, holding her ribs.

Anni trembled and looked terrified. Ravuth understood why she had to lie. She had no choice.

“I am sorry and wish I could help, but what can I do? I can’t leave without paying them money and I must get back my crucifix. It’s important.” He said.

“Sok will never return it to you and they will keep you here paying them more money,” Anni told him.

Ravuth considered that would be the case, but couldn’t figure a way out of this nightmare.

Anni then took the crucifix from her pocket and handed it to Ravuth.

Ravuth, dumbfounded, gasped.

“How did you get that?” he asked and put the gold chain over his head.

“When we left here, we went back to the karaoke bar where Sok and his policeman friend celebrated. They drank more and played with the other girls. Mamasan went to bed around 2:00 am and ordered me to clean and wait until she woke up. Sok and the policeman fell into drunken stupors in the bar around 4:00am. I put ice on my face to ease the pain and stared at that bastard while he snored on the sofa.” Anni scowled as she continued. “Knowing I could not work and pay to mamasan because of him, it made me angry. I took your crucifix from around Sok's neck and mamasan’s motorbike keys from behind the bar. I came here to help you escape.”

“How?” asked Ravuth, looking puzzled, “I would think Sok warned all the taxi drivers and moto-dops to keep their eye on me and the first bus doesn’t leave until 1:00pm. Sok said he would be here at 9 o’clock, but once he found my crucifix gone, he would come straight here.”

Anni nodded and told him, “Your safest and quickest way out was to cross into Thailand and return to Phnom Penh, either at the northern border at Poipet or go to Bangkok airport and fly there.” She looked at Ravuth and said, “That was your only way. But we would have to go now before the guesthouse owner wakes up and alerts everyone.”

Ravuth nodded, and with his bag already packed, he grabbed it and climbed out of the window. They got on mamasan’s motorbike and sped off the 4 kilometres to the border

Immigration, customs officials, and small food stalls vendors, along with border touts, were preparing for the day ahead when Ravuth and Anni pulled up. They got off the bike at the border post and Anni showed him what counter he had to go to leave Cambodia.

Anni saw Ravuth looked nervous, so held his hand. “Don’t worry Sok has no influence at the border.”

They faced each other and Ravuth said, “I don’t know how to thank you, Anni. I hope you will be okay.”

Anni smiled, nodded, and said, "I'll be fine," although knowing that her suffering was about to become worse.

Ravuth took out his wallet and counted his money. He couldn't let the girl who had risked so much stay near Koh Kong, realising she was in danger.

"If you need more money, there's an ATM on the Thai side of the border where you can get Thai baht's," said Anni, seeing him counting his cash.

"Good," said Ravuth, "but I want to give this to you so you can get away from Sok and mamasan." He handed Anni \$320. "I would like to give you a lot more, but that was all I had until I get over the border."

Anni took the cash and winced as she kissed Ravuth on the cheek and said, "Thank you... you are a kind man with a good heart."

With relief etched across her swollen face, Anni knew she could get far away from her Koh Kong oppressors to start a new life. She would take mamasan's motorbike and leave straight away; she was wearing her only belongings.

"I imagine Sok will come to Phnom Penh to track me down, so I will lie low for the next couple of days until my flight home." Said Ravuth

Anni reassured him. "Don't worry. He will never go to Phnom Penh he has no power there. Sok is former Khmer Rouge and a coward. He would be too afraid of what the police in Phnom Penh would do to him."

Ravuth looked at the bruised and swollen face of poor little Anni. He felt anguish and pity for her, and a seething hatred toward Sok.

"Will you be alright? What will you do?" he asked, concerned for this girl, who risked so much to help him.

"I will be fine. The money you have given me will last me quite some time. I can drive to the ferry port and catch the morning ferry to Sihanoukville. I have friends there and neither Sok nor mamasan will find me."

Anni noticed Ravuth's sadness and frustration, so she stroked his face and smiled. "Don't worry. Thanks to you I will be safe and once settled, I can help my family."

She nudged Ravuth, signalling him to go. He walked toward the immigration.

"Maybe we will meet again someday, Ravuth." Shouted Anni as she got onto the motorbike and headed off toward the small ferry terminal.

Ravuth watched at her speed away. "I hope we do," he said.

After being stamped out of Cambodia and walking the 200 yards stretch of no man's land, Ravuth crossed the border into Thailand and breathed a sigh of relief.

After withdrawing Thai baht at the ATM, Ravuth caught the morning bus to Bangkok. He communicated with the Thais, remembering enough of the Thai language to get by and the few he came across spoke English. He arrived at Don Muang Airport with only having to wait a few hours before he caught a routine flight for the ninety-minute short hop back to Phnom Penh.

Terrified that Sok would track him down in Phnom Penh, Ravuth stayed in the hotel room. The next day he went to the government offices and told the woman who assisted him before about his nightmarish encounter in Koh Kong. The woman said she would report it to Ny Ngem, but knew nothing would happen.

“Koh Kong was a law unto itself with it cut off from Phnom Penh by the river crossings. It was difficult for the capital to monitor or police. But report it to the Phnom Penh police and if Sok or his thugs came searching for you they would be arrested and have to face real Cambodian justice.” she said, and looking angry, added, “With Sok being ex-Khmer Rouge, he would pay dearly for extorting money off a tourist, especially a Cambodian tourist.”

That put Ravuth’s mind at ease and he now understood what Anni told him at the border that he had nothing to fear in Phnom Penh from Sok.

With a heavy heart, he flew back to England a few days later.

Ravuth, now back in the room at the Bed & Breakfast, thought hard about his next course of action. He knew the money that Father Donal had left would not last much longer, especially if he kept being gullible and an easy target for shysters. He needed to find employment and cheaper accommodations, so he could continue his search. Although the bad experience had shaken him, he was determined to return to Cambodia and find his family. Next time, thanks to the hard lessons he had learned through his naïveté, he would be better prepared. He stroked his crucifix, knowing that father Donal was watching over him. He took his bible from his banana leaf box and prayed for Anni’s safety.

-Chapter Four-

End of the Beginning

Cake was an amazing culinary craftsman with a phenomenal gift propelling him high above the rest in his field. He was a martial artist with a tall, muscular, although gangly frame. He had a loving, faithful, beautiful, girlfriend, and lived, worked, and owned one of the most aesthetically pleasing and stylish establishments in the historic city of Lincoln. However, as a businessman; he sucked -- big time!

CAKES Bakery & Pâtisserie had been running for five months and with autumn giving way to winter, it was cold, with daylight hours shorter. Things changed drastically for the business and with Cake and Jade's relationship.

The Daves' had been preparing the new products since 5:00 am and the shop bathed with delicious, baking aromas. Cake's mind was elsewhere, and as the Daves baked, he stared aimlessly through the glass partition into the dark pâtisserie. The Daves' noticed that Cake looked vacant and preoccupied with his intertwining thoughts, and could only imagine what must go through his mind, considering the bombshell he'd had dropped on him several days ago. They knew he was finding it difficult to stay motivated and adapting to the new change. The staff had grown attached to Cake and Jade, considering them as not just as bosses, but friends. They tried to support Cake through his troubles. The serving staff arrived at 7:00 am, turned on the lights, and laid out the displays from the warm trays in the bakery.

It was 9:00 am on a chilly, dark, November morning. They had been open for business now for over an hour but had no customers.

Cake continued to gaze through the glass screen. It was the day of the grand re-opening. The staff stood around the quiet counters in the empty pâtisserie.

Small Dave went to buy a newspaper forty minutes earlier and big Dave was mumbling about how long it should have taken to walk to the newsagents.

"Fifteen minutes, max.," Big Dave blurted out.

"What?" asked Cake, with a croak in his voice.

"Sorry, boss," said big Dave. "I was just thinking out loud. Normally, it takes fifteen minutes to walk to get the newspaper. Dopey Dave has now been gone for over forty minutes. He'll be chatting up the newsagent's daughter again, and I bet he comes back with some lame excuse."

Cake wasn't paying attention as he stared through the glass screen into his stylish, but empty pâtisserie.

Ten minutes later the door opened and small Dave walked in looking concerned. He strode through the pâtisserie and into the bakery.

"Oh, it's about bloody time," grumbled big Dave and asked. "What's that you've got?"

Things had gone wrong with the business almost immediately. Neither Cake nor Jade had done any financial planning or forecasting. Cake presumed that his high-quality products and good ideas would see

them through. Jade soon realised that they hadn't budgeted for the daily costs involved in running a business. They had not factored in any of the peripheries, such as accountants, taxes, licences, etc. Along with the high rental for the bakery, they were still paying a mortgage on their London flat.

Following their initial opening, they had a fair turnover of customers coming into the pâtisserie, wanting to try out the new tastes and flavours of Cake's unique baking experience. However, after the short honeymoon period, the customers dwindled from a daily crowd to a steady stream of regulars. Due to the price and unfamiliar range of Cake's food, the Lincolnshire folk considered that the pâtisserie was more of a luxury treat, as opposed to a daily snack.

At first, Cake and Jade couldn't figure out what price to charge for the products and underpriced the cost to the customer. They had only worked out how much he paid for the main ingredients and added a small profit, not factoring in anything else. Therefore, although his prices were cheap at first, when Jade worked out the lowest price they needed to charge, it was too steep for Lincolnshire folk.

The Daves' and Cake continued baking and experimenting but it only brought disappointment as trays of their unsold creations ended up either taken home by the staff or binned.

Cake, not interested in the financial side of the business, left that side of things to Jade, who went to accountancy courses at the local college a few evenings a week.

After a few months of tuition and putting what she learned into practical application, she soon realised that unless they made drastic changes, they would soon go bust.

One evening as the couple sat on the sofa, Jade, feeling frustrated and looking concerned, said. "Cake, we cannot afford to carry on running the business this way otherwise we will go broke. You need to cut down the cost of your unessential rare ingredients. You are not working at a high-class hotel where you can order anything and presto it appeared."

Cake glowered at Jade and snapped. "No, I need them for some of my creations and I won't compromise on ..."

Jade interrupted, yelling. "But they aren't selling. Don't you understand... we are using our savings to pay the daily running cost because your experimenting with expensive ingredients that don't sell costs us a fortune."

Cake saw Jade shaking with rage and thought. 'Huh, I don't care, but I suppose I better shut her up.'

Cake smiled. "I want to build a great business to hand down to our kids."

Jade glowered at Cake and feeling like she was banging her head against a brick wall, screamed. "But you aren't building a business, you are destroying one."

Cake smiled, put his hand up Jade's skirt, and caressed her moist chalice over her laced knickers.

"And speaking of kids," said Cake and slid off her panties.

Jade groaned with pleasure as Cake put his head between her legs and gratified her for several minutes. With them both aroused, Cake took Jade's hand and led her to the bedroom.

Panting and sweaty, Cake smirked as he held onto Jade. ‘That’ll keep her happy and stop her nagging’ he thought.

Jade, knowing that her warnings went ignored, sighed, and with tears in her eyes turned onto her side feeling exasperated.

Nothing changed over the next few weeks and Cake still spent money on expensive ingredients for one off creations that never sold.

Jade felt tired with her mundane existence.

Cake, woke at 4:00 am daily to start baking. Jade awoke and cooked them breakfast at 6:00 am, tidied the flat, and went downstairs to work all day in the pâtisserie. After cleaning and preparing for the following day, they would relax in their apartment, watch television, and go to bed around 10:00 pm.

They no longer socialised nor found the time to indulge in their mutual passion of kickboxing. Being together 24/7 soon took its toll and the qualities that once endeared them to each other now irritated the couple.

Cake’s quest to discover the perfect spice, once a jovial topic of mutual interest, was now in Jade’s mind, a bloody expensive waste of time and money for something that was in his imagination. It was something he wouldn’t need if he was not so gangly and his nose was closer to his arse.

Jade’s body odour, which Cake previously described as a delicate homely baking smell of the pâtisserie, combined with fragrant lavender shower gel; he now referred to as, ‘the stink of yeast and sickly soap.’

The only spark to this mundane existence was when they argued. It was fun at first when they had passionate make-up sex, but more recently, it was just to argue and sulk in separate rooms.

They drifted further apart, with Jade’s advice ignored. The atmosphere created by the pair’s constantly bickering affected both staff and customers alike. After yet another argument about money, profits, and Cake’s unwillingness to listen and acknowledge that they had a problem, Jade was at the end of her tether. Seeing no signs that things would improve, she wanted to take a break and get away from Cake. Jade, although still in love with him, knew that unless she did something drastic to shake him out of his unrealistic, cocooned little reality, they would lose everything. The couple never expected that their dreams would go so wrong, so quickly.

One afternoon, Cake took a break from the bakery. He had not seen Jade all morning and became angry. ‘Why wasn’t she in the pâtisserie?’ He thought as he stormed upstairs.

He went into the living room and saw Jade’s suitcases by the door. Jade came from the shower and looked at Cake, who looked furious, and snapped, “Where the hell do you think you’re going?”

Jade looked at Cake and sighed.

“Back to London,” she said and went into the bedroom.

Cake stood in the doorway as Jade got dressed and hollered.

“Just like that, without saying a word.”

Jade ignored him as he went about how she was leaving everyone in the lurch.

She walked past the still ranting Cake, picked up her bags, and screamed,

“I have had enough. There’s still money in the account and the bills are paid. You won’t listen and think you know better, so you can have it.” She sobbed, and with tears streaming down her face, said, “Take care of yourself, Cake.”

Jade moved back into their London apartment and went to see her old boss at her former salon. Although embarrassed by her return and failure, her old boss was delighted to have her back and her old colleague and friends were sympathetic and supportive.

Cake wasn’t concerned about Jade’s departure at first, happy that he no longer had to listen to her persistent nagging. Footloose and fancy-free he intended to enjoy himself. With only a few customers, the girls in the pâtisserie coped without Jade and they thought it would only be a temporary break-up.

Cake went out in the evenings with big Dave, who was single and enjoyed the carefree life. He was popular with the local ladies and at 24-years-old had no plans to settle down. Cake and Dave went to the lively bars and clubs around the city that big Dave frequented. Cake appeared happy and contented as he boogied the night away and received plenty of female attention, in spite of feeling old and out of place. He spent a lot of money on these nightly excursions and the weekends that he had spent clubbing were expensive. He drank fruit-based alcoholic drinks and expensive cocktails.

Jade, hoping that she had shocked Cake enough to realise he needed to change, hoped they would get back together and phoned him frequently, but Cake was nonchalant and cold towards her. He knew that he was breaking her heart but didn’t care, he felt certain that she would come back, grovelling for forgiveness.

His euphoria lasted three weeks and as Cake sat alone in the apartment nursing another hangover, loneliness and misery gripped him and the cold fact hit home that Jade had gone.

Cake had a miserable day, thinking about the events leading up to his current situation, which he now regretted. He realised what Jade had been warning him about and by the end of the day knew that he must do something, but didn’t know what.

Cake wanted Jade back. The last phone call from Jade had been a few days ago when Cake was on his way out. He told her that he didn’t have time to speak to her because he was meeting friends, and when she asked, female friends? Cake chuckled and said, “Maybe.”

Although now feeling guilty, Cake decided he would not call her yet, but make plans and then call and surprise her.

‘Everything will be fine,’ he thought.

Monday morning. It was business as usual in the pâtisserie. Cake had a sleepless night thinking about Jade, but he could not come up with any ideas. He made his daily batch of ‘bin fodder’ at 4:30am and watched the few customers trickle through the door during the day. Lunchtime, he went to the farm to see his family for a few hours.

Cake spent the afternoon chatting with his mother and grandmother, seeking their advice. It was his grandmother, Pearl, who gave him the best advice, “Go back to basics Benjamin, and keep it simple. You’ve done it before.” She said.

During the drive back to Lincoln, Cake had an epiphany. He arrived at the closed pâtisserie early evening. He went up to the apartment, pulled out a notepad, and started scribbling.

Cake had another sleepless night jotting down his ideas. The following morning when the Daves' arrived, they were puzzled to find the first batch of the day's products not made. Cake, who would normally have everything in the ovens and running around the bakery on some new experiment, leant against a stainless steel prep table with notes strewn about, grinning like a Cheshire cat.

"What's happening boss?" asked small Dave.

"Time for a change," announced Cake. "Wait for the girls to arrive and I will explain."

The pâtisserie stayed closed for the day while Cake and the others went over his plans to put his new strategy into action. Cake put a sign outside, which read:

CLOSED FOR REFURBISHMENT
RE-OPEN 15th NOVEMBER.

"Right team! That gives us a week, which should be plenty of time," Cake announced after putting out the sign.

"Do you think it will work, Cake?" asked a sceptical, Sarah. "So far, I have seen nothing to suggest that you can run a successful bakery business."

Cake smiled and asked, "Have you heard of Bakewell Bakeries of Louth?"

"Yes," said Sarah. "Who hasn't heard of them? They are one of the largest bakeries in Lincolnshire."

"I started that business with help from my family, so I can start again by keeping it simple and going back to basics."

"Keep it simple. I'm all for that," said big Dave and chuckled.

Cake's plan was to do away with all the fancy, expensive upper-class cakes, pastries, and high-end bread products.

He remembered what Jimmy told him on their first meeting about turning a bland item into something special, and he could do that. They would make simple custard pies, fruit pies, cupcakes, éclairs and crusty ploughman's loaves, bread rolls, baguettes and quiches. The customer, from a selection housed in a redesigned temperature controlled display cabinet, would choose the fillings for the bread. Cake wanted the new business to resemble a quaint Victorian 'subway', but offer a lot more.

His family gave him an area of their customers around Lincoln. Cake would supply the restaurants and public houses in his area under the Bakewell's banner with his sisters delivering and checking the customers' satisfaction. The Bakewell's had given up farming years ago when the bakery had taken over as a lucrative business. They'd used their farmland to extend the bakery for their expanding customer base.

Cake realised that this was what Jade had been trying so hard to tell him, but he ignored her. He knew he had been a fool, but at last, he had come to his senses. Jade had not contacted him now for almost a week and he had been putting off phoning her until he saw how the work progressed.

One evening, after Cake thought everything was on track, he phoned her to tell her the news and find out when she was coming back. Jade's phone rang but there was no answer. 'She might be at the gym, she mentioned that she wanted to start kickboxing again,' he thought.

Cake made several more unsuccessful attempts to call, but she still didn't answer.

This played on Cake's mind and the following day he called her at work.

Jade answered, "What do you want Cake? I'm busy!" she snapped.

"Hi, darling, I tried to call you earlier, but..."

"I will call you later. I told you, I'm busy," she interrupted and turned off her phone.

Confused, Cake carried on reorganising the bakery and waited for Jade's call, which never came.

Two days remained until the re-opening of the new CAKES Bakery & Pâtisserie.

Everything had gone to schedule. They did not change the pâtisserie, only refitting the refrigerated front display cabinets and extended the sandwich section to incorporate a chilled section for sandwich fillings. Cake, along with the staff, worked out their new, simple, but delicious ranges, with plain points of sales, signs, and menus.

Cake thought about Jade a lot. He knew that he'd upset her and did not want to push her, 'I will let her cool off' he thought. That evening, he sat in the apartment feeling pleased with himself. He took a Pineapple Bacardi Breezer from the fridge and thought, 'Sod it. I'll call her, apologise, and reassure her everything will be fine. I will tell her about the new business and the grand opening, hopefully, she would come. After all, it was still half her business.'

He called Jade's number, but again there was no answer. He tried several more times over the next hour and drank a few more Breezers.

Around 9:00 pm, he called again and this the phone clicked to receive, but nobody spoke. He blurted, "Hi darling, it's me, I am sorry about everyth..."

"Jade doesn't want to speak to you," said a man sounding angry.

Cake, taken aback, stammered, "Who are you?"

"Listen, you have been calling for over three hours. Can't you take the hint? Jade does not want to speak to you," said the stranger.

"Let me speak to Jade," demanded Cake.

"Do you want to speak with your ex?" the man asked Jade in the background.

Cake listened as the phone went silent and then Jade said, "Stop calling me Cake. We're finished. You made that clear. Now leave us alone!"

Dumbfounded, Cake heard the man mumble something to Jade.

"Who's that man?" asked Cake, wishing he hadn't asked, as he already knew the answer.

“That was Alvin, my boyfriend, and he is hung like a moose. Now leave us alone!” (Only joking about the moose part, but I didn’t want to upset you)

Jade switched off her phone and Cake’s world fell apart.

The next two days felt the worst of Cake’s life. Inconsolable, he lost his concentration and focus, all he could think about was Jade and the time they’d spent together. His stomach churned and his throat felt dry when he recalled the phone call and he trembled when he imagined Jade sharing herself with this other man.

The staff and his family rallied around to complete his project while Cake moped around the apartment in a zombie-like trance. He blamed himself for what happened and wept when he considered his unbearable future without her. Everything around him evoked memories of Jade, her familiar fragrance lingered in the apartment. Cake felt that he was living in a nightmare, unable to eat, sleep, or concentrate.

The grand re-opening went with a soggy fizz. Cake didn’t know why and didn’t care.

When small Dave walked into the bakery, Cake felt as if something slapped him. He suddenly snapped out of his daydream as something stimulated his senses.

Wide eyed, he looked up at small Dave agog. “Wow!” he exclaimed. “What’s that?”

Small Dave had something in a polystyrene container, which he held up and said, “I know where all our customers went. They’re queuing up outside a small van on the car park near the newsagents which has been there four days selling this crap.” He took out a slice of chocolate cake.

Cake’s olfactory receptors were in chaotic overdrive. He caught the aroma immediately, even above the smells of his baking produce. It was a narcotic pheromone to his heightened senses.

Small Dave handed Cake the slice of chocolate sponge. The Daves’ looked on bewildered, as Cake appeared to be having an orgasm sniffing the bland-looking confectionary.

“Chocolate, sugar, buttermilk, egg, flour, but what was that?” said Cake with a quake in his voice as he tried to distinguish the extra ingredient.

Big Dave shrugged and said, “I don’t see what the fuss is about. It’s only a chocolate sponge,”

“Yeah, and it doesn’t look that good,” said small Dave, adding, “Mind you, it must be something special; I had to queue for ages.”

“Oh! It’s something special... exquisite!” said Cake, continuing to smell the sponge. “Where did you say you’d bought it?”

“A little foreign bloke sold that and other bakery stuff out the back of a van on the car park,” Said small Dave, unable to understand the fuss. “He looked like an Indian, but he might have been Chinese, I dunno,” he mumbled.

“What is it Cake, and why was it so special?” Big Dave asked, looking confused.

Cake looked at the Daves, realising they could not detect this heavenly aroma. “I don’t know and it’s indescribable. I have never come across anything like it before,” he said as the odours swirled around his senses. “It’s like nectar to a honey bee.”

“It looks like crap, but can I have a taste?” asked small Dave.

Cake broke off two small chunks and handed them to the pair.

Cake and the Daves’ tasted the sponge, rubbing the crumbly confectionary around their mouths with their tongues.

“Tastes okay,” said big Dave, still not knowing what all the fuss was about as he detected the flavours and could name them all, except one. “Oh!” he exclaimed as the ingredient kicked in, “What’s that? It’s yummy.”

“Yeah, delicious,” agreed Small Dave as the unknown ingredient exploded onto his taste buds.

Cake, feeling euphoric and intoxicated by the flavour, exhaled and murmured, “The perfect spice.”

“Come on Dave,” he said, putting on his jacket. “Show me where you bought it.”

-Chapter Five-

Hopes and Dreams

Using a magnifying glass, Ravuth scrutinised the zoomed in section of the printed satellite image. He went over to his filing cabinet and rummaged through a drawer until he found the pile of images he was searching. With his files meticulously arranged and catalogued, he sifted through the pile and pulled out several A3-sized, coloured Google Earth images and took them over to the table. He placed them next to the new ones, leant over, and compared the images.

A jubilant look came across the old Cambodian's face. He looked up and stroked the stubble on his chin.

‘That’s it!’ he thought and looked again.

His lifelong search had just taken a dramatic new development. Now, on the table in front of him, lay evidence of the whereabouts of his village. His long search could finally be over. He then realised why the area he had been searching had been wrong, but now knew why it looked so familiar.

Recalling that his old village always seemed cool and shaded by jungle canopy, he hoped the overhead photographs from passing satellites might have picked up something. He’d spent most of his time zooming in on each sectional image separately. Now it seemed that his years spent investigating had finally paid off.

He stared at the evidence in front of him, noticing the dates on the images and realised why he had never picked up this crucial piece of information before. Although having images from hundreds of different locations, he never knew what the village looked like from an aerial perspective, so had no clue what he was looking for until he looked at the previous images dated January 2010. The new batch he analysed dated September 2013. He knew that Google Earth only updated their data when new satellite images came in every few years, so he realised that he would never have solved this puzzle from an image taken in January.

“You are stupid, Eggleton,” he said chuckling, Why didn’t you realise that tror bek did not come into season until September.”

By either luck or chance, Ravuth now spotted a field of flowering tror bek on one of the updated versions. He recognised the field as one that he and Oun used. He recalled that was where he picked the vegetable for his mother after they got lost and the horrific events thereafter.

Looking closer, he saw what looked like a faint trail from the tror bek field back to the village. He saw patches of tree canopy and faint evidence of dwellings barely visible through the trees.

Ravuth felt elated and looked at the clock.

‘It’s 1:30pm here, so that means it’s only 6:30 am in Cambodia. Jed won’t be awake yet,’ he thought. ‘I will give it another hour and then call and break the good news to him. I hope he won’t be angry.’

Ravuth checked his Fuji-Xerox C2255 A3 colour laser printer for paper and went into the kitchen where a decorated birthday cake stood on a stainless steel table. Ravuth touched the icing with a knife.

“Nearly set,” he said aloud. He went to a wall cupboard and removed a small, narrow, clear glass apothecary bottle containing a small amount of pepper-coloured powder. He gently shook the bottle, and as if speaking to an old friend, said, “It looks like I have found our home. Hopefully, we will both have company soon.”

Chuckling to himself, he replaced the bottle in the cupboard, made a cup of tea, went back into the living room, and studied the image again. He tried to find the track that led from the village to the start of the jungle, but saw no sign of the trail.

“It would be hidden by the canopy,” he thought and had an idea

Ravuth calculated from memory the time it used to take him to cover the distance and marked a point from the village to the start of the jungle where he thought the track was.

He went back over and typed instructions into his computer. Google Earth now displayed several images of the front of the jungle trees and foliage of that specific spot.

He zoomed into the image and looked.

“I must have passed this area many times and ruled it out as a possibility,” he said aloud. He printed the images, placed them on the table, and noticed the time. Bursting with excitement, he called Cambodia.

He telephoned Jed, a private investigator and friend who he had met on his last visit to Phnom Penh.

“Good morning Jed,” said Ravuth, sounding excited. “Sorry to call you so early... but I have found my village.”

Ravuth heard Jed yawn and then he said,

“Hi Ravuth; what do you mean you have found your village?” Jed’s voice sounded croaky and Ravuth knew he must have had another late night as Jed sighed and asked, “Are you sure ?”

“Yes I am 100% certain.” said Ravuth, “I am sorry to have sent you to wrong area and wasting you and your teams time and money, but I remembered why the area looked so familiar...” Ravuth went on to explain his mistake and then went into detail about his new evidence.

Twenty minutes later, he had convinced Jed that he had found his village.

Ravuth smiled, as Jed now sounded excited and, as if a weight had been lifted off his shoulders, he said, “Great news Buddy, okay, send me the details and I can search that area.”

Ravuth rubbed his chin, smiled, and said, “I will do better than that. I will move my flight forward and come out as soon as possible.”

Jed went silent for a few moments and then said, “Okay Ravuth, let me know when you change your flight and I will make the usual arrangements.” He chuckled and added, “You can play with all the new equipment when you get here.”

“Thanks, Jed, I will let you know and see you soon.”

‘Jed now sounded thrilled.’ thought Ravuth, as he hung up the phone. ‘I will bring my flight forward and need to raise more money.’

Ravuth spent the rest of the day planning and re-organising his agenda with his business commitments. He delivered the birthday cake and used the money to pay the penalty for his rescheduled Thai Airways flight direct to Phnom Penh in two weeks’ time.

He now needed to raise extra cash, and knew how to do it.

That evening, Ravuth's head was spinning as he went to bed. Once again, he thought about striding proudly into his village and having a happy reunion with his family. He imagined himself and Oun rediscovering the cave, the floor carpeted as far as the eye could see with the golden poppy.

Ravuth, with only memories and loneliness, to show for over a half-century of life; his dreams now hung on this new piece of evidence. Even though he realised that his family may have never returned to the village or maybe dead, he clung to hope.

'Today cannot get any better,' he thought, drifting into a peaceful slumber.

The telephone ringing at midnight woke Ravuth from his blissful sleep. It was Jed calling from Phnom Penh. Feeling drowsy, he yawned, rubbed his face, and answered, "Hi Jed,"

"Hi, Buddy, sorry to wake you, but you need to check your email real quick," said Jed sounding excited.

Ravuth got out of bed, went over to his laptop, switched it on, and checked his Gmail inbox. He opened the one sent from Jed.

Ravuth stared at the screen with his mouth agape looking astonished.

-Chapter Six-

Art of the Deception

Since Ravuth's first unnerving visit to Cambodia and his encounter with Sok, his life had not altered a great deal over the years. He took a job in Grantham as a kitchen assistant in a local Thai restaurant. The employment came with accommodation, but little pay. He spent the remaining money that Father Eggleton had left him on a laptop and printer, spending his free time on the internet researching. He worked most days and a few nights at the restaurant cleaning and assisting the Thai cooks. The restaurant, owned by an Englishman named, Colin, and by his Thai wife, Noy, who had built up a lucrative business in Grantham Centre. Ravuth, along with several of the Thai staff lived above the restaurant and he again became fluent in the Thai language, being that was all the staff ever spoke. He had saved most of the money he earned and had made the journey to Cambodia several more times.

Ravuth went to Phnom Penh with trepidation in 2005. He spent a fortnight revisiting the government offices, again going over irrelevant information. He remained in Phnom Penh throughout his stay, but apart from making a few contacts, he felt he was wasting his time. However, he continued his pilgrimage, still hopeful that something would turn up.

Ravuth went to Cambodia again in 2007 when he knew that two of the four road bridges that crossed the rivers on the road to Koh Kong were finished. Again hiring a 250cc trail bike, he ventured over the bridges to see if any area appeared familiar to him. Although realising that the two bridges were still a long way off where he needed to be, he gained experience in charting, mapping, and incorporating GPS coordinates. He would select and grid off an area to search, then survey around the specific location and take photographs, marking off the charts and satellite images. Driving back hot, tired, and sticky to Phnom Penh early evening, and after eating he spent time in internet cafes. He studied information and photographs from that day's search, before returning to the hotel where he planned and marked out his grid location for the following day's exploration.

This was his routine throughout his visits, although he always felt disappointed with the outcome. He knew that until they had completed bridging the remaining two crossings, he was wasting his time. Ravuth felt a little happier knowing that the final bridge was closer to where the track leading to his village might be. He also knew it was still several kilometres away from Koh Kong town and Sok.

Ravuth scanned, enhanced, and enlarged the fading colour Polaroid's of his family and carried a pile of these clearer images with him to distribute around Phnom Penh, but with little success. A few Khmers tried to con him, but he soon wised up.

Several years later, Ravuth's life took a turn for the better, in both England and Cambodia. Colin, the owner of the Thai restaurant, expanded and converted the staff living quarters into more restaurant space. He owned several properties in the Grantham area and accommodated Ravuth in a self-contained, furnished flat on the bottom floor of a large 2-storey house. This was ideal for Ravuth, who had been planning ways to subsidise his income. Now with a kitchen to use for a new venture, he learned from the internet how to make birthday and wedding cakes. Colin encouraged Ravuth to undertake the project and wanted to be involved. Colin and Noy would manage the sales and marketing alongside the restaurant and share any profit.

Ravuth was enthusiastic and after several failed attempts to follow a recipe, he made his first order, a Victoria sponge birthday cake.

The customer, delighted with both the look and taste of the cake, recommended Ravuth to her friends.

Thrilled, Ravuth and Colin knew this would bring in other orders and Ravuth felt happy with this extra income, which he saved towards his Cambodia visits.

Ravuth was at home one evening feeling bored. Normally, he would be baking cakes, reading, or working at his computer. That night he had no orders to fill and couldn't be bothered with his computer nor reading.

He glanced around his living room and the old banana leaf box on a shelf caught his eye. Memories came flooding back and he chuckled to himself. "You look as raggedy as me, but you've lasted a long time, my old friend," he said,

He hadn't opened the box for several years. The last time was when he and scanned the photographs into his computer and enhanced them in Photoshop.

Still chuckling, he took the box off the shelf and opened it.

"It still has a nice sweet smell," he thought, taking out the shrivelled seedpod that now looked like a small dollop of dog poop

"After all these years you still smell good," said Ravuth, scraping a shaving off the pod. After inspected the small lump, he tasted it. He chewed the morsel, rolling it around his mouth with his tongue, 'Wow!' he thought, as the crumb exploded onto his taste buds. 'That tastes good,' He swallowed the morsel and smiled as an image of his family came to mind. Several seconds later, he craved for more.

He scraped off another small shaving and ate that.

Ravuth could not describe the flavour. It was something he had never come across before.

'I wonder...' he thought. He took the poppy into the kitchen and using a heavy stone pestle and mortar crushed and ground up the poppy pod until he turned it into a fine powder. He took a small fraction of the pepper colour powder on his fingertip and licked it.

"Hmm, that tasted amazing," he said aloud.

He looked at the mortar containing the powder and wanted to test it further. He made a quick and simple cake mix, added a fine sprinkle of the powder to the ingredients, and then placed the mix into the oven.

While that baked, he searched and found an old small glass apothecary bottle, left by the previous tenant.

He scraped the powder into a bottle and put in the glass stopper. He smiled. 'I feel like a mad scientist,' he thought. 'It might make the cake taste like crap. I bet I end up with the shits and have to throw it away,' He sighed, ' but at least it would pass away a few boring hours.'

Ravuth removed the plain sponge from the oven, waited for it to cool, and took a bite. Several seconds later, he took another bite. He ate the full cake and made another. Ravuth couldn't believe how marvellous the cake tasted with only a tiny amount of the spice added.

He ate half of the next cake before going to bed. His mind spun with a nagging doubt that the spice could be harmful. He regretted eating so much and hoped that he would be okay in the morning.

Ravuth woke up full of vigour and ready to take on the day. He finished the last piece of the cake with his morning cup of tea.

Ravuth arrived home earlier than usual. Colin had taken a rush order for a three-tier wedding cake, so Colin let him off work in the restaurant early. He needed to go home to mix and prepare the cake, due in two days. While preparing the fruitcake's base ingredients he wondered. 'I have had no ill effects, I feel great.' He paused and looked at the bottle of spice. He tapped a tiny amount from the bottle onto his hand and sprinkled it into the cake mix.

Two days later, the cake went to the wedding. The decoration was okay, but not perfect, as Ravuth rushed to make it. He explained to Colin, who was angry thinking that the customer would complain.

Several days later, a man walked into the restaurant and Colin rushed into the kitchen looking flustered. He glared at Ravuth and said, "That's the bride's father, he must be here to complain. Where can I hide?"

One of the Thai waitresses came in as Colin was looking for a place to hide. She said something to Colin, who glared at Ravuth and said. "Damn, he'd seen me. I suppose I better go get a bollocking." He pointed at Ravuth and said, "The refund would come out of your pay, Ravuth."

Ravuth, feeling ashamed, saw Colin and the father talking as he watched through the restaurant's serving hatch. He saw money handed over and he closed the hatch. He sighed and carried on scrubbing the sink.

Colin looked stunned as he came into the kitchen and went over Ravuth.

"Sorry Colin. I will pay fo..."

"They loved it." interrupted Colin and stammering added, "He said it was wonderful and the best cake anyone had ever tasted." Colin held up cash and said, "The bride's father couldn't praise me enough, and he would highly recommend us. He paid for a chocolate cake and said it would be a regular order."

Ravuth smirked, knowing why the cake tasted so good.

The business grew and orders came in daily. Colin bought Ravuth a small Ford van to deliver and stopped him working at the restaurant to concentrate on the cake business.

Ravuth now knew that he must not only find his family and village but also locate more of this amazing poppy and make more spice. He knew what he had left would not last long, but felt certain that if he found his village, he would remember the place where he and Oun discovered the plant.

While people in England wrapped up warm against the bitter January frost, Ravuth arrived to the sweltering heat of Cambodia. He felt excited knowing that the final bridges that linked Phnom Penh to Koh Kong were complete, which meant he could now expand his search. He had waited years for this development. Ravuth stayed at his usual hotel, The Angkor International, the cheap accommodations he used when in Phnom Penh. The moto-dops and tuk-tuks that hung around outside the hotel badgering customers cheerfully greeted Ravuth. Over the past few years, he got to know these drivers and other Khmers, and realising Sok was a one-off twat and nothing like the gentle, humble, happy Cambodian people that Ravuth had now come to know. He hired a Honda Raid trail bike and spent the first evening in his room, checking his equipment for the following day. Ravuth had maps, plans, satellite images, a Nikon D-60 digital camera, an

Asus Netbook and a new Garmin GPS-60 and after putting the electrical equipment on charge had an early night.

He headed off early on his motorbike for the four-hour drive and stopped before the fourth bridge. Looking at the new concrete structure before sliding down the embankment, he looked across to the other side, where small stilted shacks lined the banks of the calm river. He smiled and stumbled back up the embankment, got on the motorbike, and crossed.

After arriving at the other side he drove a little further, turned off the main road, and headed to the start of sections of the jungle that he had been unable to reach before. Ravuth smiled, whether it was the google images or his memory, but areas in the distance looked familiar. He drove on further, planning to survey familiar areas along the front of the jungle and work his way back, the same he had been doing it for many years around the other bridges. He felt certain that he would find the trail leading to his village. He skirted the outskirts of the jungle to see if he could recognise anything else familiar or what he had seen on Google maps stirred any memories. After photographing sections from that area, he moved and repeated the process.

After spending every day doing this routine and realising that with only a few days remaining, he had come up with nothing. Although sure he was in the correct area, he again became despondent. He knew this undertaking would be difficult as the area he needed to cover was immense. One morning as he started a new grid search, he saw a dried up rice paddy a short distance away from the start of the jungle. 'That area looked familiar,' he thought and drew a line in the air from the rice paddy to the jungle and looked. Getting his bearings, he walked to the edge of the jungle and saw a small clearing. 'I recognise this. Yes... it's around here.' He thought as memories resurfaced, He grinned and went into the jungle.

Later that afternoon Ravuth drove back to Phnom Penh. Although not finding the trail, he felt confident that he'd found the right area and realised that unless people still used it, it would have grown over.

Spending his last few days surveying and searching several kilometres into the jungle and although finding no evidence to suggest the track or his village, the more he explored, the more familiar the area became.

Ravuth felt discouraged as flew back to England a few days later, although confident that he could find his village, the fact that the trail may have grown over suggested only one thing... no one had returned.

Ravuth resumed his cake business and over the following months, considered what to do. 'I have come too far to give up now. Maybe answers still lie at the village.' He thought, and then sighed, 'I'll try once more, and if I find nothing... then it was time I gave up.'

England now basked in the summer months. Ravuth went back to Cambodia and searched the prospective area again. He spent the first week looking around but to no avail and began to doubt whether it was the correct area all. He spent days trudging about and getting himself and the bike stuck in wet muddy quagmires. Cambodia was now in the monsoon season and with the constant downpours, the country roads and open fields that were dry tracks for most of the year were now potholed sloppy mud pools. The torrential rain sheeted down, making visibility zero and driving painful.

One afternoon, Ravuth, again drenched and miserable, returned to the hotel. He decided not search the following day but spend it resting in Phnom Penh

That evening, while on his way to the hotel reception, he saw a wooden board with business cards, leaflets, and brochures. He went over and a small card caught his attention, which he removed and read.

'Interesting,' he thought, called the number on the card, and made an appointment for the next morning.

The following morning Ravuth pulled up outside a 3-storey French colonial shop house. The bottom floor was a glass-fronted office with no signage and darkened glasses. Ravuth went into a small dingy waiting room, but nobody was there.

“Hello!” Ravuth hollered. “Anybody here?”

Getting no reply, he was about to leave when a scantily clad Khmer girl walked out of a room, adjusted her dress, went through the reception, smiled at Ravuth, and left. A foreign man then appeared from the room, went over to Ravuth, and extended his hand.

“Hi, there, I’m Jed Culver,” said the American.

Ravuth shook Jed’s hand, introduced himself, and said, “I picked up your business card, which said that you are a private detective. The lady I spoke to last night made me an appointment for 9 o’clock,”

“Yeah, Jed Culver: P.I. the first and only American detective in Cambodia. Last night you spoke to my err... secretary,” said Jed. “She told me that you are trying to trace your family.”

Ravuth nodded.

“Come into the office,” said Jed.

He led Ravuth into a room that he and the taxi girl exited moments ago. There was a desk with an archaic computer, an unmade bed, and beer cans and folders scattered around. Several photographs hung on the wall that Ravuth noticed as he sat down.

“That’s me, receiving my DEA agent shield,” said Jed, pointing to a photograph when he saw Ravuth looking. He explained about the other photographs, framed certificates, badges, and small shields that hung on the wall, all pertaining to law enforcement.

“I retired from the force a few years ago. I started as a traffic cop and worked my way up,” he said tapping a glass case that housed a gold badge, edged with a four gold duck foot design with an eagle at the top. Engraved on the centre were large black initials - ‘U.S.’ - around the edge of a blue circle that read: **Drug Enforcement Administration**.

Ravuth estimated Jed to be in his early forties. He always assumed retired American cops had grey hair and were fat, but Jed had a trim figure, short-cropped black hair, and piercing blue eyes.

Ravuth gave Jed the details and told him he wanted him to find his family and locate his village.

Jed went through the usual motions of jotting down details while Ravuth continued with any information he thought relevant. He handed Jed colour photocopies of his family photographs.

“These are my family,” said Ravuth and pointed out the individuals.

Jed smiled, nodded, scanned the photocopies onto his computer, and after checking the screen, gave them back to Ravuth. After an hour, Ravuth thought he had given Jed enough information about his family and his village.

“Do you think you can help me find my family?” he asked

Jed smiled and looked at the time on the screen.

Jed knew that Ravuth's family were dead, as people from similar cases he investigated were, but he needed to make a living and his seedy lifestyle didn't come cheap.

"Sure, I can help you, Ravuth. My charge is \$50 for today's consultation and \$50 a day retainer plus expenses, until either I find your family or you stop the investigation," he said and smiled. He knew this was a numbers game. Sometimes a customer would bite and pay the daily fee but gave up after a few weeks when they received their first exorbitant bills for expenses. However, most people refused to undertake his services, in which case he had made \$50.

Ravuth looked angry and protested, "I can't afford \$50 per day, and I thought the first consultation would be free!"

"Free!" said Jed, sounding indignant. "My time costs money buddy, and I have spent over an hour with you."

Ravuth frowned, 'Conned again,' he thought, as he gathered up his paperwork off Jed's desk and shoved it into his bag. He took out \$50 and glared at Jed, who grinned. "Here," said Ravuth and threw the money on the desk and left.

Jed leant back in his chair smirking

"Another mug, easy money," he thought, as he glanced at the computer screen, displaying Ravuth's photographs.

"Delete," he sang out, and as he was about press the delete button, something on a picture caught his attention.

"What was that? No, it can't be." he gasped, staring at the image. He enlarged it and then glared at the image. "Unbelievable!" he said and looking closer at the enlarged image. With his heart beating faster and his palms sweating, he couldn't take his eyes off the screen. He flicked to another, similar image, and said aloud, "If that's what I think it is, then I can use what those bastards taught me and become rich."

He pondered and thought, 'Damn, I had better check it out first; but if I am right, I gonna need help from Mr Ravuth Eggleton.' Jed found Ravuth's telephone number on a post-it note written by the girl who had taken his call and went about his investigation.

While Jed Culver spent the day finding more information and trying to contact a possible customer, Ravuth stayed in his hotel room, seething about falling for yet another con. He relaxed, watched T.V, and went through his information again, transcribing details onto his laptop.

The following morning Ravuth set off early for his planned site. Luckily it wasn't raining.

The telephone call Jed had been waiting for came at 8:00 am. He had expected to be waiting longer, knowing the individual whom he called eight hours ago was a cautious man who would check the information, especially with it coming from a former DEA agent. Jed had crossed paths with the individual in the past but under different circumstances. He knew he would be interested as not only was he a greedy and powerful man; he would be pissed off with having recently lost 16 million dollars.

Jethro 'Jed' Culver had been a DEA agent (a Narc). A motivated officer, with a passion for his job, a love for his country, and destined for great things within the agency. That was until his sudden suspension and subsequent dishonourable discharge. He had spent the past few years in Phnom Penh running his private detective agency, far away from the U.S and public ridicule. He was now a bitter man with a bad attitude.

Jed recalled seeing a picture of the object similar to the one on his screen in the archives of the DEA during his training. He and his fellow students learned about the mysterious object, which, according to the DEA, was a myth, a hilarious tale used in training and never disputed. Jed now knew why that was, because nobody had ever set eyes on one... until now.

He spent the day researching but with little success. There was no information on the internet, and even when he went into the DEA files through a back door computer programme, he only discovered the small amount of information he already knew from his training. That it was a hoax and did not exist.

He knew of one individual who had contacts who might know something. He also knew this man and his partner would want the item and pay handsomely. Jed set about putting his plan into action, knowing he must be careful and as inconspicuous as a ghost.

Jed went along to an internet café and made a disposable DV6.org email address. He looked at his old Filofax, emailed an address, and downloaded several images. Jed bought three tourist-phone-cards and waited until midnight knowing that with the time difference, it would be morning in his target's home. He made a phone call, dumped that phone card, and waited for the reply, which came at 8:00 am. Jed timed the conversation and phone usage making the calls untraceable. That part had gone according to plan.

Jed smiled as he relaxed in the chair and looked around his grimy bedroom/office. 'All I had to do now was to meet with the mark, finalise the details, get paid an advance, and find the item.' He thought

He smiled, 'Three-quarters of a million dollars will do for a start,' he thought. 'Then all I need is to find the damn things.' Jed went over to the fridge, took a bottle of Angkor beer, looked at the post-it note, and phoned Ravuth. After several frustrating hours of receiving 'unable to connect to this number, please try later' recordings and a few more beers, he called one of his ladies for the afternoon.

Ravuth was in the shower when his phone rang. Wrapping a towel around himself, he went over to the bed, picked up phone, looked at the number, frowned, and answered,

"Hi Ravuth, buddy." said Jed, "I have been trying to contact you all day."

"I have been out of signal range in the jungle. What do you want?" asked Ravuth, curtly, adding. "Didn't you charge enough for our little chat and now you want more money. Well tough, piss off?"

The phone went silent for a few moments, and then Jed chuckled and said, "Sorry about our little misunderstanding. I was having a real bad day."

"From the look of that lady coming from your room, it didn't appear too bad to me," Ravuth said, seething.

"Yeah, sorry we got off on the wrong foot, buddy. Let me make it up to you with a meal. I know a great little steakhouse, my treat, and then we can discuss your case."

“I don’t think we have anything to discuss at \$50 a time. Thanks, but no thanks, goodbye,” said Ravuth, but as he was about to hang up, Jed shouted, “Wait! I will give you your money back and we can discuss your case over a meal. It won’t cost you a cent and I am sure I can find your family, which I doubt you could do without me.”

The line went silent for a moment and then Jed said, “How about it Ravuth? What do you have to lose? The worse that could happen is you get a free meal and your \$50 back.”

Ravuth considered his offer and even though he felt angry and didn’t like or trust the private eye, he agreed to meet with him later that evening.

Jed was sat at the bar drinking beer when Ravuth entered the restaurant. He went over and sat on a high chair at the American saloon-style restaurant. Jed seemed happy and greeted Ravuth like an old friend. Jed placed an order for two large sirloins and a bottle of Chardonnay. He smiled and handed Ravuth \$50.

“Here buddy, sorry about earlier, no hard feelings.”

Ravuth took the money, “Thanks.” He said, thinking ‘maybe Jed wasn’t such a bad chap after all.’

As the evening wore on, Jed appeared interested in Ravuth’s lost family and village. He assured Ravuth that he would put 100% effort into finding them and arranged to meet in his office the following morning.

“Bring all the information you have on your family and village.” He said.

Ravuth nodded and finished his beer

“Oh,” said Jed, “I might have great news for you, buddy, I am due to meet wealthy clients in Bangkok the day after tomorrow, who are also trying to trace a family in the same area. I will take your information along and see what they have.” Jed leant over to Ravuth and said, “They were desperate and paying well over my fee; so maybe I can take your case free. I will let you know when I get back.”

“Fantastic, thanks Jed.” said Ravuth, with a big grin.

“Okay buddy,” see you in the morning.

Ravuth went back to the hotel feeling relieved and happy. He had had a pleasant evening with his money returned and a free meal and felt at last that he had made a helpful friend in Cambodia. ‘I misjudged Jed,’ He thought, as he sorted through his papers for their meeting.

The following morning, Ravuth arrived at Jed’s office. Jed asked him for another photocopy of the photographs because he had no printer

Ravuth gave him copies and Jed sat back and looked at them.

He looked at one sheet, laughed, showed Ravuth an image, and said, “Your mother looks like she's seen a ghost. What’s the story behind this one?”

Ravuth smiled as he saw the image and as the happy memory came back, he told Jed about the camera and his father surprising his mother by the flash.

Jed looked closer at the image and asked, “What’s that she’s holding?”

“It was a poppy that Oun and I found after getting lost years ago.” He frowned and added, “the day before the Khmer Rouge came.”

“I’ve never seen a poppy like this, did you find many?” Jed asked.

Ravuth shook his head and said, “No, but I will be able to find more when I find my village.” said Ravuth.

“Do you think you are close to finding the village?” Asked Jed

Ravuth smiled, nodded, and said, “Yes, I know I am in the right area.”

Jed grinned and not wanting to appear eager, looked at another images. He tried to hide the tingle of excitement that now coursed through his body.

The day wore on as Jed gleaned the information from Ravuth he needed to know. Ravuth furnished him with more details about how he and Oun discovered plant and the area were Ravuth felt certain his village was located.

Jed looked at his watch, stretched, and said. “It’s getting late buddy and I have to fly to Bangkok in the morning. Let’s go eat and grab an early night.”

Ravuth returned to his hotel after the long, but rewarding day. He had given Jed copies of plans, GPS coordinates, photographs, and other relevant details. He felt elated when Jed informed him that after meeting with his client in Bangkok, he would come back, undertake Ravuth’s case, and locate his family. Jed told Ravuth that he would have his people search while he was in England and if everything went well in Bangkok, he would buy a jeep to make the task easier.

Ravuth set off for his four-hour drive the following day and trudged through the mud to spend the day searching. Driving back to Phnom Penh drenched again, he thought how much easier it would be with a Jeep.

Jed returned from Bangkok three days later. He called Ravuth from Thailand the morning before he left, sounded ecstatic. He said he had great news and wanted to meet him when got back. Ravuth went to Phnom Penh International Airport late afternoon to meet him.

Jed came from the arrivals section with a beaming smile and went over to Ravuth, vigorously shaking his hand.

“I have great news,” said Jed, “Oh, did you have any success finding your village while I was away?”

Ravuth shook his head, replied, “No, I am afraid not,” and noticing how happy Jed seemed, added, “You look like you have just won the lottery.”

Jed laughed and asked, “Do you think you are close?”

“I’m sure that I am,” replied Ravuth, adding, “I came across a new section yesterday that looked familiar, but got bogged down and couldn’t go any further. I marked it on my chart. It’s disappointing that I have to go home tomorrow, otherwise, I would search more.”

“That’s okay,” said Jed. “I will have someone check it out while you are away.”

They walked to a waiting taxi, got into the back seat. Jed smiled and said, “Great news buddy. My client's in Bangkok will finance everything, they are happy to foot the bill.”

Ravuth felt elated and smiled as Jed leant over and whispered, “However, I do have one stipulation. Don’t give anyone else details of your case. My Bangkok clients are important people and they don’t want anyone to know that they have any involvement locating anything, or any person, in Cambodia.”

“I understand. Don’t worry, I won’t tell a soul,” Ravuth said, adding “What a coincidence that they are trying to find missing relatives in the same area.”

Jed nodded “Beneficial for everyone,” he said looking pleased.

The taxi pulled up outside Jed’s office.

Jed took Ravuth’s files from his filing cabinet and while he took a shower, Ravuth updated the maps with his recent search area.

They spent two hours going through the details of Ravuth recent search, with Jed reassuring him that he would find his family thanks to their new benefactor’s money, although not revealing any details. Ravuth didn’t care, and by the look of relief Jed saw across the happy Cambodian's face, he knew things would go according to plan.

“I will take you to the airport tomorrow, buddy. Let’s go celebrate. I am sure we will soon find your family,” said Jed, grinning.

Packing his belongings the next morning proved difficult. ‘I should have done this last night before we went out,’ thought Ravuth as he slowly folded a shirt. Feeling hung over, he tried recalling the previous night's events. He remembered drinking shots, cocktails, and copious amounts of beer with Jed, who insisted that he fondled the happy bar girl's titties for drinks. At first, he refused as it was out of his character. But as the night wore on, he had vague recollections of warming to the idea. He remembered being in the Bunny bar and, while Jed was talking to the owner, a pleasant English chap named Robin, he decided it was time to pop a few pert puppies out of their brassieres and have a good grope, much to the amusement of Jed and Robin. Jed was an excellent chaperone and friend. Ravuth lost track of how many girly bars they visited, but they all seemed to know Jed. He couldn’t remember what time he got back to the hotel or how he got back, but he had, and was now suffering. After checking out of the hotel, he waited for Jed in the reception. He forced down some food until Jed appeared at 2:00pm to drive him to the airport. Jed, full of beans, laughed and joked with the hung over Ravuth and hotel reception staff. He took Ravuth’s bags and loaded them into a Lexus RX350.

“Nice car,” said Ravuth smirking.

“Thanks, buddy, it’s the new company car that the clients in Bangkok insisted I buy.” He said.

They drove to the airport with Jed chatting about his new S.U.V, purchased that morning. The car smelt showroom-new, which turned Ravuth’s delicate stomach. They arrived at the airport and said their farewells. Jed drove away once Ravuth checked in.

A few hours later, Ravuth departed Cambodia and flew home

He had only been back at the B&B a few hours when his phone rang. It was Jed, making sure he had arrived back safely and was okay.

Ravuth, pleased that he'd at last found someone who cared and knew detective work, thought, 'I was wrong about Jed. I now have a good friend,'

Ravuth worked tirelessly over the next few months fulfilling cake orders, until the day when he came across the new evidence of his village's correct location, along with the wonderful revelation from Jed.

END OF SAMPLE

Novels by Robert A Webster

Siam Storm:

A stolen holy relic from a secluded Thai Buddhist Monastery sends a combatant monk on a quest to retrieve the sacred item. Three English lads who are having the holiday experience of a lifetime in Thailand, become inadvertently embroiled in the deadly pursuit.

Enjoy the first adventure of Nick, Spock, and Stu as they assist in the recovery of the relic and the subsequent voyage of discovery.

Chalice - Siam Storm 2

The discovery of a mysterious corpse leaves law enforcement agencies baffled. This adventure sees the lads join forces with their new friend, the mad monk, Pon, as they once again attempt to recover a holy relic, which has this time stolen for a completely new and sinister reason. The chase takes them into Cambodia, as they thwart plans that could affect the planet and change them into fruit based drinkers.

Bimat - Siam Storm 3

A kidnap and ransom demand lead our hapless heroes into a pursuit through Vietnam. They encounter an old foe, driven by obsession in his revenge driven quest. This time, they face many challenges in both their adventure and their personal circumstance and although they almost lose everything, they never lose hope.

Trilogy:

All three Southeast Asia adventures.

Protector – Siam Storm 4

The adventure continues in, Protector, the fourth book of the Siam Storm Series...

When descendants of Siddhartha Gautama arrive at the Royal Palace in Bangkok; Prime Master Pon assembles a team to discover who is responsible for the murder of the other descendants, along with their age-old protectors.

The fun begins when Spock and Stu join the team, and as usual, they find trouble. Even with Spock and Stu underfoot, the team uncovers evidence of a plot with worldwide implications.

Protector follows the hazardous journey through unfamiliar terrain as the team races the clock to stop further killings of their brethren, only to discover that things are not always as they seem.

Siam Storm – The series

The complete four-part series

Spice

Ben Bakewell is a master baker with a unique gift, making him the grand master of his culinary craft. More commonly known as ‘Cake’ he meets up with Ravuth, a Cambodian man residing in England and who has spent the majority of his life trying to trace his long lost family.

Jed Culver is a disgraced DEA agent whose bitterness for his old employer and lust for revenge lead him along a deadly path, as he also pursues the plant, although for a far more sinister gain.

This thrilling, but yet sometimes hilarious quest, takes you from the glitz and glamour of the fashionable London restaurant scene to the wild, untamed tropical forests surrounding the Cardamom mountains region

of Southeast Asia, as the participants race to discover the whereabouts of a remarkable plant and locate a misplaced family.

Fossils

Enjoy the hilarious antics of an elderly four-piece band as they embark on a whirlwind tour of several countries in Southeast Asia, unaware of their amazing worldwide success. The four musicians are inadvertently united and form a band named Fossils, whose unique sound filled an auditory hiatus lacking for decades in the modern day music industry. Pursued and hounded by ruthless record producers, this unassuming rock band discovers a new, exciting, and carefree way of life, which they enjoy to the fullest, or at least what remains of it. Viagra, snuff, and Rock 'n' Roll.

P.A.T.H

A team of three psychics use their unique talents to provide a link between the mortal world and the celestial. Commissioned by lost souls; they find lost treasures for the troubled spirits, which they give to the mortal beneficiaries. One particular case finds the team caught up in a plot conceived during world war two and instigated in the present day. The team has to solve a mystery that threatens to split the delicate fabric joining the two worlds.

Return of the Reich.

NEXT - PATH 2 – Covenant of the Gods

With the fate of humankind resting on their shoulders, the PATH team, along with the mortal Keepers and Guides around the world, are sent on various quests. Each individual test will push them all to their limits as time slowly ticks down towards Armageddon and their destiny.

Diabetes Type 2 – Help safely lower your blood sugar with the Tree of Life

This book is not written by Physicians or anyone with PhD's, but by medically trained diabetics who stumbled across pills capsules and powders made from the leaves and seeds of the Moringa tree. Dubbed The Miracle Tree or The Tree of Life. They found it reduced their blood sugar levels. This prompted research into this remarkable tree and its health benefits, which you will find outstanding. The tree grows in many parts of the world and indigenous people have been using its health giving properties for generations. Moringa pills, capsules, and powders are now readily available worldwide, This publication will tell you about the research gained and the benefits to diabetics, along with Moringa's other health benefits. It will let you know current suppliers, and where you can research for yourself this amazing tree. It will also tell you how to grow organically for yourself and a few simple recipes you can use to enjoy the health benefits of Moringa.

Ratchet and Stench – Animal Sleuths

Dog Gone Mystery

When Cruft's Best of Breeds Champion mysteriously disappears, suspicion points at the owner of a rival kennel.

Somerset police find the missing Scottish terrier's dermal tracker but cannot find further evidence of a crime. Having no proof they are unable to do anything and drop any investigations.

The other dogs call in Ratchet and Stench, and even though they uncover clues that suggest a brutal murder, the animal sleuths aren't convinced.

Something to Read While Travelling-THAILAND.

An informative and entertaining companion to accompany you on your travels. It contains useful information about Thailand, some of which you won't find in travel guidebooks. While travel guides go into more detail on specific areas of Thailand; this publication will only briefly explain about popular tourist hotspots, giving you plenty of time to read and enjoy the Useful Tips: Thai Language Made Simple: Popular Thai Recipes: Fun Quizzes and Brainteasers: Hilarious Jokes: Short Stories: and the full comedy adventure novel, SIAM STORM – A Thailand Adventure.

Leave your cares and woes at the arrivals section of the airport. Make sure you pack a big smile and this travelling companion in your suitcase. Open your heart and mind and enjoy your wonderful time in the Land of Smiles.