

Ratchet and Stench

ANIMAL SLEUTHS

Dog Gone Mystery

Robert A Webster

Copyright © 2016 Robert A Webster

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 and consent of the copyright holder, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published without a similar condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.



This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental; unless anybody knows any talking Badgers.

Acknowledgments Special thanks to my twelve-year-old niece, Jess Foster, for her help in turning adult ramblings into an understandable and exciting children's book. Thanks, Jess.

Accents used in this story with their English meaning:

Scottish

Aye	Yes
Deed	Dead
Me	My
Nay	No or Not
The Noo	Now
Teld	Told
Whesh	Wash
Yee	You

Somerset Yokel

Arh	Yes
'ole	Hole
Yow	You
Oy	I

Yorkshire

Aye up	Hello
Darn	Down
Furst	First

Nowt	Nothing
Owt	Anything
T' t'	The. the
Yer	You. Your
Yar	You are.

Table of Contents

Prologue	<i>Mystery at Windsor</i>
Chapter One	<i>The Animal Sleuths are on the case</i>
Chapter Two	<i>Glimmer of Hope</i>
Chapter Three	<i>What happened to Fosroy?</i>
Chapter Four	<i>The Mystery Continues</i>
Chapter Five	<i>Andrews and The Devil Dog</i>
Chapter Six	<i>The Investigation Closes</i>
Chapter Seven	<i>Return to the Runts</i>
Chapter Eight	<i>Escape from Windsor</i>
Chapter Nine	<i>Do the Sleuths have it wrong?</i>
Chapter Ten	<i>The Confession</i>
Chapter Eleven	<i>Home Sweet Home</i>
Epilogue	
About the Author	
Other Titles by Robert A Webster	

Prologue

Mystery at Windsor



A misty butterscotch haze welcomes a crisp spring day over the Somerset countryside.

“What is all the commotion?” shouts Tulip Windsor above the noise of dogs barking as she walks into the kennel enclosure carrying four bowls of dog food on a tray. Three barking Scottish terriers jump up at their gates. The fourth gate is open.

Tulip sees the last kennel empty and gasps. She drops the tray, sending the metal bowls clattering to the floor. Clasping her hand to her mouth, she hurries over to investigate. Tulip sees something on the floor, picks up an open collar, and stares at it. ‘How did this fall off his neck I wonder’

Panicking but hoping that her Cruft’s Grand Champion Scottish terrier has just wandered off, she puts the collar in her jacket pocket, walks to the perimeter fence, and calls out, “Fosroy... Fosroy Regent!”

She looks across the meadow surrounding the enclosure and over at the nearby woods, and shouts again, “Fosroy Regent!”

Tulip leans against the wire-mesh and rests her forehead against the cold metal in the hope of seeing the terrier scamper towards her, but there is no sign of him.

“Oh, this is terrible,” she says, and clings to the fence.

Tulip ponders for a moment, before Jenny, the young kennel caretaker walks in. “Good morning Tulip, it looks like it will be a nice sunny day.” She says and chuckles “but it’s bound to rain.”

Tulip lets go of the fence and turns to face her.

Jenny’s cheery smile disappears when she sees the worried expression on her boss’s tear-stained face, “What’s the matter?” She asks.

The Scottish terriers settle and stand at their gates gazing up at her.

Jenny then sees the food and water strewn over the concrete floor and the empty kennel. She frowns and asks, "What's happened, Tulip? Where is Fosroy Regent?"

Tulip takes the collar from her pocket and shows Jenny, who gasps, as Tulip explains, "I couldn't sleep, so took an early morning stroll around the grounds. I heard the dogs barking, so thinking they are hungry, I bought them food, and..." She bends her head forward, puts her hand over her eyes, and sobs, "Oh, Jenny, I know that something terrible has happened to him."

Jenny puts her arm around Tulip's shoulder, "Don't worry Tulip, he's probably just wandered off. I'll clean the floor and go look for him."

Although Jenny has only been working at the kennels since she left university a year ago, she knows that her boss overreacts. But she too feels a menace in the air and feels certain that Fosroy did not just wander off.

Tulip re-ties the ribbon around her strawberry blonde ponytail while she considers what to do next, and says, "Thank you, Jenny. Yes, please clean this mess up and feed the others. Then go look for Fosroy Regent while I go to the manor and call the police."

Jenny nods and goes to fetch a broom. Tulip goes over to Montrose Pearls kennel, opens the gate, and walks inside. She sits on the cold, concrete floor and strokes the Scottish terrier. She sweeps back Pearls' black fringe and gazes deep into the little terrier's sad brown eyes. Pearl nuzzles up against the upset woman and reaches up to lick her face.

Jenny returns with a broom and dustpan. She rolls up her thick cotton shirtsleeves and sweeps the mess off the floor.

Tulip gets up, disturbing Pearl. She strokes the terrier again and whispers, "Don't worry Pearl, we will find him," and adds, "If only you could speak old girl, this could be easily solved." She stands up, "I will call the police, Jenny."

"Okay Tulip, I will replace their food and then go look for Fosroy. I imagine the police will want to investigate in here." She looks at Tulip and reassures her "Don't worry Tulip, the police will soon find him. He has a microchip tracker, so it won't be difficult."

Tulip nods, forces a smile, and says, "Yes, you are right, but will they find him alive. There is no other reason apart from jealousy to take Fosroy Regent," she frowns, and looking enraged, says, "and we know who has that reason." Tulip takes a deep breath and walks outside carrying Fosroy's collar.

Jenny watches the middle-aged lady-of-the-manor walk out of the enclosure and says, "Right you lot. I will bring your breakfast and then we will find Fosroy." She smiles, knowing that the dogs don't have a clue what she is saying, but like most people, talks to dogs.

Jenny removes her baseball cap, ruffles her short auburn hair, replaces the cap, stacks the empty bowls, and walks outside to a nearby out-building.

Tulip walks up the path to the manor and reassures herself that everything will be fine and they will find Fosroy unharmed. She arrives at the entryway, wipes her wellington boots on the coir doormat, removes them, and goes into the manor. She hangs up her Harris Tweed jacket, picks up the phone in the hallway, and dials 999.

Jenny leaves the enclosure, so the Scottish terriers talk amongst themselves.

"What do yee think happened, Pearl? I did nay see or hear anything," says Hamish.

"I've nay idea," Pearl replies, and tells them, "When I woke up and could nay see Fosroy or smell his scent, I fretted, so woke yee and Hadfield."

"How did we sleep so soundly? Fosroy would have alerted us if something was wrong," says Hadfield, from the furthestmost kennel.

“Aye, it’s suspicious. How did someone come into the kennels and take Fosroy without us hearing his cries for help? And why remove his collar?” asks Hamish, “very puzzling.”

“Unless someone drugged us,” states Pearl, “That is the only logical explanation, but I can nay figure out how or why they left his collar? Unless whoever did this does nay realise Fosroy has a microchip under his skin.”

“I agree, and Andrews has something to do with this,” says Hadfield.

Hamish snarls, “Aye, it must be Andrews. We all know what he’s like, and he will nay want Fosroy found alive. He will nay care if he has a microchip. The people police better find him soon; otherwise, they will only be tracking his corpse.”

The dogs go silent as they wonder what could have happened to Fosroy.

With each kennel separated by wire-mesh, Hamish and Hadfield see Pearl go lie on her bed and then hear her whimper. Hamish realises that his outburst sounded uncaring, so he and Hadfield sit and look at one another, listening to Pearl’s mournful whines.

After several minutes, Pearl stops whimpering, stands up, and walks up to her wire-mesh fence.

“Ratchet and Stench!” she exclaims, which startles Hamish and Hadfield.

“Pardon?” asks Hadfield.

Pearl, now sounding excited, tells them, “We need Ratchet and Stench. They will find out what has happened to Fosroy.”

Hamish and Hadfield look at Pearl smiling.

“Aye, it’s worth a try,” says Hamish.

Hamish, although trying to console Pearl, knows that there is slim hope of them finding Fosroy alive. But a slim hope is better than no hope, and if anyone can solve this mystery, it is the famous animal sleuths.

“I’ll call the crows,” announces Pearl.

— Chapter One —

The Animal Sleuths are on the case



Stench nibbles on a small piece of his poop. He swirls it around his mouth like a wine connoisseur before spitting it into his forepaw. He takes the small piece of excrement over to one of several wood boards covered in small samples and sticks the small dollop on the one marked, ‘Poop Board,’ and writes, ‘Indian curry’ alongside it.

“How’s the poop board coming along,” asks Ratchet, looking over the newspaper.

“It’s coming along nicely,” replies Stench. “It came in useful with our last case, when we solved the missing sewer mayor’s ring-pull-of-office mystery.”

“Arh, it did,” chuckles Ratchet. “Not only did we help the mayor, but we made the headlines in the local rag. Another case solved by the super sleuths,” he jokes.

Stench goes over to a wall and taps on the photo of them receiving a commendation from the sewer mayor. ‘Yes, a proud moment.’ Thinks Stench, as he gazes at the photograph of two smiling rats and a badger, with the sewer mayor, wearing the ring-pull-of-office around his neck. Stench, with his combed back blonde quiff, and Ratchet, the panda looking badger.

Ratchet and Stench recover the ring-pull- of-office from a coir mat outside the farmhouse door at Burke’s dairy farm. They discover Jack Daw took the shiny item, which he drops while flying over the dairy farm. The ring-pull lands in a pile of cow dung before getting stuck in the soles of the farmer Burke’s wellies.

Stench traces the ring-pull from the metallic-can smell covered in various animal faeces on his poop board and the sleuths return it to the relieved sewer mayor.

Ratchet goes back to reading his newspaper while Stench looks again at the photo. He then looks at another photo of his dad, Shumlock. ‘Odds bodkins, Dad would have been proud,’ he thinks. He smiles as fond memories of his deceased father comes flooding back.

His father was his tutor and mentor, teaching him from when he was a pup on how to be a successful sleuth. Stench resembles his father, with his brown fur and blonde coloured quiff on his high brow, which unless he combs back, drapes over his eyes.

Stench is an articulate creature who chooses his words carefully, making him sound like an English professor.

He enjoys coming up with new and innovative techniques in animal forensics and his ambition is to be a legendary animal sleuth like his father. Shumlock died several seasons ago while investigating a new, deadly, and according to people, undetectable rat-trap. Unfortunately for Shumlock the claims were true.

Ratchet on the other hand, accidentally wandered into being an animal sleuth. Although always fascinated by the work, his family are happy building setts and expanding their badger family in the Somerset countryside. Badgers normally have a thick triangular line of black fur from their head leading to their snout. Ratchet's face is white, apart from two black patches around his eyes, making him appear like an odd-shaped panda, with a yokel twang.

The pair, now friends and colleagues for many seasons, live together in the large sett that Ratchet dug. He made modifications when Stench moved in, to accommodate his rodent colleague, teacher, and mentor, along with his equipment.

They first met at an animal sleuth's conference in the sewer under a scrap yard near the edge of the woods in Yeovil.

Ratchet squeezes into the sewer after running from a pack of brutish hounds that chases him while he is away from his sett foraging.

After going deeper into the sewer, he stumbles across a gathering of rodents, and sees a large sign on a wall that reads 'Animal Sleuths Conference.'

The chatter of the sleuths stops when they notice Ratchet and they stare at the odd-looking badger.

Stench, seeing Ratchet look bemused, walks over, and asks him why he is there. Ratchet tells him how he ran into the sewer to avoid the dogs. Stench smiles and introduces himself. He invites Ratchet to stay and listen.

Animal sleuths from the district congregate to discuss cases and learn new techniques. Ratchet looks amazed as speakers go to a matchbox podium and speak about their current cases and new techniques in solving animal crimes. He notices the adulation Stench receives when the chair-mouse introduces him and mentions his father, Shumlock. The sleuths go silent when Stench takes to the podium and speaks.

After listening to various sleuths, and knowing that the dogs will be long gone, Ratchet doesn't want to leave. Even though the sewer feels cramped, he is fascinated and knows that he wants to be an animal sleuth. During a food break, sleuths come over and welcome Ratchet. Stench brings him food over, but after looking at the rotting meats and vegetables, he pushes it to one side.

While Stench tucks into his buffet, Ratchet asks, "How do you become an animal sleuth?"

Stench stops eating, looks at Ratchet, chuckles, and tells him. "Sorry, Ratchet, only mice and rats can be animal sleuths. Other animals are too large to go where we can."

Ratchet looks disappointed and sighs.

Although there are no rules about animal sleuths, it is simple logic. Apart from their size and ability to squeeze into tight spaces, rats and mice have the best olfactory senses in the animal kingdom. They can detect aromas and scents undetectable by other animals.

Stench glances at Ratchet, and seeing the disappointment on the young badger's face, announces, "I am about to give another lecture, stay if you want and listen."

Ratchet smiles and says, "Arh okay, thanks, I will."

Stench takes to the podium, removes items from his bag, and clears his throat. He then reads from his notes and introduces his current case, “Hanratty’s stolen sugar granule sculptures.”

He explains how the famous rat sculptor had her sugar granule sculptures stolen before an upcoming art exhibition. Stench tells the mesmerised audience that he suspects her long-time rival, Salvador mouse. Stench suspects he has professional accomplices, because the sculptures went missing at night, with no evidence found at the crime scene. No fur traces, paw prints, or residual fur scent.

Ratchet watches and ponders. He is intrigued as Stench goes through his findings, but unable to contain himself any longer, shouts out.

“It sounds like ants!”

The other sleuths look around and glare at him. Stench strokes his whiskers, and recalling his research on ants, asks, “What makes you think that, Ratchet? Ants only come out during the day and don’t venture indoors. Hanratty lives under the floorboards on the fourth floor of the newsagents. She would have seen them, besides ants do not eat sugar.”

Ratchet smiles. “The ants in the woods do. They eat flower pollen and fruits...and only go out at night,” He replies.

Stench continues stroking his whiskers and grinds his teeth, (Bruxing) which he does when thinking.

Impressed by Ratchets efforts, he asks, “Why would forest ants come into town?”

Ratchet smiles and says, “I don’t know, maybe it’s the warmer weather.” He then asks, “Have you found any insect wings?”

Stench found unknown transparent, brittle, wings several moons ago, but while researching their origins, a new case overtook his study.

“Yes, I did,” he smiles, realising that ants being the culprits makes sense.

“They’ll be from the queens. Yow have a colony of woods ants move here.”

The audience, intrigued by Ratchet, although having difficulty understanding his yokel twang, watch and listen to the conversation between the sleuth and this strange badger. Stench describes the town ant species he has come across, and Ratchet tells him about the larger, darker, wood ant. Stench takes notes and scribbles down drawings. The audience looks agog as the smiling Stench leaves the podium and goes over to the excited Ratchet.

“Odds bodkins, well done young Ratchet, you may have cracked this case for me. Now, where did you say you live?”

“Oy live in sett that oy’ve almost finished digging. It’s not far away, about a four-hour walk from here.”

Stench lives under the city hall in a cramped drawer of an old filing cabinet. He is angry having to move every time people discover his nest and destroy his equipment. It irritates him having to scavenge the pieces over again.

“The soil is soft, so oy can dig plenty more room,” continues Ratchet smiling, hoping to tempt Stench and learn the sleuthing business.

That is the start of their successful partnership. To most of their clients, it seems as if they can read each other’s thoughts. Ratchet is the logical problem solver, while Stench, with his forensic ability and love for research, provides the evidence. This has been an envious sleuth partnership throughout the seasons, with the duo becoming famous for their uncanny ability to solve crimes, along with their trademarks. Stench with his magnifying glass made from a contact lense, and Ratchet with his oak-leaf deerstalker hat.

Ratchet looks over his newspaper again. “I thought yow’d given up cigarettes.”

“I haven’t got this brand,” mumbles Stench, as he finishes chewing a small chunk of a used cigarette filter tip. He savours the flavour, spits out the sample, takes it over to his ‘Butt Board,’ sticks it on, and writes: Brand P3, alongside it.

“Sorry to disturb you, sleuths,” a voice crows from the setts entrance as Cuthbert hops into the burrow.

“Hello Cuthbert, what brings you here?” asks Stench.

Ratchet puts down the paper and he and Stench face the crow. Cuthbert explains the mystery at Windsor Kennels and the missing terrier, Fosroy.

The sleuths listen, and even though Cuthbert cannot give details, it sounds a mystery they need to investigate.

Stench finds his woodland map sketch and Cuthbert shows them the location.

“Odds bodkins! It will take us at least two moons to get there.” Stench exclaims.

“We better get cracking then,” says Ratchet and smiles.

With his detective juices flowing, Ratchet tells the crow, “Cuthbert, fly back and tell the dogs that Ratchet and Stench are on the case.”

Cuthbert nods and hops out of the sett.

Stench packs his sleuths field case while Ratchet studies the map. He plans the quickest route with food and water stops along the way.

A short while later, Ratchet asks, “Ready Stench?”

Stench nods, “Yes, let’s go.”

They walk out of the sett with a spring in their step, chatting about the mystery that lay ahead.



The sett is now silent. Gone is the usual chatter of the pair discussing cases or Ratchet reading the newspaper aloud to Stench as he busies himself with his forensic research. The emptiness sounds hollow for a few minutes... until.

“Silly me, I went out undressed,” says Ratchet, walking back into the sett. Taking his oak-leaf deerstalker hat from a cotton bobbin, he flips it onto his head, straightens it up, and announces, “Ooh arh, that’s better.”

— Chapter Two —

Glimmer of Hope



Jenny loves the English countryside in spring. It feels like nature’s rebirth after a long bleak winter. She hears birds chirp as they perch on fresh leaved branches of rejuvenated trees, and notices white and blue crocuses clumped in small bunches by her feet.

What she does not enjoy is the rain, and after the heavens open, she splashes through muddy puddles with her three leashed companions. She brought the three Scottish terriers along hoping they may pick up Fosroy’s scent and lead her to the missing dog, but they keep stopping and looking back at her.

After an hour of calling out for Fosroy and now drenched, Jenny stops and looks at the mud-splattered show dogs. “Tulip will be furious if she sees you like this. Let’s get back and clean you up.”

Jenny comes from the woods and walks the short distance over the grassy meadow back to the kennels, just as the police patrol car arrives.

That was several hours earlier.

The uniformed scene-of-crimes officer walks over to Jenny who is grooming Hamish, “I am almost finished here. I just need to take your fingerprints.” He says, holding out a small device.

Jenny stands up and inserts her index finger. The machine illuminates for a second. The police officer checks, smiles, and announces, “That’s it... all done.”

Jenny kneels back down and continues brushing Hamish while Hadfield sits and waits his turn for a gentle massage.

“Have you found anything?” asks Jenny, looking up at the officer.

The officer puts the fingerprint device into his field kit case and tells her, “I don’t know yet. I lifted fingerprints from the kennel latch, enclosures gate, and the collar Mrs Windsor showed to detective Springer. I need to eliminate the people who come into the enclosure, which you already told me, is only you and Mrs Windsor.”

“That’s right,” Jenny confirms.

“Oh,” says the officer picking up the field case, “I found strands of fur snagged on the wire in a hole in the fence.”

“Sorry, I have been meeting to get that fixed,” replies Jenny, looking embarrassed.

The police officer frowns and continues, “And you are certain that the kennel gates are always locked and Fosrodyke always wore his collar?”

“Fosroy,” Jenny corrects him, “and yes, the gates are always locked. The dogs wear their kennel collars unless they are at shows. They have their name and address on them, just in case they wander off. Although that is unlikely to happen, it is a precaution that Mrs Windsor insists upon from when they are puppies.”

The police officer thanks Jenny, leaves the enclosure, and walks up the pathway toward the manor house. ‘It wouldn’t be too difficult to break in, but apart from the collar, nothing else suggests that anyone did,’ he thinks, ‘ But I will let Dick know and see what he has come up with.’

The officer stops and looks over the sprawling meadows of the vast Windsor estate, surrounded in places by woodland.

He sees stables in the distance where horses stand in a corralled enclosures looking over the fence as a man unloads bales of hay from a trailer.

He notices a larger kennel enclosure a short distance away, with several wood and concrete outbuildings of varying sizes. The police officer continues along the gravel path, passing sculptured bushes and manicured lawns.

“Good morning,” says a young man holding pruning shears, kneeling at the side of a rose bush patch.

“Morning,” replies the police officer, smiling. ‘Cor blimey, how the other half live’ he thinks.

The officer walks to his patrol car parked next to a new Range Rover in the large courtyard. He puts his field case in the back seat and goes over to the manor house.

Jenny brushes Hadfield. She feels guilty for having lied to the police officer. But it was only a little white lie, and it only happened a few times, so hopefully nobody will ever find out.

Tulip wipes away her tears with a handkerchief. Her middle-aged husband, Rupert, pecks her on the cheek, “Everything will be fine, so let’s not jump to conclusions, darling.”

Pearl lays by Tulips feet, listening to the sobs of the mother. The little terrier rests her head between her paws, thinking of Fosroy and the happy times they spent together.

The Windsor estate has been in Rupert Windsor’s family for generations, with his fortune and estate inherited from his wealthy landowning parents.

Detective Dick Springer puts the china cup back onto its saucer and looks at his notes, giving Tulip time to compose herself. He sits back into the armchair and looks around the room at the trophies and photographs of the Windsor show dogs.

A gold tinged amphora-shaped trophy stands on a round wooden base, with: Best of Breeds Grand Champion 2015: Winner: Fosroy Regent – Windsor Kennels, engraved on two brass plaques. The trophy, housed in a mahogany and glass cabinet, is placed centre stage on an oak table in front of the large bay window that overlooks the grounds.

The detective hopes to end the interview soon, having been there for two hours trying to get a statement. Tulip keeps interrupting him with bouts of sobbing and showing him photograph after photograph of Fosroy, while telling him about his winning prizes. He looks at the photographs again and notices something peculiar.

“Mrs Windsor, on the photographs it looks as if Fosroy is wearing a collar with gemstones on it. Yet the collar you showed me from his kennel is an old blue one.”

Tulip sniffs back the tears and tells him. “Yes, one is his gemstone-encrusted show collar, but the one he wears at home is his kennel collar, which he has worn since he was a puppy. He was four-years-old... she sniffs again... I mean, is, four-years-old,” she sobs again.

Springer then asks “And you feel certain that...” he looks at his notes and continues, “Harry Andrews could be the one responsible for his disappearance.”

Tulip glowers at the detective and snaps, “Yes, vile man, his kennels are several miles away and he has always been jealous. He only entered his Scottish terriers in dog shows several years ago, but his wretched dogs have never come close to winning. His best dog Helmsly is a nasty beast that attacks Fosroy at shows.” She smiles and adds, “The ones that my dogs always win.” She leans over and strokes Pearl.

There comes a knock on the door and the uniformed police officer enters. He walks over to Tulip and Rupert, smiles, and tells them, “I am finished with my investigations.”

He then looks at detective Springer, “Can I have a quick word, Dick?”

“Excuse me,” says the detective.

The police officers walk outside and chat in the hallway.

“Have you found anything, Dave?” asks detective Springer

“Not much. When I get back to the crime lab, I will check fingerprints and shoe prints, but they are probably from this morning. So unless someone took the dog and mopped the floor, I see nothing to suggest anyone broke in.”

Dick Springer sighs and says, “But someone got in to take the dog and remove its collar. So how did they get in and out? Mrs Windsor assures me that when she went to the enclosure earlier she found the gate locked. And it doesn’t sound as if the other dogs alerted anyone until this morning.”

Dave shrugs his shoulders, chuckles, and says, “That’s your job to find out, detective.” He looks at his watch, “Are you almost finished here? I’m famished.”

“Yeah, I will finish up here and we can go into town and eat. Then I will go speak to this Harry Andrews fellow.”

The uniformed police officer goes to wait in the car and detective Springer returns to the drawing-room.

“Have you any news, detective Springer?” asks Rupert, as he hugs Tulip, who has a look of hope on her tear-stained face.

Dick Springer sits back down and tells them, “The scene-of-crimes officer has taken evidence which he will process when he gets back to the lab. I can let you know more then.” He smiles at Tulip and tells her. “Don’t worry Mr and Mrs Windsor, we will find him. We should have a trace on his microchip tracker soon.”

Detective Springer’s phone rings. He takes it from his pocket, looks at the number on the screen, and says,

“Ah, here is the department now.” He smiles and answers the call.

Tulip and Rupert look at him and Pearl’s ears prick up.

Detective Springer finishes the conversation, smiles, and announces, “Good news, they have Fosroy’s microchips location. A squad car is on its way there to get him.”

Tulip and Rupert breathe a sigh of relief. “Oh, that’s wonderful news, detective. Where did they find him? Is he alright?” Tulip asks.

The detective smiles at the anxious Tulip and tells her, “I’m sorry Mrs Windsor, but I don’t know anything yet. I told the officer to call me as soon as he picks up Fosroy. Please be patient, it shouldn’t be too long.”

Rupert holds his wife’s hand, “Don’t worry darling. He’s been found, so let these fine fellows do their job.”

Tulip takes a deep breath, smiles at her husband, and says, “Yes, of course, you are right Rupert.” She pecks her husband on the cheek and leans over to Pearl, now sitting up and wagging her tale. Tulip runs her hand playfully through the little terrier’s glossy black wiry coat. “Don’t worry old girl,” she says, “Fosroy will soon be home.”

— Chapter Three —

What happened to Fosroy?



The full moon's silvery glow enables the nocturnal sleuths to make good progress through the undergrowth. They travel at night and rest during the day in animal burrows along the way. The burrows occupants are delighted to have the famous sleuths as guests. Stench slows them down at times by stopping to gnaw tree barks and take samples for his 'Bark Board.' After travelling two days and nights, the sleuths arrive at the Windsor kennels just after sunrise. They leave the surrounding woods and survey the area.

“There!” exclaims Ratchet, pointing to the nearest enclosure.

After making sure that the coast is clear, they scurry across a small grass meadow and walk around the perimeter of the wire-mesh enclosure.

“Look at this!” exclaims Ratchet, pointing to a hole at the bottom of the fence.

Stench looks and sniffs the around the hole in the mesh. “hmm,” he mumbles.

“Yow detecting anything?” Ratchet asks.

“I don't know yet,” replies Stench rubbing his whiskers and wafting scent into his nostrils.

Ratchet and Stench go through the hole and over to the kennels. They walk towards a kennel and Hamish comes to his gate.

“Good morning, I am Stench and this is Ratchet. I believe you are expecting us.”

Hamish forces a smile, and in a Scottish accent, says. “Hello, fellas. I am Hamish.”

The sleuths nod and Hamish tells them, “The kennel to my right is Hadfield and Pearl's on the left.” Hamish glances towards the respective kennels, and then whispers, “And the empty one at the end... was Fosroy's.”

Hamish sighs and tells the sleuths, “I am sorry but, I think we have wasted your time.”

Hadfield comes over and presses his nose up against his gate.

The sleuths can hear whimpering coming from Pearl's kennel and see her lying on her bedding over at the back wall.

Hamish looks at Pearl and then back at the sleuths. "Fosroy is deed," he whispers.

The sleuths are confused by the Scottish accent until Ratchet figures out what Hamish means and asks, "Deed... I mean dead... how?"

Stench walks to the empty kennel.

Hamish tells Ratchet how the people police found Fosroy's microchip with blood and pieces of Fosroy's flesh on it several days ago. He explains, "Pearl overheard the mother speaking to the people police on the phone after they found the microchip." Hamish glances over at Pearl as she moves closer to her gate, and continues, "Pearl heard them say that they located it near Andrews Kennels and Farm. They took Andrews to the people police station, but we have heard nothing since." Hamish looks solemn and then the little terrier snarls, "Andrews will get away with everything. Fosroy is only a dog. It is obvious that Andrews removed his microchip after murdering him and then took his body away to bury deeper into woodland. The people police will nay try hard to find him; they will nay be too bothered."

Ratchet knows that without a body there is no proof of a crime, so they won't punish Andrews, besides, as Hamish pointed out, Fosroy is only a dog. Wanting to learn more, Ratchet asks, "Who is this Andrews person, and why would he harm Fosroy?"

Hamish tells Ratchet of the rivalry between the two kennels, and the jealousy of Helmsly, Andrews best show dog, after always losing to Fosroy. The pair goes silent as they see movement in Pearl's kennel.

Pearl sees Stench looking around Fosroy's enclosure and comes to her gate.

"What are yee doing?" she croaks.

Stench, noticing how upset Pearl appears, stops sniffing around Fosroy's Kennel and walks to Pearl's gate, "Sorry for your loss. Were you and Fosroy close?" he asks.

Pearl sighs and nods.

Stench walks away.

Ratchet sees Stench head to another area, so goes over to Pearl. "Sorry about Stench, he just wanders around on an investigation. He doesn't mean to be rude."

Pearl groans and tells Ratchet, "There's nothing to investigate, Fosroy is deed." She looks at Ratchet and feeling tears well up in her eyes, skulks to the back wall, lies on her bedding, and rests her head on her paws. She continues whimpering.

"People coming!" shouts Stench, rushing over to Ratchet, "Quick let's hide"

The sleuths rush into the grooming area at the end of the enclosure and hide behind several containers. They watch Jenny come into the enclosure with the dogs' breakfast. She opens the kennel gates, puts a bowl of food and water in each kennel, and leaves.

"Odds bodkins!" Exclaims Stench

"What are yow detecting?" asks Ratchet, seeing Stench's whiskers twitch.

Stench looks intrigued and replies, "I don't know yet, but it's something I need to investigate."

The sleuths return to Hamish's gate. "Would yee like something to eat before yee go?" Hamish asks, and tells them, "The food here is delicious."

"Not for me thanks," says Ratchet.

Stench squeezes through the gate mesh and over to Hamish's food bowl. He nudges pieces of moist chunks around with his snout, takes a morsel from the bowl, and drops it on the floor. He then goes over to Hamish's water and smells around the metal bowl. His whiskers twitch and he looks at Ratchet. He takes a sip of water, goes to the food morsel, and eats.

Ratchet looks at Pearl still lying against the back wall, so asks Hamish, "Can yow tell us anything about Fosroy's disappearance?"

Hamish frowns, and snarls, "Andrew must have grabbed him while we slept. Pearl thinks he drugged us because Fosroy was gone when we woke up. We did nay hear anything, and Fosroy would have put up a fight. All we know is that he'd gone and his gate was open, with his collar on the floor."

The sleuths listen. Stench stops eating and says, "Hmm, not much to go on, but we will investigate further."

"There is nay point," says Hamish "Fosroy is deed."

"We are here now so it won't hurt to look around, besides this food tastes delicious," replies Stench.

"It's up to yee, but yee'll be wasting your time."

Ratchet glances at his colleague and realises that Stench is on to something.

"Arh, it's okay," says Ratchet. "We have nothing better to do and we have travelled all this way, so we might as well investigate."

Hamish shrugs, "Up to yee."

Stenches whiskers twitch and he warns Ratchet, "That female person is coming back,"

He squeezes back through Hamish's mesh and tells him. "We need to look around more, so we will see you later."

Ratchet and Stench hurry out of the kennels and through the hole in the wire-mesh fence. They scurry over to the outskirts of the woods where they sit and watch the enclosure.

"What do yow think, Stench? Is it worth our while investigating?"

Stench is bruxing, a clear sign to Ratchet that his colleague is thinking about something. Stench then replies, "I believe everything is not as it seems." He points over to the manor and announces, "I need to get in there. When the coast is clear, go back to the enclosure and ask the terriers more about Fosroy. See if they can tell you anything useful about that Andrews person and his dog Helmsly."

"Oy will, but Scotties are hard to understand. They don't speak good English likes I do," says Ratchet and chuckles.

Stench looks at his yokel colleague and tuts.

Stench scurries through the short grass and makes his way to the manor. Ratchet sits behind a small mound and watches Jenny take the dogs for their morning walk.

Stench stops as he nears the manor, detecting a familiar and reassuring scent. "Excellent!" he thinks, "This will make my job easier." He follows the odour trail and enters the manor through a hole in an old brick that leads him under the floorboards on the ground floor. He has not gone far when a mischief of rats surround him.

"Good morning, master sleuth," says a cheerful, middle-aged white rat in a polite English accent. "I am Harold Ratchester, and this is my dam, Mavis."

Stench nods and smiles at the parents and then at the dozen pups in their mischief crowding around him. Harold continues, "We heard rumours from the crows that you and sleuth Ratchet are coming. Are you here to investigate the tragedy surrounding poor Fosroy?"

“Yes we are Harold. Did you know Fosroy?” asks Stench, trying to hear over the chatter of excited pups.

Harold smiles and tells him, “Yes, charming fellow. We chatted several times when the mother brought him into the house. It’s tragic and I know it upsets the mother. I hear her weep at night when I do my shopping. Oh, where are my manners, would you care for some food or wine? I have a nice bottle top of Chardonnay.”

“No I am fine,” replies Stench, trying to nuzzle his way clear of the pups, “Could you show me around the house, Harold.”

“Of course dear fellow. You must meet the neighbours. They will be green with envy when I tell them the famous sleuth Stench is staying as our guest.”

“How do I become an animal sleuth, sir?” asks a chubby pup.

“Yes, I want to be one too,” says another, leading to a barrage of questions from the Ratchester’s curious mischief.

“Now, now, young scamps. You can ask sleuth Stench these things later. Come along sir, I will take you to meet the Fielding’s, the mice family on the first floor.” Harold informs him.

With the Ratchester pups questions still ringing in his ears, Stench, and Harold travel under the floorboards until they reach the first floor. Stenches whiskers twitch. “What is that smell?” he asks.

“Ah, yes,” replies Harold, grimacing, “awful isn’t it. It is coming from the mother’s boudoir.”

“Will you take me there?”

“Of course old chap, we can swing by there first, it’s just along here.”

Harold detours and leads Stench to a large en-suite bathroom, which they enter through a hole under the bathtub.

“Did Fosroy ever come in here?” asks Stench.

Harold looks puzzled, “Yes, the mother bought Fosroy up here many times while she prepares her hair and bathes. Why master sleuth, do you think something sinister is afoot?”

Stench doesn’t reply and picking up no people scent climbs up the side of the bathtub and surveys the area. Something in the plughole catches his attention, so he slides down the enamel sides to investigate. He looks at a short strand of blonde fur and takes a lingering sniff that makes his eyes water. He climbs up the plug chain, hops onto the taps, and leaps the small distance to the top of the bathtub. Stench jumps to the floor and scurries into the bedroom. He climbs up the bed and looks around the room.

Stench sees several small bottles of pills and liquids on a bedside table, so goes over to inspect them.

“Have you found any clues? What do you think happened to Fosroy?” asks Harold from the plush carpeted floor.

“Perhaps,” replies Stench as he sniffs at the top of a small white plastic bottle that peaks his interest. His whiskers twitch and he jumps off the bedside cabinet to join Harold on the floor. “I need to ask your neighbours some questions.”

Ratchet watches Jenny bring back and groom the dogs. He waits until she leaves the enclosure and returns to investigate further.

Ratchet goes into the empty kennel and looks up at the latch behind Fosroy's gate. He realises from the descriptions given of Fosroy that he is a similar size to the Scottish terrier. 'That is still too high,' he thinks, 'unless.' He puts his front paws between the fishing net wire-mesh and heaves himself up. He puts his back paws in the mesh for leverage and using the mesh as a ladder, touches his snout to the latch, which moves slightly. 'Maybe it's not so difficult, especially if...hmm, I wonder,' he thinks, and smiles.

He pushes backwards, lands on the floor, and goes over to Pearl's kennel. Ratchet sees Pearl on her bedding by the far wall with her back turned to the gate.

Hamish and Hadfield stand at their gates, so Ratchet asks, "Could Fosroy jump?"

Hamish looks bemused and replies, "Aye, he loved jumping and always bouncing around... why?"

Ratchet, not wanting to raise the dog's hopes at this stage, smiles, and asks, "What can you tell me about this Andrews's person, and his dog, Helmsly?"

Hadfield tells him, "Andrews is a mean person who mistreats his dogs. One of his terriers told an acquaintance of ours at a show that he thrashes them when they lose. I imagine Helmsly gets beaten a lot if the rumours are true," says Hadfield. He smiles and continues, "He could nay win against any of us at shows, and did nay stand a chance against Fosroy."

"Aye and he still will nay win against us, or any other show Scottie. He has white fur on his muzzle, so it looks like he dips his nose in flour... oh, and he is ugly," says Hamish, and he and Hadfield chuckle.

Hamish continues, "Helmsly is a bitter, vicious, terrier who hates us, particularly Fosroy and attacked him at every opportunity." Hamish snarls, "None of us like him, and he despises us."

"Aye, and it's rumoured that he bit a show judge. He is now a mean, vicious, dog," adds Pearl, now standing at her gate. "He never used to be, but I hate him now, and so did Fosroy."

"Aye, as do we all," adds Hadfield.

"Ah, Pearl," says Ratchet going over to her gate, "can I ask you some questions?"

Pearl nods, so Ratchet asks, "Do you know if the person who takes care of you ever left Fosroy's kennel unlocked?"

Pearl thinks for a moment, "Jenny... nay, never." She cocks her head to one side, frowns, and continues. "Oh hang on, she came in a few days ago and I heard her open Fosroy's gate without hearing the latch click, so maybe it was already open. I'm not sure... why?"

Ratchet smiles. "Oy am just trying to tie up loose ends. Oy will take another look around and wait to see if Stench has found anything from his investigations."

The bemused dogs stare at Ratchet.

"What do you think happened?" asks Hamish.

Ratchet looks at the three curious dogs, "It's too early to tell, but we need to go to Andrews kennels. Can you show me the way?"

"We appreciate your help, but it is pointless. They will nay do anything to Andrews... and it will nay bring Fosroy back," says Pearl.

She sighs and skulks to the back of her kennel.

Stench conducts several interviews with the manors resident animals, eager to help and honoured to be meeting sleuth Stench. Harold looks smug as he introduces Stench to the Fielding family. The pups crowd around Stench with a barrage of questions. Mrs Fielding offers him tasty, rancid treats, which Stench finds hard to resist, but he is on an investigation, so food will have to wait. After interviewing the mice, bats, and other rat families at the manor and uncovering nothing useful, Stench tries another approach. "Harold, apart from the bedroom where else did Fosroy go when he was in the house?"

Harold thinks and tells him, "He spent a great deal of time with the mother in the drawing-room."

"Will you take me there please?"

"Certainly old chap, follow me."

The pair scurries under the floorboard junctions until they reach the drawing-room on the first floor. They enter through a small hole in the skirting board. Stench can detect dogs' odour, which he assumes is Pearl's and Fosroy's.

Not detecting any people, Stench goes to the middle of the room and stands on his hind legs to survey the area. He sees the photographs and prize-winning trophies adorning the room. 'Hello, what's that?' he thinks. Unable to stretch far enough to see, he climbs up the leg of a cabinet. On an oak table in front of the locked mahogany, cabinet, containing the Cruft's trophy, is a shabby blue leather collar. He can detect a dog scent, which Harold confirms is Fosroy's, after climbing up to join him. A framed photograph of Fosroy is behind the collar. Stench looks at the picture of the Scottish terrier and remarks. "He doesn't look happy in this picture."

Harold shrugs. "He always seemed happy when we spoke." Harold cocks his head to one side and says, "Mind you, now you mention it, after winning the big trophy, he did not appear his usual happy self. Perhaps the mother put too much pressure on him. People came with picture making boxes, so the mother fussed over him to make sure he always looked well groomed and manicured."

Stench looks around and sees a folded newspaper over on the sofa. From the trophy table, he can make out the headlines. 'Best of Breed, Grand Champion Is Missing, Presumed Dead.' He takes out his magnifying glass and points it at the paper, but apart from the first couple of lines, he cannot see any more of the story.

Stench doesn't think it worth the effort going over to the sofa for the little information he may glean from the newspaper, so turns his attention to Fosroy's open collar.

He inspects the clip with his hand-like forepaws, turning it over and looking at the small buckle and the stitching of the leather strap. The collar is open and Stench notices the closed buckle attached to the wrong end. 'This was yanked off,' thinks Stench.

"Something afoot?" asks Harold, hearing Stench bruxing

"I don't know yet. I need to see what Ratchet has uncovered."

"If you have finished with your investigation here, we can pop back to chez Ratchester's for a bite to eat. Mavis is cooking a scrumptious ripe stilton and sour milk broth for luncheon. When we heard you were coming, we hoped you might visit us, so she went earlier to stock up from the larder, just in case." chortles Harold.

Stench is tempted until Harold tells him. "My mischief will love to hear stories of the cases that you and sleuth Ratchet have solved. I will get fresh straw and you can stay as our special guest tonight."

Stench can imagine the scene, with the Ratchester pups scrambling and climbing over him asking questions. He cringes at the thought of them tugging at his whiskers to see if they are any secret weapons or sleuthing equipment in there. Rat pups are curious and mischievous. That is why they call a family of rats, a mischief. It is an appropriate name.

“I am sorry Harold, but I have to decline your kind offer. I need to get my information and clues back to sleuth Ratchet and find out what he has uncovered. We need to solve this mystery post haste.”

Harold looks disappointed, and then appears curious, “Do you think there could be more to the Fosroy tragedy than meets the eye?” he asks.

“I don’t know yet, but your help has been invaluable Harold, your pups will be proud when you tell them.”

Harold smiles and blusters, “Yes, they will indeed, especially when you solve this case, and I inform them that it was I who assisted the great sleuths in cracking this mystery.” Harold bobs his head and says, “Toodle-pip. I hope you and sleuth Ratchet solve this mystery soon.”

Stench smiles and bobs his head at Harold. He then scurries to the hole in the brick and scurries across the lawns towards the kennels. ‘I hope the dogs saved me some food, I am famished.’ thinks Stench. He then smells a delicious odour, ‘Hello. What’s in there I wonder.’ He veers off and heads toward a small brick outbuilding, finds a hole in a brick, and goes inside.

“Hello again, welcome to the larder. I popped in for a snack, but don’t tell dad,” says the chubby rat pup that Stench recognises as one of the Ratchester’s mischief. “Look, I found a new toy.” The pup pushes a small white plastic bottle along the floor with his nose, which rolls to a stop in front of Stench.

“Don’t worry, I won’t tell your parents,” Stench assures him, looking around the sacks of vacuum-sealed dog food, empty dog bowls, and leashes.

The pup goes back to removing a morsel of dog food from a sack he chewed through earlier.

Stench sniffs the top of the plastic bottle and inspects several indentations with his magnifying glass. He grins.

“Mm... mm...Want some?” The pup mumbles, as his mouth is stuffed full.

The terriers give Ratchet the location of Andrews kennels and farm. Pearl describes where they found Fosroy’s microchip after overhearing the detective give the mother details. Ratchet thinks that it isn’t too far from Andrews’s kennels, so plans their route to go there before proceeding to Andrews kennels and farm.

Ratchet went out earlier and unearthed a worm, which he is chomping when Stench arrives.

Hamish hid some of his food underneath his bedding for Stench, but Stench declines as he has just eaten, so Hamish finishes his stash as the sleuths compare their findings.

Hamish and Hadfield watch the sleuths from their gates and listen to their conversation. They wonder why the sleuths want to continue with this fruitless investigation. Even if they find proof Andrews killed Fosroy, what can they do?

Pearl sits on her bedding at the back of her kennel.

“What do yow think Stench?” asks Ratchet as Stench sits bruxing

“There are things about this case that make little sense. We need to put all the pieces in place before we can find out what happened to Fosroy.”

“Agreed,” says Ratchet. “We can set off now and investigate around where they found Fosroy’s chip. It will take less than a moon to get there and it isn’t that much further to Andrews kennels. ”

“Be careful of the Andrews person, he is a murderer,” Hamish tells them, overhearing their plan.

“Aye, and beware of Helmsly,” Hadfield adds, frowning. “He is a vicious brute.”

Ratchet and Stench thank the dogs, leave the kennels, go through the hole in the fence, and scurry into the woods.

Feeling exhausted with having spent most of the day investigating, the sleuths push through the undergrowth until the first rays of sunlight shines through the trees. They find a badger sett by the side of a large elm tree in a shaded forest. Ratchet smiles and they go inside the burrow.

“Hello, cousin Ratchet” comes a friendly greeting as they enter the burrow. “It has been a long time.”

“Hello William, it’s good to see you. We are on an investigation, so will it be possible to rest here?”

“Of course it is,” says William Badgerly, smiling and bobbing his head. Ratchet smiles and returns the greeting.

“I hear that you are a famous animal sleuth now, cousin,” says William. He looks at Stench and says, “This must be sleuth Stench, your esteemed partner.”

William bobs his head at Stench, and he returns the greeting.

“Come in, come in. We have fresh juicy worms and nuts. Ethel will bring soft kindle, so you can have a comfortable sleep; you both look exhausted.”

“Thanks, William,” says Ratchet, and he and Stench go further into the burrow.

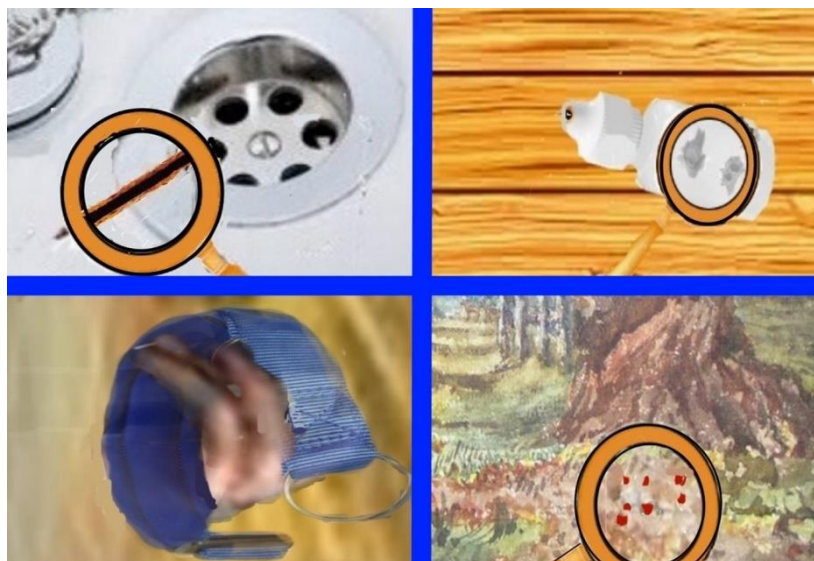
After they eat, the sleuths are shown to fresh kindle piles, where they lie down and fall into deep slumber.

Ratchet wakes around noon. He wakes Stench and says, “We can be at the place where they found Fosroy’s chip by nightfall if we set off now.”

The sleuths creep out of the sett so not to wake the sleeping Badgerly’s, and continue their journey through the shaded forest.

— Chapter Four —

The Mystery Continues



“This looks like the place where Pearl described they found Fosroy’s microchip,” says Ratchet, looking around and noticing compacted earth and bulldozers a short distance away. He can smell the unnatural odours, and continues, “She said by the side of a landfill site, a short distance away from Andrew’s kennels.”

Stench nods and surveys the area.

Although almost midnight, the nocturnal sleuths can see the site clearly, so Ratchet looks around while Stench sniffs the breeze.

“Over here!” Stench exclaims, catching a scent. They walk over to a small patch of earth under a sycamore tree. Stench sniffs again to pinpoint the origin of the scent.

“Here!” he says.

The sleuths examine small droplets of dried blood on the ground, along with small strands of fur. Ratchet looks impressed and says, “Oy have never known you to detect dried blood.”

Stench smiles, “I didn’t.” he replies, “It is something else. But I know that this is Fosroy’s blood and fur.”

Ratchet nods, knowing that Stench will explain later. They search the area around the blood and notice several tyre tracks in the soil.

Stench sniffs the air again, but cannot detect anything further.

“Perhaps Hamish is right about Fosroy’s demise,” says Ratchet. He looks at the blood splatter and surmises, “It looks as if Andrews brought Fosroy here and killed him before cutting out and discarding his microchip. He must have taken his body and buried it somewhere else.” Ratchet removes his hat, scratches his ears, and says, “That is where we need to find.”

Frowning, he replaces his deerstalker and announces, “There are still things that don’t make sense.”

“I agree. We need to get to Andrew’s kennels. The answers are there.” Stench replies.

“Helmsly knows someth...”

“Whooh, what are you doing?” A voice from the tree branches above their heads interrupts Ratchet.



The pair look up and sees a large Tawny owl glaring at them from a tree branch.

“We are investigating the abduction and possible murder of Fosroy, the missing Scottish terrier,” replies Ratchet.

Stench nuzzles closer to his larger friend, in case the owl is peckish.

“Whooh?” asks the owl

“Fosroy, the Windsor kennels champion terrier,” replies Ratchet

“Nooh, I have never heard of him.”

“Where you here three moons ago?” asks Stench in a bellowing voice, hoping not to sound like a rat.

The owl leans forward to see what animal is pressing up against the badger. “Nooh” he replies, and still unsure what Stench is, tells them, “I only arrived here this evening. It is near my nest.”

Stench gulps and nuzzles against Ratchet’s fur.

The owl ponders and tells them. “Maybe Kelvin Kestrel will know something. This is his hunting ground. He has been here for seasons and told me there are tasty snacks to be had.”

Stench groans when he hears that a kestrel hunts there and whispers to Ratchet. “We need to get out of here.”

Ratchet chuckles and asks, “Is Kelvin here?”

“Nooh, he went back to his nest earlier with his supper. He should be back at sunrise. Why don’t you wait for him?” says the owl swaying back and forth to get a better view of the sleuths.

“No, it’s okay. We have to go to the Andrews kennels, thanks for your help,” bellows Stench, nudging Ratchet towards a patch of thick nettle bushes nearby. The sleuths scurry over and hide under the nettles.

The owl watches them and seeing Stench's tail disappear under the bushes, thinks, 'Damn, that is a rat. Oh well, never mind, I don't want to tangle with a badger, they can be mean creatures.' he sighs. Seeing movement in the undergrowth below, he swivels his head and glares. 'Oh, there's a field mouse. That will do for a snack.'

The owl flies off, so Ratchet and Stench come out from under the nettles. "Phew that was close," says Stench.

"Don't worry, bodyguard Ratchet will protect yow... again." Ratchet looks at Stench, sniggers, and asks, "Shall we wait for Kelvin?"

Stench glares at his giggling colleague. "No! We shall not."

Although Stench knows that he is too large for a kestrel, he has always found them to be rude birds that glare as they speak, which he finds unnerving. He tells Ratchet, "There is nothing else to find here. We need to get to Andrews kennels."

— Chapter Five —

Andrews and the Devil Dog



“Stop barking yer stupid mutts, yar getting fed,” says the brusque Yorkshire man as he walks into the enclosure. Terriers surround him as he pours bags of dried dog food into a large communal trough. The hungry dogs gulp down their food while Andrews walks over to a hosepipe and fills another trough with water. He looks around the concrete floor at the dollops of excrement and urine and inhales. “Eey, smells ripe, but it’ll be okay till Sid comes in t’ morning,” he says. He walks out of the enclosure and locks the gate.

“It’s not as organised or as clean as the Windsor’s,” says Ratchet, as he and Stench watch Andrews walk away from the enclosure carrying the half-empty bag of food.

Now dusk, the sleuths, having scurried through the undergrowth all day, arrived at Andrews.

Andrews kennels and farm is in a shallow valley. The large estate, with swathes of meadows and surrounded by woodlands, resembles a large, land, coral atoll. The sleuths notice several small tracks through the woods leading to into the estate.

Within the valley are several hillocks, with a large farmhouse, a caged kennel enclosure, and a wooden barn on a flat area at its centre. The sleuths can see what appears to be the start of a larger kennel enclosure to the right of the farmhouse, but a hillock blocks their view. They notice several smaller kennel enclosures nearby, but they look empty.

In the distance, the sleuths can make out barns, outbuildings, covered pens with flocks of sheep huddled together for the night, and two large chicken coops.

The sleuths survey the area and Ratchet asks, “Oy wonder which enclosure is Helmsly’s?”

“I don’t know. Let’s go to that one and ask. It is the nearest, and it looks like there are terriers in there.” replies Stench, pointing to the enclosure Andrews just left.

They run the short distance to the enclosure and stand at the wire- mesh fence, behind the dogs eating.

The five terriers inside on sensing the pair look around and glare at the sleuths.

A Scottish terrier comes towards the fence, snarling and bearing his teeth. Ratchet moves in front of Stench and returns the snarl, bearing his considerably larger canines. The terrier knows the fearsome reputation of badgers. He looks at holes in the mesh fence and realising that Ratchet can get through, steps back.

“What de yee want,” he growls.

“You must be Helmsly,” Stench asks, coming alongside Ratchet.

“I am, so what of it?” he snarls,

Ratchet glares at the other dogs, making them nervous.

“We are Ratchet and Ste...”

“I know who yee are. We’ve been expecting you. Now, what do yee want,” snaps Helmsly, interrupting Stench.

“Some cooperation and politeness for a start,” growls Ratchet and bares his teeth again.

Helmsly steps back further and announces, “If yee have come to find about that wimp Fosroy, you are wasting your time...he’s deed.”

Taken aback, Stench asks, “And you know this, how?”

Helmsly smirks “because I see the father kill and bury him.”

The sleuths look at one another.

Helmsly sneers and tells them, “He whined like a scared puppy, it was pathetic, but he always was pathetic and pampered.”

Stench looks at the smirking dog and asks, “So how did he die, and where is he buried?”

Helmsly moves closer to the fence and tells them,

“I went with the father to the Windsor kennels three moons ago and he put sleeping juice in the Windsor wimp’s water. When they fell asleep, the father broke in and took Fosroy. He bashed him on the heed with a burrow maker (a spade) and threw him in the back of his pick-up truck. The father cut out his microchip and threw it away. He whined like a sissy puppy before the father bashed him again and killed him deed. The father took his body deeper into the woods and buried him.”

Stench looks at Ratchet and then back at Helmsly.

“So you claim that your father cut out Fosroy’s microchip at the Windsor’s?”

Helmsly glares at Stench. “Och, did I say that?” He smirks and reminds them. “I did nay say at the Windsor’s, I said in the back of the pick-up.”

Ratchet and Stench now know that this obnoxious animal is involved in Fosroy’s murder, but realise that unless they bait him, he is unlikely to help. Stench feels that Helmsly is proud of his involvement, so hopes that he can work on Helmsly’s arrogance. Stench whispers to Ratchet, who nods and smiles.

“So will you take us to where you claim the father buried him?” asks Stench.

“Nay, why should I?” snaps Helmsly.

“Because we don’t believe yow,” snarls Ratchet.

Stench looks at his angry looking friend and smiles. He then looks at the smirking Helmsly, and calmly says, “Because the Windsor dogs need closure, they are obviously distraught. Only you can show us what happened to their friend, Helmsly.”

Helmsly glares at the sleuths and growls, "I don't care what you want or believe. The people police took the father away, but he came home a few hours later. They couldn't prove anything, and neither can you. I will nay show you where the wimp's buried, so go away and leave us alone."

'Good rat, bad badger routine isn't working. I will try something else.' thinks Stench, suddenly catching a familiar scent on the breeze for a brief second. He then coughs as a disgusting odour fills his nostrils.

"Ratchet!" He exclaims screwing up his face.

Ratchet smiles, "oops, windy-pops, sorry about that, Oy must have eaten too many worms."

"Go back to your enclosure, runt." barks Helmsly, "before I come and rip yee throat out."

The sleuths look behind them to see what Helmsly is shouting at, and glimpse a mud covered dog disappear over a hillock.

Helmsly barks out an order, "Yorkies; make sure that Scottish half-breed goes back to the runts enclosure and is nay trying to run away again. Mind you, it makes no difference if his does, useless mongrel."

Two Yorkshire terriers run through a hole in the mesh and chase off over a hillock.

Helmsly looks at the sleuths and snarls, "Are yee two still here?"

"Yes we are," says Ratchet, "So you'd better get used to us being here. We have an investigation to conduct and a possible murder to solve; with or without your help," he stares at Helmsly, looks at a hole in the fence, smirks, glares back at Helmsly, and asks "So where is Fosroy buried?"

Helmsly sees the hole and gulps. He looks into Ratchet's angry eyes, and fearing the consequence if he doesn't answer, but still wanting to appear top dog, says, "There is nay mystery here; Fosroy is deed, end of story. It will take us over a moon to get to the place where the father buried him and I am not going. Besides, I hated Fosroy, so why should I?" He smirks and says, "But to get rid of you two, if I show you the evidence, will you leave?"

"It depends on what you show us," says Stench, disliking this rude, arrogant, dog.

Helmsly scowls at Stench and warns, "Well if you don't leave us alone, the father has undetectable rat traps." He glares at Ratchet, "and a shotgun. He likes collecting badgers, I will show you."

Stench glares at Helmsly.

Ratchet looks over at Stench now trembling with rage. Ratchet realises that Helmsly knows one of these traps killed Stenches father. so he moves up to the fence and glares into Helmsly's dark brown eyes, "Show us what you have, and be quick about it," he snarls. Ratchet snaps his jaws open and closed several times, directing the warning at Helmsly's throat, and says, "Do you understand numb-nuts?"

Helmsly, realising the danger he's putting himself into, looks to his pack for back up, but they are cowering at the back fence. He scowls at them, faces the sleuths, and snaps, "Follow me." He walks over to a hole in the mesh. Once outside the enclosure, he walks off, so the sleuths follow.

They go over to a wooden barn. Helmsly leads them inside through a hole in the rotting wood.

Darkness has now fallen. A light bulb hangs from the ceiling illuminating a large wooden workbench in a cordoned off section. The sleuths don't need light to see what's in the barn and gasp. They tremble as they walk towards the lit area, passing stuffed animals and birds adorning the walls and hanging from the rafters with lifeless expressions and plastic dead eyes staring blankly into nothingness. They pass a German shepherd mounted on a wooden base with its mouth is open and tongue lolling to one side. He appears to be smiling.

"He looks better now than when he was alive," chuckles Helmsly, looking back and noticing the sleuths agog. They continue over to a wooden workbench.

Helmsly titters as he announces, “This is the father’s workshop. He will be here in a wee while, so be quick.”

They stop at the workbench. Helmsly looks up at the bench top and says, “Yee’ll like this one; it’s the father’s work-in-progress.”

Ratchet looks, and his jaw drops.

Glaring down from the edge of the workbench stands a stuffed badger set on a wooden base. It appears to be snarling and ready to pounce.

Ratchet glares at the smirking Helmsly, and then back at the stuffed figure of his nephew, Horace. He now knows that his family was right to be concerned about his disappearance. This ferocious figure looks nothing like his friendly and curious nephew.

“You will make a good addition, a panda lookalike. He will love you,” gloats Helmsly, seeing the hurt on Ratchet’s face.

Stench can see the anger raging on his usually placid friend’s face and Ratchet’s mouth quivers.

Helmsly can see Ratchet become angry and realising that he has pushed him too far, trembles.

“So where is this proof?” Stench snaps, hoping to diffuse the tense situation.

“Err...aye, it’s over here,” replies Helmsly, and quickly walks towards another section.

The sleuths follow and Stench whispers, “I am sorry my friend,”

“I hate him,” snarls Ratchet, staring at Helmsly’s back.

“Here,” says Helmsly, stopping in front of gardening equipment. He goes over to a mud-caked spade and tells them, “The father bashed Fosroy over the head with this. He whashed it, but yee can still see and smell Fosroy’s blood.”

Stench walks over to the spade and sniffs around the blade.

“Maybe you can nay smell it. It’s only a faint trace and you’re only a rat, but I can.” Helmsly smirks.

“Yes, I can smell it fine.” Stench tells him.

Helmsly chuckles and walks away, “Follow me, and I will show yee more proof.” He walks back to the hole in the barn, leading them slowly past Horace. Stench nudges Ratchet and nods towards a container. Ratchet looks, smiles, and returns the nod.

Helmsly leads them to a pick-up truck, parked in the farmhouse’s forecourt. “This is where the father cut out his chip and killed him, before we went to dump his body.” He smirks and adds, “If you look in the back, you will see the blood.” He looks at Ratchet, “But a badger will nay be able to climb up there.” and glaring at Stench, says, “And neither will yee, you are too small.”

Stench ignores Helmsly, looks up at the high flat bed, and figures a way to get up there.

Stench scurries up the wheel arches to the back of the cab until level with the side of the flatbed. He leaps onto the side and drops onto the plastic floor. Stench smirks and looks around the flatbed. He is trying to detect a scent when the farmhouse door opens.

Helmsly barks frantically.

“What’s that damn racket?” yells Andrews, who looks livid.

Helmsly rushes towards him barking and yelping.

“What you doing out yer kennel?” he asks. He looks at the terrier jumping up and down and looking towards the pick-up. “What boy, what’s up with yer?”

Although the porch light illuminates the forecourt, Andrew's cannot clearly see the vehicle in the shadows. He goes inside the farmhouse with Helmsly at his heels.

“Quick Stench, jump” yells Ratchet, moving around to the back of the truck.

Stench climbs up the rear tailgate and leaps onto Ratchets back as Andrews comes outside with a torch and a shotgun and strides towards the truck.

“What’s that?” he shouts, shining the torch onto Ratchet and Stench.

“A Badger!” he yells and raises his gun. He looks again and shakes his head. ‘It must be my imagination, badgers don’t wear hats.’ he thinks. He takes aim at a now fleeing Ratchet and Stench.

Terrified, the sleuths ignore the shotgun click and Andrews cursing behind them. Running as fast as they can with the sides of Ratchets oak-leaf deerstalker flapping, they rush towards the shadows of a large enclosure where dogs are barking behind a wire-mesh fence.

They skirt around the fence and look at a nearby hillock. Although they know that the woods are just beyond, they realise that they will be an easy target out in the open. They stop and hide in the shadows, panting. The dogs inside the enclosure stop barking.

Helmsly continues to bark.

“Hush Helmsly,” yells a frustrated Andrews, who can no longer see the badger with his torch. Helmsly stops barking and looks at Andrews, who breaks open the barrel of his shotgun, removes a dud cartridge, and inspects it. “Damn things wet” he mutters and puts the cartridge in his pocket. He tramps into the farmhouse with Helmsly and curses, “We’ll hunt it darn in t’ morning. Now, how did yer get out of your enclosure I wonder?”

“They’ve gone inside the house. Quick, run t’ the woods.” says a dog behind the wire fence.

Hearts pounding, Ratchet and Stench look at a scruffy terrier that trots over from the adjacent corner of the enclosure. They notice that the dog has dark and light patches of fur.

“Isn’t that the dog that Helmsly chased away from the show dog kennels earlier?” Whispers Ratchet.

“It looks like him, but I only caught a glimpse,” replies Stench. Although Stench can pick up a dogs scent like other animals, he cannot tell the species or individuals, only other dogs can do that.

The sleuths look over at the farmhouse, but cannot see Andrews or Helmsly.

“You better go before they come out again.” The dog tells them.

“Thanks, we will after we catch our breaths,” says Ratchet.

Other dogs come to over the fence. The sleuths can see that they don’t appear to be the same well-groomed terriers they saw in Helmsly’s kennel enclosure. These are various breeds and seem playful and full of beans.

“What is this enclosure?” asks Stench, looking around and getting a faint whiff of a now familiar odour.

“We certainly aren’t show dogs.” chuckles a dachshund. “We are known as the runts.”

“We are mainly mongrels that the father keeps to sell, or send to dog heaven,” says the terrier and chuckles.

“Shut up, Digby. The father will never do that,” says a scraggy looking pug, chastising the terrier’s outburst.

“I’m only joking. Even though no person has taken any of us for seasons, we must be t’ unlucky, ten.”

Stench smiles at the terrier and then looks at the dogs in the enclosure. Although they are crowded behind the terrier, he nods at Ratchet.

Ratchet looks and returns the nod.

A dog shouts out. "Quick the farmhouse door is opening."

The sleuths rush into the safety of the woods as Andrews comes outside and stomps toward the show dog's kennels with Helmsly.

"We'll go out first thing in t' morning to hunt t' badger," he mumbles.

With their hearts pounding, the sleuths walk to the outskirts of the woods and overlook the farmhouse entrance. They watch Andrews return Helmsly to the show dog enclosure and walk around the fence with his torch. They see him locate several holes in the mesh and shake his head.

"If oy ever run into that Helmsly again, it will end very badly for him," pants Ratchet.

"He is a mean animal, I hope he gets his comeuppance." replies Stench, trembling.

They watch Andrews walk into the farmhouse and then the porches light go off.

The sleuths forage food and compare notes for the next few hours. Although fearful what the following day has in stall, neither of them want to go back to the Windsor kennels with the news that Fosroy is dead, unless they are certain.

— Chapter Six —

The Investigation Closes.



“I’m sorry Mrs Windsor, but there is nothing more we can do.”

Tulip cups her hands to her face in frustration and cries.

“Surely detective, you can charge Andrews with something?” asks Rupert, placing a comforting arm around his sobbing wife’s shoulder.

“I’m sorry sir, but we have nothing to charge him with,” says the detective, leaning forward in the armchair.

“He’s a brute; he murdered Fosroy and buried him alone in the woods.” sniffles Tulip, now looking at detective Springer. “And we all know it.” She sobs.

Detective Springer looks at Tulip and calmly informs her, “That may be the case, ma-am, but we have no evidence to confirm it.”

“It’s been four days now, can’t you find something to charge him with?” asks Tulip, continuing, “How about breaking, and entry?”

The detective shakes his head. “We interviewed Mr Andrews, who denies breaking into your property or taking Fosroy.”

“And you believe him? What about the blood you told us your team found in the back of his pick-up?” snaps Tulip.

“I am sorry Mrs Windsor but I already told you, Mr Andrews said that is from dead animals he transports for his taxidermy business.”

Rupert, noticing his wife becoming more upset and irritated, blusters, “Analyse the DNA in the blood. I will gladly pay for any tests to be undertaken.”

Detective Springer sighs, having been through this many times over the past few days with the Windsor's. He is tired with the persistent phone calls insisting that he goes to the manor only to go over the same stuff. Unable to comprehend their concern over one dog, he looks at Pearl lying by Tulip's feet. 'It's not as if they don't have lots more,' he thinks.

"Detective!" exclaims Rupert, repeating, "What can be done about the DNA?"

Detective Springer looks at Rupert and tells him,

"I'm sorry sir, but our DNA samples are sent to the Met's lab in London and I am afraid they won't accept animal samples... only people."

"So that's it then, you will do nothing," snaps Tulip.

"I am sorry Mrs Windsor; there is nothing further the police can do. I must close this investigation."

Tulip starts crying again.

"Well we can do something," bellows Rupert. "I will get our lawyer and a private investigator on the case, darling. We catch that brute Andrews and prosecute him with the full force of the law,"

"That will be your only alternative sir," says Springer, seizing the opportunity to end this fruitless investigation.

Tulip soaks in the bathtub while Pearl sits at the side of the tub listening to the droplets as the mother sponges her face with hot soapy water. Pearl takes comfort lying there as she can still detect a faint trace of Fosroy's scent on the carpet, the same as in the drawing-room,

Tulip gets out of the bathtub, dries herself off, puts on a bathrobe, walks over to the large washbasin, and looks in the bathroom cabinet's mirror. She pulls back her central parting and looks at strands of hair near her scalp. "More grey hair, old girl," she says. Pearl looks up into the tearful eyes of the mother and Tulip kneels down and strokes her. Tulip kisses her face and says, "I will make sure nobody takes any more of my babies." She wipes tears from her eyes, stands up, and takes a bottle from the cabinet. Pulling the knob on the faucet to change from tap to shower, Tulip leans over the sink to dye her hair.

"What's happening with the people?" asks Hamish, once Tulip leaves after returning Pearl to the enclosure.

Pearl sighs and tells them, "The people police have given up their search for Fosroy because they have nay proof. Although the mother is nay giving up hope, she seems more concerned about getting Andrews punished."

"So that's it then," says Hadfield. "Andrews gets away with murder."

Pearl goes silent and skulks to the back of her enclosure, sits on her bedding, and pines.

"Och, do nay despair Pearl. Ratchet and Stench may come up wey something. Do nay give up hope," says Hamish, hoping to reassure her.

"They have nay found his body, so perhaps he is still alive," adds Hadfield.

Hamish chuckles and says, "Aye, maybe he has only been dog-knapped and he'll come trotting in with the sleuths with a big smile on his face." Hadfield and Hamish hear Pearl sniffle and sigh.

Although Pearl realises that the pair are trying to comfort her, she feels in her heart that Fosroy is dead.

Hamish goes to the back of his kennel and lies on his bedding, 'Even without Fosroy, Helmsly will never win shows against us Windsor dogs. We will have our revenge.' thinks the angry Scotty.

END OF SAMPLE

Novels by Robert A Webster

Siam Storm: A Thailand Adventure

A stolen holy relic from a secluded Thai Buddhist monastery sends a combatant Thai 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 hilarious adventure of Nick, Spock, and Stu as they assist in the recovery of the relic and their subsequent voyage of discovery.

The fun has just begun.

Chalice - Siam Storm 2 : A Cambodian Adventure

The discovery of a mysterious corpse leaves law enforcement agencies baffled. This adventure sees the lads join forces with their new friend, the mad Thai monk, Pon, as they once again attempt to recover the holy relic. The chase takes them into Cambodia, as they try to thwart plans that could affect the planet and change them into fruit based drinkers.

Bimat - Siam Storm 3 : A Vietnamese Adventure

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.

Protector – Siam Storm 4 : The Final Adventure

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, it is Prime Master Pon's duty to discover who is responsible for the murder of the other descendants, along with their age-old protectors.

Pon assembles a team of combatant monks to track down the leader of a rising savage group of terrorists. 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 Anthology

When three lovable English rogues embark on their first holiday to Thailand; little do they realise that they are about to go on a journey that will dramatically change their lives.

Four hilarious adventures set in Southeast Asia.

SPICE

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 long lost 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.

Steve Baker (Strat) Elvin Stanley (Chippers) Charles Clark (Nobby) and Wayne Logan (Sticks) more famously known as 'Fossils,' are four musicians from varying background who are inadvertently united and form a band with a unique and exciting sound, filling an auditory hiatus that has been lacking for decades in the modern day music industry. Pursued and hounded by ruthless record producers, this unassuming rock band discover 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.

PATH. – Paranormal Assisted Treasure Hunters

A team of three powerful psychics use their unique talents to provide a link between the mortal world and the celestial plane. Commissioned by lost souls, they find treasures hidden by the troubled spirits during their lifetime and give them to their mortal beneficiaries. One particular case finds the team caught up in a plot conceived during world war two and now being instigated. 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 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.

Ratchet and Stench – Animal Sleuths

Dog Gone Mystery

Following the mysterious disappearance of Cruft's Best of Breed Champion, Fosroy Regent; the finger of suspicion points at the owner of a rival kennel.

Even though the police find the Scottish terriers bloodied microchip, with no proof they are unable to do anything, even after another show dog goes missing.

The other dogs call in Ratchet and Stench, the famous animal sleuths. Although clues suggest that Fosroy was brutally murdered and his body buried in the forest, the sleuths aren't convinced.

Non Fiction

Diabetes Type 2 : How to Safely Lower Your Blood Sugar with the Tree of Life.

Written by Diabetics; for Diabetics.

Diabetes is now a prevalent condition that affects millions of people. Many of you will have, or most of you will know, someone affected by it.

This book is not written Medical Practitioners, Ph.D. professors or salespeople; but diabetics, who until recently struggled to control diabetes with diet, exercise and high levels of glycemic drugs alone. After learning about products made from the Moringa tree, they were able to dramatically lower their blood glucose levels within weeks and continue to do so. They discovered that pods and leaves of this unique tree dramatically lowered their blood glucose levels, which continues to be the case. They now want to share their knowledge and extensive research in a simple to understand way, so you too can also benefit from their experience.

Something to Read While Travelling – THAILAND

An informative and entertaining companion to accompany you while travelling through the ‘Land of Smiles.’

Something to Read While Travelling – THAILAND has useful information about Thailand, some of which you won’t find in travel guidebooks. Comprehensive travel guides will go into more detail on specific areas of Thailand. This publication only deals with the 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, along with this travelling companion in your suitcase. Open your heart and mind and enjoy your wonderful time in the Land of Smiles.

Connect on Facebook and Twitter

<https://www.facebook.com/Buddhasauthor/>

<https://twitter.com/buddhasauthor>

Web sites

<http://www.buddhasauthor.com/>

<http://stormwriter.weebly.com/>

