

# BAYON



# pearnik

Cambodia's ORIGINAL FREE Tourism and Information Magazine

Est.1996 Issue 216 August 2014 [www.bayonpearnik.com](http://www.bayonpearnik.com)



# Where the 'Secret War' Never Ended

Copyright 2014 Matt Jacobson Author of *Ultimate Cambodia*

Available at Monument Books, & D's Books

Continued from last month.

Stopping at a small shack across the street from the runway, I found a packet of instant coffee and asked the lady that ran the place if she had some hot water to make it for me. With her soldier husband not around, she seemed friendlier than the previous evening and obliged. As I sat at the plastic table in front of her shop sipping the coffee, I drank in a much larger gulp of the Secret City's lost-in-time 1960s and 1970s Indochina atmosphere. There, on that morning, it did feel like time had stood still. Strange as it



sounds, I could almost feel the presence of the colorful characters that had inhabited this place. Maybe it had something to do with the other-worldly look the morning fog and smoke from nearby burnings gave the mountains and base- or maybe it was the light fog covering my brain from the beers I shared with the Chinese the previous night. I can say for sure that I have nothing but respect and admiration for the pilots who flew in and out of Long Cheng. Watching the sun come up in the east over the tallest knife-like 'rock' highlighted not only the beauty of the surroundings, but also the difficulty of the pilots task, with a mere window in that limestone mountain being the only open spot they had available to get out and back in. They were good!

Departing the coffee shack, I soon noticed that the commandant had in fact already been busy that morning. Although it was a day that probably was usually a lax one, Sunday, I could see spaced sentries on duty, weapon in hand, watching me and my camera. Surprisingly enough, the last sentry I spotted was some twenty kilometers from Long Cheng, looking down on the road from a nearby hill. Suddenly, the song by the Guess Who, "We Don't get Fooled Again", came to mind.

It was then that I recalled reading in the book what was said by, and to, a Raven over the radio just after he had flown his last mission and would soon be departing Laos. The Raven would first radio air command and say "See you next war, baby." Command would then radio back and say, "Alpha, Mike, Foxtrot", which in Air Force radio jargon meant adios,

mother f\_ \_ker. I then thought of the Vietnamese base commandant and bid him an Alpha, Mike, Foxtrot.

Deserving of more than a mere footnote to any story about the Indochina War, nothing should be written about Long Cheng without putting the Hmong front and center. It was their village, a part of their ancestral homeland, and it was their fight for the survival of their way of life, and themselves. A fiercely proud and independent people that were courageous enough to fight against overwhelming numbers of invaders, it is estimated that around 1/5th of their population was killed during and after the war. The communist regime that came to power in post war Laos, which included their puppeteer masters pulling the strings, the Vietnamese, had a self-stated policy of extermination against the

Hmong. Besides the scores killed in battles after the war had supposedly ended, napalm and possibly poison gas ('yellow rain') were used in a bid to wipe them out. This policy was, quite horribly, far too successful. Thousands did manage to escape and make their way across the Mekong River into Thailand, only to lead a sad life as refugees in an enormous, barbed wire-surrounded camp. The really lucky ones were able to migrate as refugees to other countries, mainly the United States, where there is now a significant Hmong population. There they have faced many difficulties in a land with a culture so different from theirs. Although they still have villages scattered about northern Laos, the Hmong population there is a mere shadow of its former self.

On that note, I'd also like to bid the communist rulers of Laos an Alpha, Mike, Foxtrot. Until my next attempt to infiltrate their coveted inner sanctums, that is.

*Footnote: Lao people pronounce the village the same as it appears on the village sign, in Lao and English script, Long Cheng. At the time of the Indochina War, as it was when French colonizers originally transliterated Lao into French, it was Long Tieng. For this article, we use the way it is spoken and written at this time by the Lao people.*



## Travelling There?

Just a word of caution when and if you are looking for a decent place to change money near the Luang Prabang night market.

Most quote terrible exchange rates, but ONE won't even pay you the correct rate! The woman at the desk will try and pass of 20,000 notes as 50,000 and hope you don't notice. I was exhausted after a day of travel and attempted to count back but got confused. Afterward, I realized she had shortchanged me about 300,000 kip! This also happened to a couple who had used her services the day before and later warned me about her dishonesty.

The money exchange is just a small shop front on the night market road, Next to Siriphong air ticketing across from "Jewel travel Laos."

Steer clear of this place when exchanging money as the rates are terrible and the woman shortchanges you on top of that.

## Laos: Travel Info The Basics

Exchange rate: 8057 Kip/USD

Capital city: Vientiane

Main religion: Buddhism

Main language: Lao (official)

Telephone code: +856

Time: GMT +7 hours

Emergency Numbers: Ambulance – 195, Fire - 190, Police - 191

Laos Language Essentials:

Hello: Sabaidee

Thank you: Khop Chai

Thank you very much: Khop Chai Ly Ly

How are you? Sabaidee baw

Delicious: Sep Ly

I don't understand? Baw Khowjai

Laos Visa Information

Visa: Most nationalities can obtain a visa for Laos at international airports and border crossings. The cost is usually US\$30 for 30 days. At the Thailand/Laos border if you pay in Thai baht the fee will be more expensive. You will need 2 passport photos and your passport must be valid for at least 6 months upon entering.

Visa extension: Visa extensions can be applied for at the Vientiane Immigration Office or the Luang Prabang Immigration Office, which costs US\$2 / day for up to 30 days. Extensions can also be obtained from some travel agents for around US\$3.

Penalty for late departure: US\$10 /day. Long overstays can lead to arrest and imprisonment.

Climate

The wet season in Laos is between May and October and the dry season between November and April. Temperatures during this time are the most comfortable, and can be quite cold in mountainous areas. The hottest time of the year is between March and May, with temperatures reaching 38 degrees.

## The Top 5 restaurants in Vientiane

1. Aria Mixay Italian Restaurant

The owner Gerado is very ambitious and has high expectations of his staff and work. His dishes aren't winners in a creativity contest, but still something special, prepared on highest level in terms of quality. The service is one of the best in Vientiane, although the manager still has to jump in from time to time - but as a guest I don't care much who serves me as long as they get it done. Dining experience is extraordinary, with Gerado asking every guest if they are satisfied. The truffel specials are heaven for food lovers.

8 Rue François Ngin, Ban Mixay, Open daily for lunch and dinner

2. Le Silapa (French-Asian Fusion)

In terms of food and creativity Le Silapa is the best place to go. The Menu is very unique in Vientiane, quality of food always on a high level. Le Silapa recently moved from a beautiful small house that gave guests a lot of privacy, to the first floor of I-Beam. although the reasons for the move or understandable from the owners point of view, it lost a bit of it's charme, and suprisingly the level of service dropped significantly. It's still above most places here, but one would expect more for the price they pay for the - again - outstanding food.

Setthathirat Road, opposite Wat Inpeng. Open daily for lunch and dinner.

3. Fujiwara Japanese Restaurant

Fujiwara was one of the first Japanese restaurants in Vientiane and for a long time the most popular. It lost customers to the recently opened Thai owned Fuji, and both are in the same league of quality of food. Yet, Fujiwara still has some advantage when it comes to ambience and dining experience. It is one of the places where you like to sit just a little bit longer.

Rue Setthathilath, Vientiane, Laos

4. L'Adresse

This might be the best french restaurant in town, yet it has it's problems: It is overpriced, if you are not french you don't feel much welcomed, and a sense of arrogance was in the air when I visited it last time (or better try to visit: We came a bit early before opening at 6.30pm, and were told to come back later).

Yet, if it has to be french cuisine, this place is the hot spot for this type of restaurant. Well decorated, it is a nice place to have dinner. The menu contains the usual suspects, from duck liver to lamb with rosemary, but of good quality.

Website: <http://ladressedetinay.com>

5. Muzaic Restaurant

This place is a little bit different: It is not fine dining, but something so special that it has to be on this list. They serve outstanding salmon laap, pumpkin curry and many other Lao and Asian dishes. It's interior shows that someone cares about it, although it is simple and basic. It's just some special place. For lunch, go to Lao Kitchen, serving Lao food on a higher level.

Manthathoulath street. Open daily for dinner

Those didn't made it to the list:

Le Signature at Ansara Hotel is totally overrated. We always got a terrible service for a place in this category of fine-dining, the menu is boring and the prices are too high. La Scala has quite a nice interior, but service sucks and the menu isn't something special. Yet, the lunch buffet is a pretty good deal.

Makphet is a place where you should eat because they employ street kids. I rather like to eat at a place where they serve good food.

Lao Garden is a very solid place to go, and should be number 6 on this list. Le Opera had it's good times, but the menu is the usual italian dishes, nothing special and for this to expensive. In case you are looking for a good well priced steak, go to Veena Cafe opposite the City Inn Hotel. Avoid the restaurants of the big hotels like Mercure, Green Park, Lao Plaza and Don Chan Palace.

## Lao diplomats are fast - at least in cars

It seems that the Lao Embassy in the Philippines tried to import a Ferrari Spider and 2 (!) Lamborghini Aventadors, claiming these are diplomat cars. Or better not claiming anymore. Because, regarding to the newspapers report "Since they arrived on Nov. 28, nobody has come forward to claim the cars after Bureau Of Customs agents questioned why diplomats would buy fast cars as their service vehicles."

# GOOD SPORTS - BAD SPORTS

**G**rowing up we were taught to be good sports; to put your heart into the game, but always compete fairly and if you lost to take it as a good sport and not get upset about it: It's just a game, you do it for fun.

Hopefully it still works that way when playing informally, but unfortunately sports today have become so commercialized and such big moneymaking machines that the term 'good sport' barely registers anymore. If there are big bucks involved a player will try to bend the rules if he thinks he can get away with it; anything to get the advantage.

In America club owners demand huge subsidies from local government and players demand huge salaries, but there's no loyalty whatever to the fans or the city they've extracted so much from. The American system of sports is especially pernicious as it leaves all major decisions to the club owners who have exemption from anti-trust rules. They essentially function as a cartel and decide amongst themselves who can buy a team, which city is privileged to have one and how many teams make up the league. The latter is especially important for franchise value: the fewer the teams the more each is worth.

In every case but one - the Green Bay Packers (American) football club - the owners are rich people whose primary motive is income. They may like or even love the sport they possess a part of, but that's secondary to the cash flow. You don't own a franchise worth up to

two billion dollars without insisting that it pay off. This is exemplified in the case of Paul Allen, described in a recent article, Pity the Poor Billionaire, who though he had \$20 billion in the bank, demanded a new \$500 million stadium for his Seattle team or else he'd be glad to move it to a more grateful city. The city balked, refused his demand, so he financed

an initiative with \$5 mil of his own money and got the people of the state of Washington to buy it for him. At the time, \$500 mil was a mere 2.5% of his fortune. As such he could've gifted the stadium to the people with the equivalent of pocket change and been known for generations as a great benefactor, instead he felt he had to extort every penny he could from the citizenry.

The word Seattle is in the team's name, but that doesn't mean much, it's obviously only a temporary arrangement. That's the kind of people who own major league teams.

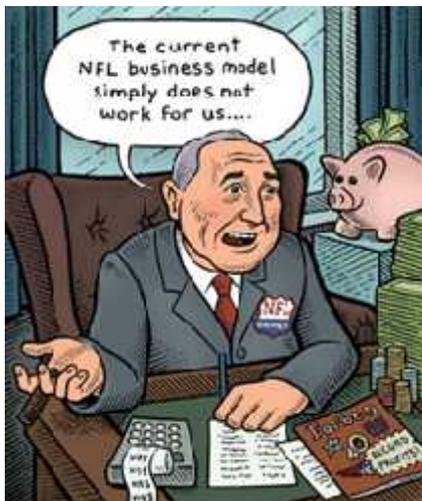
Sometimes an owner will make business decisions which pad his wallet while lessening his team's chances of winning in the playoffs. The fans be damned. Or take the case of Donald Sterling, owner of the L.A. Clippers basketball team, who was outed recently as a racist... and that in a league in which 80% of the players are black. Recent articles I've seen in the leftist blogosphere suggest the team should be owned by the city or the people in some form. Great idea except the owners' cartel would never allow it since it would completely change the mercenary aspect of the game and threaten their profits. Only one team is community owned, the aforementioned Packers. Only congress can end the power of the owners' cartels.

Green Bay, Wisconsin is a small city of about 100,000 people and yet they support a competitive team in all aspects. Its team is the only one in all American professional sports that is community owned and by far has the smallest economic base. Yet it has won more championships than any other team in its sport, the last only a couple years ago. It was grandfathered in when the current ownership rules were adopted in 1980. All rules in all American sports today prohibit this type of ownership and for good reason; for the fans and city, public or community ownership is far preferred.

The way that football - soccer to Americans - is organized in the UK offers a superior alternative that could break the monopoly that the owners have over sports in the US. They have a premier league and secondary leagues. Each has twenty teams. Each year the three worst performing teams in the premier league get relegated down to the next lower league and the three best from the lower move up. Instead of the owners' cartel deciding how many teams there are in the league and which cities can have them, there would be no limit to the number of cities who could have teams

or even how many teams a city could have - New York once supported three baseball teams. Any person, entity, community or city could organize a team from scratch, start at the bottom league and work their way up, though I personally prefer all teams be community owned.

There are quite a few mid-sized cities in America which could



support professional sports teams but are shut out of the possibility by the limited number of franchises and unwillingness to put up the hundreds of millions necessary to secure a franchise. Portland, Oregon is a case in point. With a metro area of two million it could easily support football and baseball teams, but today has only basketball. There's no way the people of Portland are going to take money out of schools, infrastructure and services and hand it to billionaire club owners, so they'll never get to enjoy those sports in today's setup. For me it rankles so much to see the great rip-off I've lost nearly all interest in professional sports.

The Olympics is another case of a great sports idea turned on its head by the vast sums of money necessary to be a host city and the widespread disruption and dislocation that precedes the games. One of the reasons suggested for contributing to Greece's financial problems was the cost of the 2004 Olympics, the most expensive to that point at \$11b. In 2008, Beijing put on its extravaganza at a cost of about \$42b and forced the dislocation of half million people. The London games in 2012 cost \$16b. Prime Minister David Cameron famously said it was worth it for the great publicity it got for the city. Sixteen billion dollars for a publicity campaign? For a city that's already one of the most touristed cities in the world? Of course we know politicians will say anything to try to justify their poor decisions.

There are a lot of good things the city could've done with that money better than a one time marketing stunt.

While the Olympics are happening, local residents are faced with many kinds of inconveniences and after it's all over a lot of the sports venues are demolished or left to deteriorate since most are built for one use... there's no city in the world that needs or can utilize all those stadiums and sports venues. And the tourists who would otherwise come, stay away during the games.

Regardless of any long term benefits that might accrue to the host city it is a tremendous burden. The whole concept needs to be rethought. The ancient games were held on Mt. Olympus, why not return to the original location (or one similar) and hold the modern games there on a permanent basis? The games would be held in a rural setting and each venue built to last. There was a controversy recently over the Olympic committee's decision to eliminate wrestling, one of the original sports, from the roster. In this new concept every sport would come up with the money to build its needed venue and as long as there

was sufficient support from the community, it'd be difficult for a single committee to say which sport is allowed and which isn't. Beach volleyball an Olympic sport but not wrestling? What kind of crap is that?

In a countryside setting there'd be space for visitors to camp out as well as hotels to stay in. That way even average people could afford to attend. What did a hotel room in London cost during the games? And since venues would be permanent and paid for by the sports themselves, the games would cost far less to hold and therefore ticket prices would also be far less. It would be a permanent sports center available for sports lovers everywhere and used between games for training or just enjoying.

One nasty side effect of the current system of cities competing to hold the games is the corruption that goes with the process of choosing. Large bribes have been paid to Olympic committee members to have them vote the right way. The same holds true for the countries chosen to hold the football World Cup. Just as the Olympics should have a permanent home, the World Cup should also have one and use the same Olympics venue. There would already be at least a couple of stadiums at the site that could be used and there are certainly the requisite 12 stadiums within a reasonable distance. In the current Brazil World Cup stadiums in the north of the country are more than 2000 miles - 3200 kms - from the most southern ones.

Another egregious use of sports for commercial purposes is the sponsorship system. All alcoholic drinks were banned in Brazil's stadiums in 2003 but that law was changed for the World Cup since a beer company is a prominent sponsor and FIFA insisted that beer be sold at their games. While Brazil spent nearly \$4 billion on stadiums and committed another \$8b for infrastructure, FIFA expects to make a profit of more than \$3b. Brazil pays, FIFA rakes it in. Brazil experienced protests over the cost of the games and the potential alternative uses of all that money starting a year before the

first kick-off.

Finally a word about how world football (called soccer in America) is played. It's my favorite sport, at least in theory. I played in school during a time when I'd quit smoking cigs. After I returned to the evil weed my chest hurt so much from all that running I had to make a choice: tobacco or sports. Since I couldn't figure out how to quit smoking again, I gave up soccer. At the age of 40, after I'd quit smoking for the last time, I found a pick-up game and played every Sunday morning, rain or shine, cold or hot for four years until I hurt my back and could barely walk, let alone play. By the time I recovered, I figured my serious soccer days



were over, besides over the four years I was always the oldest player on the field and thought I shouldn't press my luck.

Soccer is energetic, uses lots of skills and allows everyone to compete, even a shorty like myself. Tall people have an advantage, but not like basketball where short people are almost totally locked out.

Unfortunately the way the game is designed it's weighted so heavily towards defense that, when played professionally or with highly competitive teams, goals are few and far between. In what other sport can you witness a full 90 minutes of play without a single score? (That does happen in baseball, but rarely.) In championship games, after two overtimes without a single score, (or tied games) games are decided by a penalty kick. After the last World Cup, Sepp Blatter, long time head of FIFA, world football's governing body, commented that it was a travesty for championship games to be decided by penalty kicks and he wanted to think of some way to improve on that method of deciding winners.

The need for penalty kicks is merely a symptom of the difficulty of scoring. With the rules and design of the game the way it is the better the teams get and more evenly matched they are the less likely they are of scoring. In the first round of the 2010 World Cup, of a total of 48 games there were 6 nil-nil ties, 6 1-1 ties and 12 games decided by 1-0 scores. A total of only 24 goals scored in 24 games. Spain, the winner in 2010, won all of its last four playoff games by 1-0 scores.

This year saw a lot more scoring but still there were 4 nil-nil games, 8 1-0 games and 2 1-1 draws for a total of 14 of the 48 games in which scoring was scant. In this year's playoffs, of a total of 16 games, there were four 0-0 ties in regular play and four 1-0 games, a total of only 4 goals in 8 games.

It's boring and frustrating to watch a game for 90 minutes – or 120 minutes in a World Cup playoff game – and not see one score. What's more, when scoring is so difficult most goals are flukes or accidents and hardly indicative of better playing. Even if a game of 1-0 has a clear winner, it's not at all clear that that was the best team, they were just lucky. One of the 1-0 scores in the playoffs was the final between Germany and Argentina. Now Germany played very well during the tournament, so maybe one could say they deserved to win, (obviously

Argentina must've also played well to get to the final) but when only one goal is scored in two full hours of play, that makes it difficult to say that Germany had the best team.

There are three factors that make scoring difficult. The first, and easiest to correct, is the size of the net. If you simply make the goal bigger by, say, adding one meter on either side and maybe 50 centimeters on top you will double or triple the number of goals scored.

Secondly, there are too many players on the pitch. It's so crowded that players have no room to maneuver. As soon as one gets the ball he's surrounded by the opposing team. It's nearly impossible for a player possessing the ball, no matter how good he is, to make a run from the center of the field to the goal. They don't get to show their stuff. I was taught to always pass the ball instead of kicking it far forward in the field, but players often feel so blockaded, that's exactly what they do, including in professional games. In American football most plays involve small distances but occasionally, maybe once or twice in a game a player will get the ball and move it half way or all the way down the field. It's very exciting and beautiful to watch. That cannot happen in soccer. I suggest a maximum 8 players on the field to

give them room to maneuver. They'll have to run more and cover more distance so it should be easy to substitute.

The third problem is the off-sides rule. This is designed to keep the players all bunched together, which again makes for

a boring and low scoring game. It should be modified or eliminated altogether. Some combination of fewer players and a relaxed off-sides rule would leave a lot more space on the field and make for a much more exciting game.

Soccer has never taken off as a professional sport in America though there are pro leagues. Yet it's the most popular sport in school. Easier scoring might make the difference, at least it would be a lot more fun to watch.

Cambostan





#### **Do as we say not as we do**

Nice to see the boys in blue out and about the other night.

They may not be fining everyone at the moment but were out at 4am in a jeep on St51.

Only problem was they were going the wrong way with no lights on and had blacked out windows! Don't know if they were drunk or not but at that hour it seems highly likely!

#### **Duhhh**

A guy sat at Golden Sorya mall on 51 and was approached by one of the local ice queens.

No surprise there.

She became very affectionate and draped herself all over him. It was only after she suddenly left he realized he had been pickpocketed and his Galaxy phone had gone.

No surprise there.

A quick search of the local area proved fruitless. On hearing the complaints another girl approached and said she knew the girl and would get the phone back for twenty dollars. He coughed up the loot and the girl was never seen again!

No surprise there.

The next day he went back to the mall in a bad mood. Talking to some girls he told the story. One girl said she knew her and actually knew where she had sold the phone. After some back and forth discussion he gave her one hundred and fifty bucks to retrieve his phone. And the girl was never seen again.

No surprise there then.

We are now all eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Tuk Tuk driver that, "I know her house!"

#### **We stand corrected**

Oscars bar on St51 was sold recently and to everyone's amazement the new owner named it "Muff Divers."

This isn't Pattaya. so people wondered how long it would last.

About a week before he was apparently told to change it.

Pretty sure the cops had a laugh when it was explained to them

what it meant!

#### **Swapsies?**

Rainsy returns for yet another overseas trip (strange they always coincide with problems here) basically sells his party up the river (mainly due to the main members of his party being locked up).

Then swaps a position with one of his MPs to take a parliamentary seat?

He didn't even stand in the election!

Can I swap too? I want to be an unelected MP.

Many in his party are disgusted with his deal and rightly so.

As for the beating of security (thugs) at freedom park, general consensus is they have been dishing it out in the past and they were well due for payback.

No doubt the circus will continue for sometime with them being squeezed into a corner in the not too distant future.

By the time you read this things could have changed dramatically.

#### **Batty**

They spent a fortune on revamping a parrot in the past. Then BAT spent a ton on withdrawing Ara Blue lights from the market (which were popular with for-

eigners) and replacing them with Ara silver.

Now the Silvers have been withdrawn. In the last few months though reports have many packets being stale and mouldy with speculation that they randomly insert flakes of old car tyres to help you cough up a lung.

All from a company who's premium brand here used to be the cheapest supermarket smoke in the UK!

#### **WTF**

Golden Sorya mall unbelievable managed to sink to a new low recently with two dead in a murder/suicide bringing the total this year near double figures.

The night after the sad event there was a fight in a bar opposite supposedly involving a US embassy staffer.

Awhile later SUV's pull up and embassy goons got out with a K9 dog!

Were they trying to track the other party or just intimidate the surrounding area? Whatever they succeeded as upon entering the mall half the customers left.

Not sure who was at fault but judging by locals throwing stuff at the staffers SUV when he first drove off We have an inkling who may be responsible!

# Phnom Penh Pub Page

**B**een another odd month around the Pub Page – I actually got back to doing serious research – and have certainly paid the price for it with a 24 hour hangover and a torn muscle in my drinking arm.

Only hit only two new bars this month – I saw that Rovio had finally expanded its empire to incorporate hostess bars and opened a beachhead facility in Phnom Penh on 130 St – unfortunately this was a beta version that was not really ready for release based on my first visit.

Hopefully the brains at Rovio will retool and re-release quickly as there seemed to be a few issues. The place looked good, it was well lit and the music was quite reasonable while I was there. However this expansion lacked even basic user interface or interactivity.

When I walked in, the entire staff was either playing cards at the bar or watching other play and enjoying their beverages. They were actually louder than the music by a significant degree. I felt lucky that one broke away from the flock long enough to serve me a beverage but there was no reaction when I decided that listening to the card game hysteries was not the best way I could spend my evening and no one even looked up when I slipped money onto my table and walked out.

If Angry Birds is a ladies card club, it seems like it will be a great success. If it was meant to be a hostess bar, serious debugging is in order.

I also wandered into Happy Girls bar on 110 St. It has only been open for a month if I understood correctly (actually to be honest I was so drunk that I just could not remember what was probably very clearly explained. The bar is really basic and for some reason feels particularly long and narrow but the place still seemed spacious which I enjoyed.

In sharp contrast to the other new bar I tried, the staff here was attentive – perhaps a bit too attentive as I was the only customer so the entire staff surrounded me. To be fair, they were not annoying and except for a few odd bits of conversation seemed willing to wait for me to decide on the level of interaction. Overall big points for the staff – I was too drunk to really speak and they were content to be available while allowing me to consume my beverage in relative peace. I have already recommended the place to a couple of friends

who I think will enjoy it.

The rest of my month has been occupied skulking around more familiar hangouts – I realized I have not bumped Larry's 110 St Bar & Grill lately. I mostly go for meals – one of the few times I promote food on the pub page is remind people that the food there is great – but I decided to stop in for a couple of beverages this month.

Well worth it – it was not too busy but there were enough people to keep the staff occupied. It is clearly a place where regulars hang out but all are welcome. The staff is friendly and service is quick.

Speaking of good food SKIRTS!!!! – the evil publisher has noted my lack of product placement and seems to be withholding payment until I satisfy my contractual obligations – Skirts!! Skirts!!! Skirts – by the way, if you go to Skirts early you can get the best Fish & Chips in Cambodia shipped in from The Pub next door – just a thought.

Basically the rest of my bar crawling this month was filled with old regulars – spent more time on 136 St – Oasis was quite busy every time I dropped by but I was pleasantly surprised at the reasonable volume being maintained – except by the other customers – it actually seemed almost mellow last time I went in Xanadu - much more boisterous and unfortunately I was greeted with the site of male customers dancing on the bar – fully clothed but still not what I want to see when I walk into a bar.

Best 136 not sure it is the best but it is still a fun bar to drop by with attentive staff and good atmosphere. Candy – used to be one of my favourite bars (and really loved the lunch time pizza specials) – it was probably the first hostess bar to go 24 hours and was a great hang out – after it took over the Huxley space, I

thought it took a real dive and was looking forward to enjoying it back in its original location. Unfortunately, it is my least favourite of Chea's bars and I have a much better time at 69 and Mister Butterfly.

I was supposed to be reviewing bars in Sihanoukville again this month but I was so hungover that I missed my bus and did not feel up to the trip – honest more new bars (well new to me anyway) next month – really – this time i mean it.

*Unfortunately our reviewer was let out unsupervised this month resulting in some injuries. Next month he will be under adult supervision courtesy of the Hunchback! ED*



# A Phnom Penh Prison Diary 4

I am now three months into my stay at the exclusive VIP suite, 33A, at Prey Sar prison.

I share my cell with the cream of corruption: a killer - who is also a pornography connoisseur, a rich General's son - who has been sent to Prey Sar by his angry father, a drug dealer - the only person who I have ever met who sleeps with his eyes open, an American returnee - who is not named Elvis, a very ugly lady-boy - who's notable feature(s) is a large pair of breasts, 13 bike thieves - aged between 12 and 23 and an obsessive compulsive who insists on jogging (or stomping) on the spot, at 05:00 every morning.

While I read the bestselling thriller, "What to do when somebody dies", kindly provided by my embassy, I note how my cell mates pass the time;

Eating rice, while glancing at lady-boys breasts, viewing the killers endless porn marathon, comparing with lady-boys breasts, smoking, followed by staring at lady-boys breasts, playing cards, followed by watching lady-boys breasts, singing karaoke, at the lady-boys breasts and playing with the old chap, while cupping\* lady-boys breasts.

The rainy season has finally arrived, bringing slightly cooler, though humid weather and an ankle deep lake of sewerage. However, inside Prey Sar, there is another benefit - rain water is slightly cheaper!

At some point, in the distant past, some NGO did something useful and fitted 16 x 5,000 litre rainwater storage tanks around the remand block A. The rainwater falling on the massive red tile roof is piped into large blue plastic tanks.

Logic would suggest that the cool, clear rainwater would be given to prisoners for showering, helping reduce the current scabies epidemic. The storage capacity would allow 4 buckets of water for each of the 1,000 detainees in block A.

Logic of course doesn't prevail here and overnight the taps at the base of each tank has been padlocked closed and the tanks are now literally overflowing - wasting this precious resource.

The queue of Khmer prisoners, each carrying a 20l paint bucket, are informed by a stick welding Vietnamese prisoner, who is responsible for the grey market water trade, that rainwater is priced at 500r a bucket.

While this is 45 times more expensive than Phnom Penh City water, it is half the price of the shower water which is delivered daily by truck in white plastic bottles. There are plenty of takers as the line of grinning inmates, wait to pay - for rainwater - in a country which has no shortage of this basic commodity.

The drains around the prison are not maintained during the dry season, or cleared before the wet season and the resulting mess is quite predictable.

First, a mass of cockroaches crawl out from the drains and climb the prison building, followed by rats the size of donkeys and then raw shit.

It is the rats that now have a group of Khmer prisoners excited - lunch! I watch as they work together in order to corner the rats and then club them to death with a stick.

I am thankful that I am in a VIP cell, where rat meat is only de-

livered in fillet, soup or sausage form. Either way, I decide that I will play it extra safe tonight and make myself a packet of chicken noodles.

The prison routine is designed so that nearly everyone can understand. There are two daily work sessions, the first doors are opened around 8AM for workers who are responsible for carrying "brown water", to replenish the brick tanks inside each cell. The brown water is pumped in from a storage reservoir, just outside the prison walls.

Some deal with the daily delivery and distribution of "clean" shower water, in white bottles and drinking water, in the standard 20l blue bottles. The clean water is delivered twice daily on trucks which carry around 400, 20l bottles.

Others are responsible for sweeping the yard and carrying buckets of putrid garbage to the prison dump.

Khmer prisoners are lead out into the exercise yard, a room at a time, where they are forced to stand in the burning heat and recite the new prison rules - word for word.

Prisoners are sent back to cells at around 11AM, when the lunchtime meal of soup and rice is delivered, and the prison is locked down for lunchtime.

The afternoon session is roughly the same, starting around 2PM and ending at 4PM. Simple. If you can't work it out by the end of the first week, you must be retarded.

One of the only English speaking prisoners in my cell is a Khmer/American returnee. Like the majority of returnees I have met since, he is polite, well spoken, helpful and reasonably well educated, having been

in America for most of his life.

The reason he has returned is that he had been convicted of a crime in America and following a US prison sentence, he was sent back to Cambodia - a country which he doesn't know, where he has no surviving relatives and where there is no social support system. He could certainly function as a constructive member of society, but instead, he has been sent to Prey Sar.

Many of the returnees in his situation, go by an English name, but not Bill, Steve or John but (yo! mo-fo! stick a cap in your ass!) street names like Tank, Shotgun, Trip and in the case of my cell mate - Trigger.

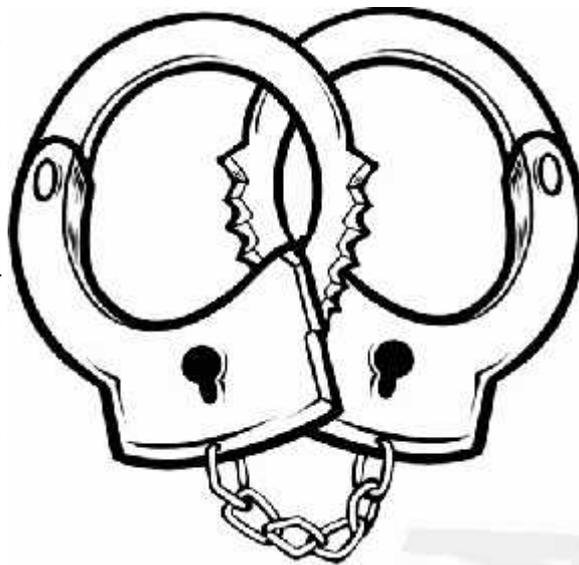
Trigger has a great sense of humour and he is good company, but having never seen an episode of Only Fools and Horses, he doesn't understand why his action-man name makes me smile.

On returning to my cell, I am surprised to receive a wedding invitation, one of my cellmates informs me that as privileged, VIP prisoners, it is quite common to be invited to weddings, by guards or in this case, by the Director himself.

I am quite excited at the prospect of getting some decent food and perhaps a few drinks, but it appears that I haven't fully understood the situation.

My cellmate, Trigger, continues to explain that while I am certainly invited to the wedding, it will not be possible for me to attend because I am in prison. Trigger is certainly living up to his name today.

So the correct protocol in the unfortunate event that you cannot attend, is to fill the oversised envelope with cash, which will



then be collected by the room leader, the block chief and finally the Director.

Still, it's the thought that matters. So I think for a moment and then into the envelope, I put a crisp new 50 reil note, that I had been saving for a situation just like this.

While on the subject of money, the room leader announces that block A will shortly have a new exercise area. However, authorities require a donation of \$50 from each cell to complete the project. Wonderful.

At this time, block A consisted of just the cell block, plus, in the yard; a tin hut -single seat - barber shop and the wooden market shack. It is lucky then, that the Directors wife, just happens to own a very competitive building supply business.

As VIP prisoners, we are expected to grin like retards and, on request, hand over unlimited handfuls of cash for major improvement projects - such as this. I struggle under the circumstances to grin like my cell mates, but I hand over \$10, just to keep the peace.

There are 48 cells in block A, which means that our new exercise area will have a total budget \$2,400, I visualise a large cement slab, perhaps a basket ball court, volleyball or a football pitch. Perhaps a gym area with some weights.

The following day, two small trucks arrive, one of sand and another with 20 bags of Portland cement - maximum cost \$150. It takes a group of volunteers another day to mix and lay a wafer thin layer of cement 10m x 20m, straight on top of grass and mud. The finish resembles a miniature lunar landscape, where prisoners can now stand in the rain, and recite the prison rules.

I am still held on pre-trial detention, charged with a crime that is just not possible. The downside seems to be that the Cambodian police are just perfect. A 100% detection rate, 100% conviction. Every day since my arrival, I have been subjected to continuous karaoke, inhuman heat and the never ending ecstatic screams of my killer cell mate's porn collection. Plus the flies. And the all night card games. And the stupid lady-boy jiggling her/his tits. Today I am sick. I have a headache.



we drive out towards Phnom Penh.

Monivong hospital is not on Monivong, it is just over the Monivong bridge in the Chbar Ampouv area of Phnom Penh, somewhere to the right of highway 1. The hospital is a large four story, rectangular building with a red cross painted on the front, a car park for 40 cars - empty. The perfect place for a Mafia style execution.

So I request permission to leave block A and seek the expert advice of our very own vet, who is also a doctor. On the side.

After many forms, I walk to the prison hospital, which is around 400m from block A.

I explain that I have a headache and I would like some pain killers. Its a gift doc, an easy one. But he is Khmer and has seen "House" on AXN, he no doubt believes that my headache is the physical symptom of a much more serious problem. Probably lupus.

He checks my arms and legs and appears a little surprised that they are all there. Not lupus, so it must be my heart or kidney stones. As the prison MRI is sadly missing, the doctor uses a stethoscope to listen to my kidneys.

The doctor fills a small bag with funny coloured pills and I return to my cell, picking out the paracetamol on route.

That afternoon, two guards arrive with handcuffs to take me away. My cellmate, Trigger, translates the bad news - I have a weak heart and I am being transferred to an off-site hospital.

I consider the situation, I am innocent. The police, 100% detection rate. The courts, 100% conviction rate. I have a headache. Cambodian prison doctor - shit, I'm going to die.

The guards however are trained professionals, I am cuffed and forcefully removed, my wrists snap and my hands turn into purple balloons.

We walk to a prison van where we join three more guards with AK47 assault rifles - rust coloured. Five guards, a driver and three guns - for one prisoner, who judging from the prognosis, is unlikely to survive the night. I think of the 50 reil gift for the directors wedding party - I didn't make the vig. And now he will shoot me in the head, a fake prison break, my chest tightens as

we drive out towards Phnom Penh.

Monivong hospital is not on Monivong, it is just over the Monivong bridge in the Chbar Ampouv area of Phnom Penh, somewhere to the right of highway 1. The hospital is a large four story, rectangular building with a red cross painted on the front, a car park for 40 cars - empty. The perfect place for a Mafia style execution.

\* cupping - a form of traditional Cambodian massage.

# Bits from the Beach

Another fire to report this time it was a boat well in fact three. It was reported that an electrical fire started the fire but witness statements suggest arson.

The triple decker Sun Boat which has been plying day trips to the islands for some time and the German owner has been quite successful. So jealousy could be a factor especially considering a new contract had been signed meaning a second boat would be needed.

The second boat arrived about a week after the fire so business was not interrupted too badly. The other two boats were speed



boats moored alongside. One belonging to the same owner as the Sun Tours and the other belonging to a tycoon.

New restaurant to try is The Spot which is located at the very end of Ochheuteal beach just before the head land with Otres and one road back from the beach. The Dubai/Russian owners with an Uzbek chef have been cooking up a stir with some

suggesting that this is the best restaurant in Snooky. Baked lamb is their speciality, but it has to be booked a day



ahead. But there are other delights including a sumptuous beef stroganoff. Word of warning. The restaurant is currently BYO beer & wine & closed on Monday.

Ochheuteal beach was the site of an unfortunate incident recently involving some American military.

This prompted the American embassy to issue a warning to the effect that Ochheuteal beach is dangerous late at night with gangs of youths fuelled with drugs & alcohol. Big thank you to the American Embassy for promoting Sihanoukville's tourism. Maybe just maybe the military personnel were fuelled by the same drugs & alcohol and were acting like complete arseholes and got what they deserved.

Two were stabbed and one succumbed to his injuries passing away in hospital a few days later. As a result the new chief of Immigration police and the new governor visited the area late at night, well 11PM. Probably late for them but I doubt you would find too much going on that time of night!

But there are rumours that the late night bars may be forced to change the style of bar are even force them to close. The owner of the bar where the incident happened is a local police officer so he should be alright.

On the long road to Independence beach from Eckhareach is the 5 Men Fresh Beer brewery run by the brewmaster that set up Cambodia beer. They are Sihanoukville first micro brewery and offer a blonde and a dark beer for an unbelievable 50c & 75 c a mug respectively. They also offer some Khmer style snacks and BBQ. The beer is a bit cloudy but this is only cosmetic as it is true LIVE ALE (not pasteurized) and does not take away from the beers wonderful taste.

Check it out.



## Bayon Pearnik®

Adam Parker, *Publisher and Editor-in-Chief*  
A. Nonnymouse, *Wordsmiths*  
Sharpless, *Photos*

Maxwell Perkins, *Editor Postmortis* Dexter Coffin III,  
Lawrence Connolly, *Rich, Well-Connected Friends of Publisher*  
Jeff Elson, *Associate Deputy Editor* Dr. Safari, *Health Editor*  
Ian Velocipede, *Editor-at-Large* James Eckhart, *Editor-at-Large*  
A. Fortiori, Dan Meat, Etta Moga, *Assistant Associate Deputy Editors*  
Cletus J. "Bubba" Huckabee, Jr., *Movie Reviewer*  
Edward R. Murrow, *Famous Journalist*  
Autmean Loy, Prakhai Thuich, Som Muiroi, *Overworked Proles*  
Sdap Otbaan, Ta Madong Thiet, *Translators* It, *Coffee*  
Dim Sambo, *Systems Support* Chubb, *Reception*

The Bayon Pearnik is an independent magazine dedicated to raising beer money as well as encouraging debate over standards of taste, humor and journalistic ethics. Published every month or so in Phnom Penh. Not to be taken seriously or while driving or operating heavy machinery. Always consult your doctor first because we're not responsible for what happens to you.

Advertising, Editorial, Inquiries and anything else :  
The Bayon Pearnik, P.O. Box 2279,  
Phnom Penh 3.

Advertising, Editorial : 012-803-968 (Adam),  
Advertising: 012 887 699 Mol (KHMER/ENGLISH)  
E-mail: bp@forum.org.kh www.bayonpearnik.com  
"We accept anybody's ravings—we often print them!"

# THE BAR STOOL RANT



**H**umanity has spent the last couple of hundred years, since the industrial revolution making a whole lot of stuff. Why haven't we got better at making things last? In fact

we've gotten worse. Many items that were once considered lifelong purchases have become popular in frequently thrown away forms. From watches to razors disposable has allowed us to buy things cheaper, but with much more waste as we buy them again and again.

There comes a point when we have to ask what we actually need. Phones, marketers would have us believe, need to be traded up on a yearly basis, but in reality most people only use a phone for a few key functions. A twenty dollar Nokia will provide you with all you need to make calls, and it's your choice if that is all you need. At the other end of the spectrum a modern smartphone connects you to the web, takes selfies and youtube videos, plays media stuff and acts like a computer running programs. If you want all the bells and whistles and a device that an advert has told others to be wowed by, that's your choice too. If you want a device that will provide the key smartphone functions, but is built to last and be upgraded, forget about it.

Maybe the phone is a bad example to start, as really it is no longer a phone, but a computer, and thus the argument is more complex. Modern operating systems offer small improvements on previous versions, at the expense of needing far more processing power to do it. As I sit here writing on a laptop running Windows 7, I can't really notice an improvement in experience over doing it in XP. In fact XP is still the second most popular system on desktop computers, even though it is no longer officially supported. Why? Because it browses the web, it plays music and videos, it processes documents and images, all the things that people actually need. Windows 7 and the more powerful computer you need to run it only really add benefits to graphics for games and HD media. Surely a modular upgrade could add the functionality? The argument is that technology grows almost

organically with competition driving improvements, and yes that has been true up to now, but now we know more about the consequences of our wastefulness can't we decide what we need and look at improving things on a modular basis, replacing a part not the whole. The standardization of phone chargers to micro-USB has made a huge difference to the waste generated, it's a start.

Speaking of the start, this whole thing, planned obsolescence, started with the light bulb. A group of light bulb manufacturers got together in the 1920's in what became known as the Phoebus cartel. They realized that technological innovations improving the efficiency and longevity of the light bulb would be detrimental to their profits, so the group consisting of Osram, Phillips, and the other big players of the time got together and decided to purposely shorten the life of the bulbs reducing the hours bulbs would burn from 2500 hours in the 1920's to 1000 hours by the 1940's. They did very well out of this until the disruptions of World War 2 exposed their conspiracy. Don't believe that all the light bulbs you've ever changed never needed to be replaced? The Centennial bulb in Livermore, California has been in near constant use for 112 years now. A regular 60W bulb built in 1902 has been burning for nearly a million hours. So if they hadn't been built to fail you'd have never needed to go up that ladder.

The boom of cheap manufacturing in the eighties meant that obsolescence barely even had to be planned. The lack of quality meant items guaranteed to fail, the cheap price made them easily replaced, the result; more waste. Ikea rose to prominence in the eighties manufacturing cheap furniture that they encouraged customers to replace frequently, going as far as to urge customers to throw out their sofa to buy a new one. In America they'd been doing this with cars for a long time, making new changes yearly to encourage

yearly upgrades, whilst not really aiming for durability or value, at least until foreign competition forced them to change



their ways.

In all the time since the industrial revolution the goal has only been to make more products and more money. Now we know the costs of this can we maybe think of more things like the light bulb that could last longer, but for the lack of financial incentive.

# ON ASSIGNMENT IN KRATIE

On assignment for the Bayon Pearnik I, Emeritus Ex XXX Underground Reporter (with Mango clusters and Durian Slices) aka The Fat Bastard, had been banished to Kratie to write a fluff piece on the endangered Irrawaddy River Dolphins. These sizable, nasty, carnivorous mammals, who some consider cute and others consider tasty, congregate at deep, fish rich pools in the Mekong during dry season when river levels run low, trapping them there for tourists to gawk at. The dolphin assignment was the punishment my evil publisher laid on me for refusing to write a story that would have put me on the wrong side of the Russian mob, who were reputed to be even nastier than my publisher. I tried to look at it on the bright side and make the best of a humiliating situation. Surprisingly my expenses were being covered by the magazine. The advance left me with enough cash in my pocket to purchase several bottles of life giving Pastis to tide me over during my stay. I'd never been to Kratie before. How bad could floating on the river, watching for dolphins with a Pastis in hand be?

Due to my massively masculine stature and a lot of winging on my part I had even convinced the boss to buy two seats for me on the bus from Phnom Penh. As I spread my bulk and settled in I watched a middle aged couple coming up the aisle, looking for their seats. He led; a rough looking character in his mid-fifties, sporting a graying ponytail and a permanent scowl. His creased and craggy face turned my way, his cold gray eyes scanning me warily before he took the window seat across from me. The woman sported salt and pepper hair that made me hungry just looking at it and had me imagining a thick buffalo pepper steak on a bed of salted fries.

Curiosity is the hallmark of an investigative reporter. As the bus ground into gear I leaned over and introduced myself as Joshua Smedley-Fuches, Joey or Fat Bastard, as you like. "I'm Sara, and this is my husband Heinz," she said with a toothsome smile that would benefit from some extensive dental work.

My fine sense of deductive reasoning and fluency in accents told me she was American and he of Germanic origin. It also told me there was more to this couple than met the eye. "Let me guess," I said. "River dolphins tomorrow, then off to Laos and the 4,000 Islands." It was a statement, not a question.

"Why yes, that's right. How did you know?" she asked, obviously in awe of my brilliant reasoning powers.

Her husband leaned forward and in a thick German accent said, "Yes, how *did* you know?" His tone and steely stare were as cold and menacing as an Angkor draft served in an icy mug.

"No offence mein friend, but it is the common tourist route after all. You know, a little oohing and aweing over the dolphins, then off to Laos for further adventures in S.E. Asia. Umm, you wouldn't happen to have a bottle of Pastis in your bag would you?" I said, licking my lips. This seemed to put the formidable Heinz at ease, no doubt assuming I was just another ex-pat on a tight booze budget. We rode to the first rest stopping in silence.

My bulbous and carbuncled nose for news told me there was something dodgy about this couple. I slouched over to where they were turning their noses up at the flyblown food on offer at our seedy rest stop. Perpetually hungry and never too particular what I filled my gut with, I ordered a plate of lip smacking lukewarm offal on rice and invited them to join me at a table; I'd even buy them each a beer if they were thirsty and so inclined. It's always

easier to tease information out of your subjects drinking is involved. And so, over a few beers, they started to unwind.

Her story was that she was a lawyer from New Jersey. "I was forced into early retirement when the bubble popped in the crash of '08." From watching re-runs of the Sopranos I knew New Jersey's reputation for mob related activities. I guessed her claim that her practice was virtually all real estate related was a fabrication as flimsy as a fan-dancer's feathers.

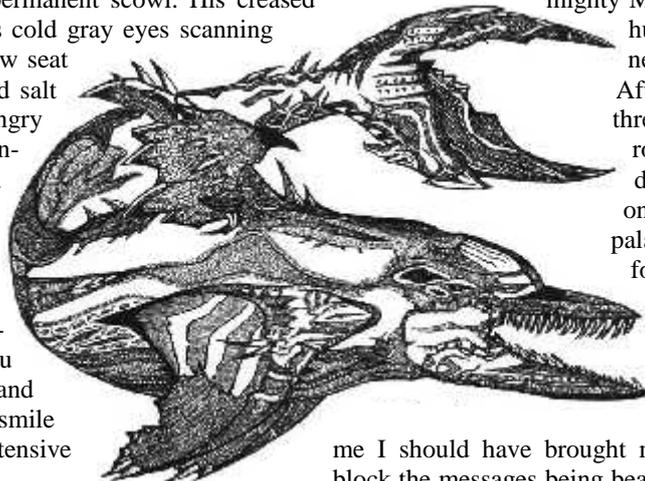
Dancing around my cunningly crafted questions with the grace of an aging matador, Herr Heinz was far less forthcoming. Judging by the way he was savouring his tepid can of Anchor as if were a vintage Bordeaux, I deduced his story of being a Bavarian brew master to be 1% hops and 99% bull. Sara, hugging Heinz's ham like bicep like a cheer leader in heat, claimed that she and Heinz had recently married in Lesotho and had chosen the Kingdom of Cambodia for their honeymoon. At best it was a romantic tale of an odd couple whose love story suspiciously spanned several sketchy South American and African countries. At worst it was a shabby cover story as full of holes as the twenty year old mosquito net hanging above the bed in my rude Phnom Penh hovel. I smelled a story more interesting than writing pap about a pod of endangered dolphins hanging on the edge of extinction in the mighty Mekong. Extinction stories were five-hundred Reil a dozen; yesterday's news.

After a bone rattling ride to Kratie the three of us decided to freshen up in our rooms before meeting for dinner and drinks that evening. I threw my bag on the bed in what turned out to be a palatial five dollar fan room far too nice for the likes of me. I contemplated a shower, but remembered I'd had one only a week ago so instead made my way to a street side table overlooking the post office. My finely tuned sense of paranoia told

me I should have brought my cleverly disguised tinfoil hat to block the messages being beamed into my brain from the communications towers sprouting all around me. Already I could hear the alien voices telling me because I was so huge that I'd make a delicious main course when the invasion fleet came out of hyperspace to harvest the meat crop they'd planted on earth countless millennia ago. Thirsty and in need of a fix to settle my nerves, I ordered a quad Pastis, one ice cube, with water on the side.

I was saved from my raving lunacy by the arrival of Heinz, who continued to eye me with suspicion. I smiled and waved him over. I enquired if he had ever enjoyed the rich aniseed flavour of Pastis, the King of liquors. With a dubious look he shook his head. I calculated that my publisher might be prepared to pay the additional expense if there was a good story to be had; I ordered another quad for me and one for Heinz. When it arrived he sniffed the glass cautiously before tipping it to his lips and taking a deep draught of the creamy yellow ambrosia. "Ya, is sher gut, he said, draining the rest of the glass in one swallow. When he was gulping down his second, I was well on the way to ordering a third quadruple and we were both on the way to becoming fast Pastis buddies.

By the time Sara arrived the Pastis had worked its magic and Heinz had confided in a Teutonic slur that in '70s he was a minion loosely attached to the Baader Meinhof faction of Marxist revolutionaries, who were the forerunners to the infamous Red Army Brigade. Judging more by his visible prison tattoos than by his rough demeanor, I had little reason to doubt him. Wishing to pre-



serve my handsomely corpulent body I applauded his revolutionary zeal. He would make a far better friend than an enemy, meaning I would have to tread carefully in my investigations and say nothing to give away my profession as an underground reporter.

Over a dinner fuelled by yet more Pastis for my friend Heinz and I with flagons of red wine for Sara, I managed to tease out more about the odd couple I had chanced to meet on the bus. As I was to discover later it was not a coincidental meeting, but rather a well calculated ruse.

It was Heinz who suggested in a manner that broached no disagreement that instead of engaging a tuk tukin the morning we should hire motorbikes and make a day of it. Knowing how badly hung over we would all be in the morning we agreed on an early eleven o'clock start. Kampi, the hotbed of dolphin action, is only twenty kilometers from Kratie. Prime dolphin hunting time is late afternoon, which gave us about three hours to explore along the way. As something of an expert at reading between the lines, I surmised that Sara and Heinz were something more than met my jaundiced eye. I didn't know who they worked for but it was increasingly obvious they were far more than love struck honeymooners, and despite their protestations to the contrary were not in Kratie for dolphin watching alone.

Heinz and Sara shared one motorbike and were in the lead, hugging the shoulder at a sedate speed. At length we came to a Pagoda wall. Heinz signalled and turned in at the gate. I assumed that being first time visitors, Buddhist Pagodas were still exotic for the newlyweds. It was only when Heinz ambled off and started speaking with an elderly Monk that I began to suspect something other than whimsy had brought us to that particular Pagoda. My sketchy German friend was speaking fluent Khmer.

A kilometer or two further up the road Heinz, still in the lead, stopped at a broad dirt road and suggested we try following it east, then if possible find another road that might lead us back to the river nearer to the dolphin pool. My nose for news and my sense of paranoia were both kicking into overdrive. There was a reason Heinz was not sharing about why he wanted to travel into the dry barren looking landscape instead of along the shady tree lined main road that paralleled the river. I wasn't sure I wanted to travel into the heart of darkness to find out why.

After several kilometers of seeing nothing other than uncultivated scrub land the road took a promising bend to the north. At the bend a rude wooden house, a skinny cow and a fat old pig tethered to a shade tree by an ancient ox cart and three water buffalo in a wallow made it a perfect place to snap some photos. A menacing water buffalo with a less than friendly glint in its bovine eyes began climbing out of its muddy hollow and was aiming directly at us. It would sooner see buffalo turning on a spit than have one take an interest in me. I suggested we move on before it gained its footing and charged us.

After another ten minutes of riding we arrived at a small village of crude bamboo and rice mat houses on stilts. I could feel pairs of hooded eyes following us as we slowly rode past children at play who went silent at the sight of us. Though the sun was shining the village had a gloomy and menacing air. At the far end of the eerily silent village the good road ended and a rough track that might or might not lead us back to the river began. The sound of a banjo playing in my head had my self-preservation instinct kicking in. I wanted to get out of deliverance country as quickly as possible.

Heinz pulled up in the shade of a monstrous old mango tree. It stood as a sentinel in front of the last house in the village. Three villagers sat on the edge of the veranda; two men and a woman wrapped in a red sarong. "Quick, ahead or back," I said, the matted hair on the back of my neck bristling. As I was voicing my anxiety at remaining there another second, one of the Khmer men slid off the veranda and headed our way. I gulped, realizing that I was entering the final moments of my miserable life.

"He's got a gun," my American friend said with characteristic

understatement. Americans may be used to people carrying guns, but I was not. Where I was from only cops and criminals had guns; just as it should be. The man walking towards us was not a cop.

"No shit," came my whimpered response to the obvious. Indeed the diminutive Khmer approaching us did have a huge, sinister looking, silver plated .45 in the palm of his hand. The gun was larger than life and completely covered his small hand. I was immediately taken by how a handgun was so much more than a fashion accessory. A .45 can make a very small man look much larger than life.

As he got closer I saw he was wearing what not only looked like, but was an authentic New York Yankees baseball uniform, complete with the official cap. Obviously USAID or the Peace Corp had been active in the area. Either alternative was spooky.

His eyes were stone killer cold, a blank and sinister expression that chilled me to the bone. My loosening bowels were making me regret the offal I'd eaten the day before and the chilly and spider omelet I had for breakfast. The only thing that saved me from making a stinking mess in my already foul smelling trousers was that he was holding the gun flat, his finger wasn't on the trigger and most encouraging of all was he was not pointing the gun in my direction – yet.

Heinz and Sara remained silently on their bikes, behind and to the right of me. The little gunman came right up to where I sat quivering in the seat of my bike. For fear of wetting myself I purposely looked not at the gun, but directly into his humorless eyes. My Khmer being virtually nonexistent I forced a friendly smile and with my arms waving in the direction of the dirt track ahead asking if it led back to the river. He answered me in his local dialect, his tone unfriendly. He noticed I was paying no attention to his shiny cannon. He raised his arm. The gun was mere centimeters away, but still held flat. I turned my head momentarily to look at it, shrugged my shoulders in dismissal and returned to my gibberish and sign language dialogue with the man I was certain, at any moment was going to be my assassin. I judged mine wouldn't be the first life he had taken.

I had a distinct feeling he was not just the armed guardian of the village, the .45 the only badge of authority he needed, but that he did not want us venturing down the rutted track ahead. To try and ease the tension I pointed back the way we had come as a safe alternative to murdering us. All the while there had been absolute silence from my companions. They were obviously in awe of my neck saving negotiating skills, so left me to literally sweat it out on my own. At least I'd go down with my gums flapping.

Then I heard Heinz spit out a half dozen words in German accented Khmer. The man with the gun's eyes shot up and past my shoulder. His whole expression suddenly transformed from one of menace to one of abject fear. He lowered the gun and his head simultaneously. Heinz said, "Goot, let's go," and started his bike. I wasn't about to argue at the unexpected turn around. As we drove off I prayed to the Great Buddha to stop my killer from shooting me in the back.

Once we were safely away and out of gunshot range I braked my motorbike to a skidding stop. I lugubriously dismounted my rented Honda, waddled at top speed to where Heinz and Sara sat, and demanded in the name of the gods of Pastis an explanation for what had just happened back there. Heinz glared at me and said that it was really none of my business, but seeing how I handled myself under pressure he and Sara decided to tell me why we had gone to the village, what he had said to so dramatically turn the tables, and how I had passed the test.

.....To be continued.....© Alan Alan 2014