

Pajau Bones: Chapter One by K.M. Kaung

The three men and their lackeys lurched out of the HQ building, really a hut, followed by the four guards and other hangers on, all in uniform.

It was only about 8 PM, but the jungle was cold, almost pitch black.

The mosquitoes had frozen since the temperatures started to get cold at night in December.

The highest-ranking among the group there in the HQ building, the DCC or Deputy Camp Commander, Roger Win Aung, was the most wasted on whiskey, rum, home brew or Kachin *tsa pi* and home-rolled marijuana joints. These were rolled in local mulberry paper, also called Shan paper.

He was seething from what had happened in the daytime, during the In-Camp Training Session Number Three. This had broken up with sharp words around dinner time, when Ko Htoon, the Camp Commander, said he didn't believe there were that many junta spies in ABS North.

Where was the proof?

Htoon tried to lighten the mood by going to the beat-up old piano and attempting to sing their favorite song to them, but Roger Win Aung, Than Doke (Iron Stick), and Myo Win shouted him down, so he stopped.

Ko Htoon sighed, "Oh well, I will go to sleep then," and left quietly.

The three women also left.

Roger Win Aung shouted after them, “You sons of bitches! You bitches. You whores. Tomorrow I will prove I am right. Proof, you understand, proof!”

Than Doke and Myo Win shouted, “Hear. Hear!”

They always applauded whatever the *khwe ma tharr* Roger said, even if it made no sense.

As the backs of Ko Htoon and his group faded into the darkness, away from the triangle of yellow light streaming out of the briefly-open door, Roger Win Aung screamed after them, “You college students! Don’t think you know everything. I will show you who is master here. Only the fifth grade, but I am more powerful than you. You will see.”

To make the point, he snapped his home-made black *nan chauk ku* karate sticks in the air, chop, chop.

But he had to close the door again, so in the room he sat in the warmest spot near the fireplace the Kachins called *dap*, and played with the sticks some more, chop, chop.

He loved to do this, preferably close to Ko Htoon’s nose.

He just could not stand the do-good *mainma shar*. Always making reference to things in books, to show off his learning, or his pedigree in Mandalay, the King’s Royal City; the City where people were so educated and knew how to write and talk.

Roger hated everybody, including communists.

He was tired of hearing Ko Htoon say, “But Grandmother Ludu Daw Ah Mar said,”

He did not care what the old gal said.

Everyone in Mandalay knew she and her husband got money from Red China to set up their printing press.

That, Roger admired. He was sure his friend in ABS South, Aung Win, would also like to latch onto a good source of funding, in the Karen stronghold of Manerplaw, on the Burma-Thai Border.

They must get together and chat some more.

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“Go on! Go and secure all the soft mines, rifles, RPGs and all,” he shouted to his deputies and the guards.

Besides the cakes of yellow *plastique*, they also had US-made round Claymore mines, about two inches in diameter and a khaki green color, and Russian AK 47s, left over in Southeast Asia from the Vietnam War, old rifles, even a muzzle loading musket which they fired with round pebbles.

In the Golden Triangle, everything could be bought in the black market, even human organs like kidneys for the Chinese transplant market, and brides for the women-scarce Chinese cities, on the one child policy for so long.

Babies. Plasma. Rhino horn, an aphrodisiac. Opium, *yaba*.

They took a percentage cut on everything that passed through their area, both ingoing and outgoing.

Bricks of raw opium and *yaba* or Ecstasy (methamphetamine pills) made an excellent local currency because they were valuable but not too valuable, like a big 6 x 6 x 10 foot boulder of jade or a teak log (then worth about *kyats* 10,000 or US dollars 500 per log).

The Chinese building boom after Deng Xioaping's economic reforms vastly increased the demand for everything from Burma.

There was a Chinese jade-buying depot on the Chinese side, a bit south of Pajau between Pajau and Ruili.

Roger was dabbling profitably in the now opened-up overland trade.

He may not have known all the reasons why things were as they were, but his kind was the street-smart kind that always knew how to work the system.

It didn't really matter what kind of system.

He knew how to work it.

Opium and methamphetamines were easy to store without decaying, and could be divided into small units as a divisible currency.

In these northern hills, opium had been given in tribute or as taxes for centuries before the ABS came along. Some of the outlaw groups used opium as a currency to pay their troops. Even the CIA allegedly had used it in the area through the DEA, when waging its war against opium in the seventies, when it was also said to have used Vietnam-type defoliants, like Agent Orange.

During World War II, some of the levies and porters had been paid by the Allied Forces with silver coins or opium bricks or slices.

The opium weights from the old days though, shaped like *hintha* or mandarin ducks, had largely disappeared. Roger was to see one large one, about five viss, at Chiangmai Museum of Art years later.

He wanted to steal it, but was not able to. There was an electronic protective wall around it, and he could not figure out how it was turned on and off.

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Than Doke and Myo Win went off to do Roger's bidding. They hid almost all the ordinance except the small arms that Ko Htoon's group already had, under Roger Win Aung's bed, where he kept his porn videotapes.

Now he turned them on, on his small TV that he had bought in Pajau town. It ran on a small generator.

Good thing he had brought these tapes to Assam Hill after they had raided the Hpakant gem mine hostels during the Thadingyut waning moon. In Hpakant there were many open mine pits full of loose gravel and mined earth.

Ko Htoon had objected when he played the tapes loudly at night. He said it wasn't decent and it wasn't proper, there were young virgin girls (*ah pyo lay dwe*) in the camp.

Roger had replied "How do you know they are virgins? Have you sampled the wares?"

Watching the porn tapes aroused him sexually, so he went into his own private outhouse that he could reach via his private back door, and jerked off there.

Before he went to bed in his private room, he oiled and caressed his pistol, calling his gun his *mahaythee*, and put it under his pillow.

He thought Mao Tse Tung was so right – power does reside in the barrel of a gun.

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