

TALES
FROM
THAILAND
EP

GREGORY
PLESHAW



TRACK ONE: THAI POLITICS FOR DUMMIES

January 27–29, 2010

I am currently seated on a large floating barge on the Thai side of the Thai-Laos border on the Mekong River, in a small town called Nong Khai, in [the province of Isaan](#). I came here to engage in a trans-national diplomatic exercise known as “a Visa Run” which is now successfully complete and whose details are outlined on [my public blog](#). I have stayed for a little while longer, may stay as long as a month or even longer than that, depending on developments, to continue working on an evolving project about the Thai political situation and a bunch of other issues both political, personal, and mystical.

Nong Khai is the eastern-most city in the province of Isaan, the northeastern province of Thailand. It is also a literal stone’s throw from the Laos border (I could swim there in fifteen minutes, though the current might take me far down the river, as it is quite fast, particularly in the middle.) It is currently believed by this writer (and a rather significant number of people that I’ve talked to lately) that civil war in Thailand is quite imminent. Former Prime Minister [Thaksin Shinwatra](#), who was ousted in a “bloodless coup” in 2006, has lately taken a job as a political advisor to the Kingdom of Cambodia and is developing a political base there and (probably soon, perhaps already) a government-in-exile. As recently as Sunday, his political base in Thailand, known as [the Red Shirts](#), declared war against the Thai military, an organization that answers to no one, it is said, other than, perhaps, [CENSORED, due to unverifiable information.]

In addition to having a parliamentary system with a Prime Minister,

Thailand also has a [monarchy](#). The monarch, [King Rama the Ninth](#) in the Chakri dynasty, (proper name: Bhumibol Adulyadej), is an 82-year-old legend and demi-god to the Thai people, (in the very literal sense, to a degree, but to my Western mind he's like a pop star of sorts, albeit one with enormous wealth and power, and I've come to collect picture postcards of him that I just love.) Having been in power since 1946, he is currently in hospital [CENSORED, due to unverifiable information]. His death, it can be presumed, is also imminent, (though perhaps not, because he is one of the wealthiest people on earth and could easily live for another 20 years, depending on what ails him) but rumors of his possible death leads us to play the most popular parlor game in southeast Asia at this moment in time, a game I like to call:

“What will happen when the King dies?”

Both farangs (foreigners) and Thais play this game, but certainly not together. It is absolutely forbidden (and *illegal* and punishable by long jail sentences) for anyone to discuss the King in any way other than in total reverence. [CENSORED: All moments of censorship in this document were made in an effort not to offend the wonderful people of the Kingdom of Thailand nor to place myself in a position of possibly ending up in a Thai jail for either "criminal slander" (a nebulous law that I was de-briefed about in October and still do not entirely understand) nor for a violation of any of the articles of [Leses Majeste](#), which is still enforced in Thailand and rather vociferously at that.]

On the record, Thailand has enjoyed a special role with the United States since [the SEATO treaty of 1954](#), and in 1961, the Kingdom of

Thailand signed a secret military agreement with the US, where Thailand agreed to allow the US government the ability to install two air-bases in Thailand, (opened for business in 1963) that were then used to bomb Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos during what people over here call “The War of American Aggression” and what we like to call “[The Viet Nam War](#).” Thailand had never been colonized – it still has not, and it wants to keep it that way. In fact, Thailand is one of just two third world nations that’s never been colonized by Europeans. (Ethiopia is the other one.) Signing that agreement afforded the Thais the ability to avoid that pitfall as well as to avoid the conflict that defined a generation of young men, including Americans, Viet Nameese, Cambodians, and Laotians, as well as the citizens of many other nations as well.

Thailand’s primary role during the conflict(s) of those times was to provide both air support and R&R activities for the many soldiers who served – however, long before the arrival of US servicemen and women, Thailand had and continues to have a global reputation (well-deserved) as one of the great [sex tourism](#) capitals of the modern world.

While Thaksin hails from the northern city of [Chiang Mai](#) and certainly has wide support there, his real political base is right here, in the province of Isaan. Though Thaksin is a billionaire and a world-class crook, (corrupt even by Thai standards, or so I’m told) he implemented a number of policies that made him very popular in the cash-starved northeast. In an area where the average monthly wage is estimated to be around 8,000 baht (\$240 US), Thaksin offered money to villages that voted for him to the tune of 1 million baht (\$35,000 US) and won the job of Prime Minister handily in a popular election in 2001 – Thailand’s

first, it should be noted. Once in office, Thaksin also implemented a vastly popular and quite humanitarian policy known as [“the 30 baht scheme”](#) which basically entitles any person in the Kingdom the right to enter a hospital, claim poverty, and be treated by a doctor for just 30 baht (\$1 US.)

Were anyone to attempt to roll back that rule, they would surely to be beaten to death with sticks in the streets of Krung Thep, aka “The City of Angels,” {but known to the world as Bangkok.) A billionaire and a populist hero, Thaksin seems to enjoy enormous support inside Thailand for these and other reasons, including a rather strong opinion that the monarchy’s role should be greatly diminished in the very near future, as he deftly opined in an interview with [the London Times](#) on November 9, 2009. His political base is known as the Red Shirts; the opposition party are known as [the Yellow Shirts](#), and they believe that the monarchy should never go away though they also believe in some form of democracy.

It’s never very cut and dried in Thailand – it’s really difficult for any outside observer to tell who’s really up to what, and things change here daily and dramatically. Nevertheless, it seems a fair bet that whether it is the death of the King or the potentiality that Thaksin will use his Cambodian base to stage a “bloodless coup” of his own and invade the northeast of Thailand with an army comprised of former [Khmer Rouge](#) generals and interested mercenary Cambodians and Thai soldiers, {honestly, just a rumor that can't be confirmed but has been suggested, repeatedly,} the stage is clearly set for civil war, and I can’t see any better place to be.

The northern city of Nong Khai is just across the river from Laos, so jumping a border to get out of harm's way is not out of the question, and it seems highly likely that most members of [ASEAN](#), Laos included, will stay as far away from the conflict as possible in order to continue to work towards their most important aim – the development of an [Asian Economic Community](#), similar to that enjoyed by Europe, with a common currency and all the rest of it – including high-speed transportation across the entire region. A crucial component to the development of ASEAN aims as a world economic player includes [the Trans-Asian Railway](#), which will run from Beijing across South East Asia into Singapore on one end and into Istanbul in Europe on the other, and whose \$15 billion US construction is currently halted because of the diplomatic row between the Kingdoms of Thailand and Cambodia, resulting from Thaksin's move to Cambodia (incidentally, though not unimportantly, from the UAE's Dubai) and his subsequent appointment as an economic and political advisor to the Kingdom of Cambodia. The lynchpin of that crisis is that Thailand wants Thaksin extradited from Cambodia to Thailand to face charges of corruption – both Thaksin and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen (also former Khmer Rouge) have created the second most popular parlor game in South East Asia, something I like to call “thumbing your nose at Bangkok” and the current Thai [Prime Minister Abhisit](#).

Currently, the entire nation of Thailand, (and much of the rest of the region, one might assume) is concerned with a particular date - namely, February the 26th, 2010. Known variously as "Decision Day" or "Judgment Day" (depending on whether you're reading *The Nation* or *The Bangkok Post*, the two largest English-language dailies in

Thailand,) February the 26th is the day when the Thai Supreme Court will decide on what will happen to the 76 billion baht in Thaksin family assets that the Thai government froze in 2006 when then-Prime Minister Thaksin was deposed in the "bloodless coup" and fled the country. His first post-coup stop was England, where he immediately made a flashy purchase designed no doubt to flaunt his wealth and make him seem like "a regular guy" by acquiring [the Manchester City football club](#) for around 90 million pounds (later sold to UAE interests for a 30 million pound profit)) and then to the UAE's Dubai, where he resides when he's not hanging out in Cambodia with Cambo PM Hun Sen (former Khmer Rouge general and now rumored to be one of Thaksin's favorite golf partners.)

Why someone with Thaksin's obvious financial and political acumen didn't figure out a way to zap those assets (mostly liquid cash, from what I understand) to a numbered Swiss bank account before he turned off the lights and fled Thailand is an open question at this moment, (though many chalk it up to the kind of enormous hubris one must have to become both a billionaire in a very poor country and then to also become its prime minister.) Totaling 76 Billion baht (\$US3billion, give or take) this money represents both what Thaksin earned with his company, called the [Shin Corporation](#). Only half of these assets existed prior to Thaksin ascension to Prime Minister of Thailand - the other half is largely believed to have been acquired by the company due to an enormously byzantine web of dummy corporations that benefited greatly by Thaksin's government, which swayed national telecom policy to benefit this hidden web of profits for Thaksin and his family. {Officially, Thaksin's "sold" his company to his family and children prior to becoming PM, but his wife and heirs were able to purchase

shares in Shin Corp. (now known as [Thaicom](#) and owned by interests in Singapore) for \$1 a share and sell those shares the following day in the Singapore Stock Exchange for \$46 a share.)

You may not find yourself concerned at all about what will happen in Thailand in the next month or so, (other, perhaps, than to hope that I will be safe, something I've started to be a bit more concerned about myself lately what with all these students groups running around braying for one side or the other) but I have reason to believe that whatever occurs here will have some global ramifications – but perhaps the entire thing is a tempest in a teapot and nothing will happen at all.

Regardless of the outcome of this particular fracas, however, former PM Thaksin has a lot of interesting connections. Raised in a prominent Sino-Thai family in Chiang Mai, he has ties to the Chinese government, and he may or may not be receiving financing from certain factions in the Middle East. He also has a lot of connections with the global telecom market, which may or may not be germane to his plans, which are still open questions. Suffice to say, there's still some oil in SE Asia - harder to get to than before, perhaps, but certainly not an obstacle in the era of peak production. It really would take awhile to unpack all the various stuff I've read about it and talked to people about, and while at least one analyst actually told me to my face that I've read too much [Noam Chomsky](#), the fact remains that history has a funny way of repeating itself – and in Thailand, things like prophecies have never disappeared from the popular consciousness, making the one which floats around Thailand like the fine mist rising off the rice paddies at dawn seem particularly prescient.

That prophecy takes its cue from one of the more peculiar aspects of Thai numerological beliefs. In Thailand, neither 5 nor 7 (nor 23, I'd bet) are particularly "lucky" numbers. The luckiest number of all is [9](#), which has its roots in the significance of the [number 108](#) in both the Buddhist and Hindu religious system. In addition to all the other reasons why Thailand might soon be headed for a conflict that it cannot contain peacefully, there is something around here called "[the Prophecy of the Chakri Dynasty](#)" of which the current king is a part. It was predicted some time ago that the House of Chakri would only last for Nine Generations – and the current King is actually King Rama the NINTH.

On February the 18th, the UK government issued a report stating that Thailand is now a dangerous place to travel and that British citizens living in Thailand should stay away from any large public gatherings on or near the 26th - turning the tension up to an almost unbearable notch. It suggests that [MI5](#) have some advance information about what will happen on the 26th and they're covering their bases and actually warning people to either stay away or leave or at least stay inside their homes.

ps: the latest news is simply this: the 26th (which will be the day that the Thai Supreme Court ruling on Thaksin's asset freeze is announced) is no longer being called "Decision Day" but "Decision Week." Many people here who are serious about covering the action are leaving for Chiang Mai ASAP. I am, for the moment, undecided.

TRACK TWO: DISCORDIANISM & THE NUMBER 23

January 29th, 2010

Written to 14 of my friends. Sum = 5 (giggle)

From: [gregoryp\(tm\)](#)

Dear Comrades in Esoteric Mysticism:

I could speak at some length about the political situation in Thailand, as well as some of the very interesting personal discoveries I have been making about myself since my arrival in Nong Khai, but I prefer to focus instead on an issue slightly more pressing and more along the lines of your mystically-inclined expertise. I am currently in Nong Khai, in the northeastern part of Thailand near the Laos border. Since arriving here, I have experienced an extremely high level of what I can easily term “dynamic dischord.” And I can hear you thinking to yourself, “Well, of course, [gregoryp\(tm\)](#), your life is awash with such stuff” and truly, while getting my passport held in Koh Tao and having it ransomed back to me by the police was really quite terrifying, what’s been happening here is a bit different, and may be more difficult to elucidate than I expect, but let me give it a shot nonetheless.

Without getting into too many details (I will, at some point, discuss all of them somewhere) since my arrival in Nong Khai I have been plagued by what Wikipedia terms [“the 23 Enigma,”](#) which I am quite sure is familiar to all of you because we more or less dip into the same canon in our relationships with the traditions of [Western Hermetic Magick](#). As you will no doubt recall, the 23 Enigma features prominently in the book [“The Illuminatus! Trilogy”](#) by [Robert Anton Wilson](#) (& [Robert Shea](#), but people tend to forget that) and was supposedly first discovered by our old friend William S. Burroughs. (he needs a link, I just deleted it.)

On the train to Nong Khai, the dining car was Number 23 and I just giggled a bit, as I always do when I see the number. In the dining car, I asked a man from Norway who lives in Laos where to stay and he suggested the [Mut Mee Guest House](#). I hired a tuk-tuk and I was brought here, a lovely genteel place with a garden and a floating barge restaurant, and I was stunned when I was told a simple room was available for 150 baht (\$4 a night.) I was shown the room and I agreed to take it, thinking it would make a lovely cell for what I needed to do – and then I was handed a key with a leather fob with the number 23 written on it. I smiled brightly and said, “Looks like I’ll be staying awhile.”

Now, recall this from your memories of the text and dig deep for me. Right now. As I’ve always thought about, 23 and [the Law of Fives](#) are sort of considered “lucky” within [Discordianism](#), yes? And yet, Discordianism is an adjunct of [chaos magic](#), correct? It’s been years since I thought about this stuff, thought there was certainly a time when my bookshelf and even my backpack always held a copy of The Illuminatus! Trilogy. I tried to find one today – but I’ll get to that. First...

On my first day in the guest house, a young woman named Susan from behind the counter shouted at me to get away and not ask her anymore questions. I was crestfallen – we’d had a minor exchange with one another earlier on and I thought she was very nice, and perhaps I’d said or done something that made her upset? I

cannot even tell you where my mind took me as to why she shouted at me like that – [the wheel of samsara](#) is VERY strong within me, much as I am trying to work to “reverse the wheel” on a daily basis with a meditation I recently learned while reading [Pema Chodron’s](#) “When Things Fall Apart” called [tonglen](#). I retreated, I meditated, I came up with some idea of where she might be coming from, having people ask you questions all day and generally the same ones over and over again – and I breathed compassion and light towards her.

The next day I headed to Laos and made [my visa run](#). After first leaving Thailand, entering Laos, and then going to the Thai Embassy, I made my way to a hotel with two young women from the UK (each aged 27 (which equals 9, but we’ll get to that later) and wide-eyed as I explained [Saturn Returns](#) to them later over dinner, chuckle) I decided to shower and then go shopping. I bought a hot pink handbag for myself and thought it would be nice to get one for Anna, the other desk girl, because she’d really been very helpful in elucidating the steps of making this visa run. I thought to myself, “I’ll get something for Anna but nothing for Susan,” and then I thought, “well, you know, that’s not very [compassionate](#). Perhaps you need to find something for her because she clearly needs a friend.”

I walked the marketplace until a small stuffed dog called out to me. It really did seem to say, “I belong to Susan,” and so I paid 30,000 kip for it (\$1.30 US) and put it in my bag. I got back to Thailand, eventually, and gave Anna the bag and Susan the dog, and Susan was overwhelmed with gratitude and began to cry about what a hard job she had and what a hard time she’d been having and how sorry she was and had wanted to say something but thought I would rebuke her and hadn't bothered to address it with me sooner. She played with the dog for a minute then asked me to hold him while she went to the bathroom. I held the dog and turned it over – a small tag on the bottom read “23.”

I chuckled. Clearly this was working out. But then a Great Big Pile of Chaos ensued. I mean, chaos just so weird that I haven’t even posted it to the private blog.

I want to tell you the details but it's all really too sordid and bizarre and that went on for three days before last night, when I finally went and talked to someone about it all, namely Susan & Anna, who told me all kinds of strange things about the guest house where I am staying, but primarily that it attracts every lunatic in SE Asia. I realized someone who'd been stalking me (a woman, also 23) but never made her intentions clear was a [borderline sociopath](#) (don't ask me to unpack how I know that, it would take forever) I was verbally attacked then sexually attacked by a woman who I thought was *really* just my friend, and I got into a crazy situation where someone tried to sell me an underage girl – it was [gonzo](#). I finally retreated to my room and today walked the streets of Nong Khai to clear my head – and this is what I found:

First thing in the morning, I spoke with a young woman tattoo artist who had just spent ten days on [Vipassanna](#) retreat in some [wat](#) near Bangkok and we agreed to meet later and talk about it. I walked the streets and ended up at my laundry place (number 23) that I'd discovered a few days before and turned in my wash. I walked past a bookstall and saw a Tattoo magazine and thought to buy it for this woman (everything is so cheap here, it's easy to give people presents) and it was Volume 23. I bought it, but started to feel uneasy. I walked to a children's charity to see about volunteering for a bit but no one was there, and I realized at that point that the toothache that arrived yesterday was getting worse so I went to a pharmacy. They suggested an anti-inflammatory and the price was 23 baht. Right. Okay.

I went to a bakery and ordered a bottle of water to swallow the pills and a bus passed by: Number 23. I shuddered and looked at the clock – it was analogue and the little hand was on the 2 and the big hand was on the 3. I looked away and saw the Intersection: Soi #2, Road #3. And that's when I just said "Enough already" and began composing this letter to you in my head...

I recently became familiar with a word that I like quite a lot: [Apophenia](#), which I found while searching around for the 23 Enigma. I chuckled at that, because the

description of the word sounds quite a lot like what Western psychiatry terms [“magical thinking,”](#) thinking a classic symptom for a manic-depressive. {Is everyone here aware I’ve been off-med since Burning Man?} I immediately posted the link to a friend and stuck it in my gmail status and sorta forgot about it, but now, it was becoming part of an understanding about...something. I wasn’t quite sure what. I wandered through the market and found a street stall selling some kind of balm for toothaches and I bought it. I stopped off at a store for cigarettes and met a German man who told me all kinds of crazy things about what’s going down in Cambodia right now with Thaksin and at some point I pulled out the creme and he said, “Toothache? You need cloves or clove oil,” and I did recall that this was a classic herbal remedy, but where was I going to find cloves in Thailand?

I walked back to the guest house. I asked the owner for the Thai word for clove or for the location of an apothecary or herb store. He drew a blank on both – the man is as mad as a hatter and possibly [Asberger’s](#), but that’s another story. I wandered over to the Italian restaurant/book store to see if the man I’d met that morning, a fellow named Anthony, was around. He was not and the woman behind the counter knew English and Thai and pulled the word from a dictionary and wrote it for me in phonetic Thai and Thai script and told me to go back to the marketplace. Just for fun, I asked her her age. 23. Just then, Anthony walked in and said he had cloves in his kitchen. While I was waiting on him, I looked over the bookshelves and I found a copy of the Illuminatus! Trilogy in Danish. The price was 230 baht. I was about to leave and I saw a pile of books that had a sign on them, “Not Yet Ready, Do Not Touch” and I saw what looked like a very well thumbed copy of “Techgnosis: Myth, Magic & Mysticism in the Age of Information” by a fellow named [Erik Davis](#). And so, I went to my room (23) and got my computer and began to write to you all.

Here are my questions and you can choose to answer them anyway you like, meaning a) not at all, b) with short terse words that tell me you thinking I’m wasting my time and yours, c) long-form, with little anecdotes of your own

perhaps, d) to everyone on the list, or e) just to me personally. This piece, of course, is going to the blog, so if you don't want your comments to end up there, please say so, but really, I need a few answers here.

What is/was Discordianism, as best as you can recall?

Is it a pseudo-religion made up by Wilson? ([The Principia Discordia](#) was attributed to him, I believe) (actually, it was written by Malaclypse the Younger, whose real name is [Greg Hill](#),) thanks to excellent research by my boyhood friend Jimmy F.)

Is the number 23 or the corresponding Law of Fives present in any legitimately recognized system or strain of Western Hermetic Magick?

Did [H.P. Lovecraft](#) play any part in the formulation of the Law of Fives?

Are these just totally absurd questions?

Bottom line: Is #23 the sign that you're on the right track – or the wrong one?

love & quisses

warm regards & loving kindness

peace out

gregoryp(tm)

TRACK THREE: THE JOURNEY TO NONGKHAI

mid-February, 2010

Searching for clarity in Thailand is not always easy. In fact, on a lot of levels it's downright impossible, and I'm sure that a saner man would've given up by now. Let me share an example from the past couple of days:

Two days ago, I was in search of an apartment, as I have decided to stay in Nong Khai to continue working on a series of writings that I began in August of 2009, while still in the United States. I finished a major section of this work on December the 21st, ([Winter Solstice](#), a fine "[coincidence](#)", eh?) From there I retired to [Koh Tao](#) for a week to learn to SCUBA dive, a lifelong dream that I was quite happy to fulfill, and which I've written about extensively on the private blog and in letters to friends around the world thanks to the Internet. I fell in love with Koh Tao, and made plans to stay there and resume the work, but once I had the place fully networked with a hut with wifi, knowledge of cheap local food and a favored bar and beach, I had a rather unfortunate incident of a tiny scratch on a motorbike that I had rented using my passport as collateral.

The resulting demand for money was absurdly out of touch with the reality of the actual damage, and I refused to pay it. The local police confiscated the passport,

then offered to ransom it back to me for a lesser sum but it was still more than I had and more than I thought I should have to pay. [An elaborate magickal ritual](#) was then considered, planned, and executed - this has also been written about and may be eventually be revealed - and I felt fairly certain it would all work out. It did, of course, but not nearly as conveniently as I had planned.

The short story is that I returned to Phuket, where I had been living from October - December, contacted a friend at the US State Department and was put in touch with the head of American Citizens Services at the US Embassy, who told me without question that I should travel to Bangkok immediately to get a new passport. Riding to the bus station on the back of a motorbike taxi, I happened to read the back cover of Pema Chodron's excellent book "When Things Fall Apart," which instructs us not to shy away from difficult situations but to approach them with "friendliness and curiosity."

Thus, at the last possible moment, I switched gears and directions and instead of boarding a bus to [Bangkok](#) I boarded a boat back to Koh Tao with the intention to just pay them whatever they wanted for the original passport. In the interim period since my departure and re-arrival, the bill dropped from 12,000 baht (around \$360 US dollars and about half of my monthly budget) to 4000 baht (around \$120) and while I wasn't explicitly asked to leave the island, I was asked when I was leaving the island and I sadly boarded the next boat back to Bangkok.

Needless to say, I was rather crushed by the whole experience (in Phuket, actually, at the height of my frustration, I actually threw a chair at some know-it-all ex-pat who dressed me down for ever giving my passport to anyone at all) and my advice really is, "Don't ever do it unless you're in an airport or an embassy," but it is fairly common practice in Thailand to do so, and not all that uncommon (as I learned the very hard way) to be forced to pay A LOT to get it back.

Crushed as I was, I briefly considered bagging Thailand entirely and going to

India to see [Kumb Mela](#), the largest religious gathering in the world, that involves 60 million people dancing and bathing in [the Ganges](#) in a northern city called [Haridwar](#), but as I stood in line at the Embassy of India to apply for a visa with time running out on my Thai visa, I decided to make a border run to Laos for a new visa and then return to Bangkok and decide from there.

In Nong Khai, however, on the Thai-Laos border, I fell in love. There are a million good reasons to like this place, and perhaps the predominant one is that it is a proper Thai town that isn't especially catering to tourists and I like that. Another major reason to stay is the Mekong River, which according to Thai belief (attributed to Buddhism but perhaps pre-existing from even earlier influences) the Mekong is populated by the nagas. [Nagas](#) are the dragon-like creatures that surround the head of the meditating Buddha and while at first I simply heard that "the naga" lives in the Mekong, I have since come to discover that Thais really believe there are a school of many many nagas swimming around in the Mekong, each one measuring about one meter long. This goes a long way towards explaining why Thais are actually quite terrified of being in the Mekong, except in very shallow patches safe from the rushing current in the middle.

All of that was completely unknown to me on the day I decided to stay here and finish the work I intended to finish in Koh Tao, when a farang friend and I decided to walk to a shallow section of the Mekong that the Thais have designated as "a beach." It is a marvelous place, this beach, a real third-world affair just to the immediate west of the [Friendship Bridge](#) which connects the nations of Thailand and Laos, complete with tons of makeshift bars and restaurants and people plucking guitar and sitting in inflatable inner tubes, but we were the only farangs there on a day when the place was otherwise packed and I decided to do something that struck me as perfectly natural but which quickly turned me into something of a local legend, among farangs to some degree but most certainly among the Thais as well.

Handing off my wallet to my friend, I walked into the Mekong fully clothed (Thais do not swim shirtless, neither men nor women, they are both a very modest people in general and they also don't like being furthered darkened by the sun) and I proceeded to float down the middle of the Mekong, suspended between two nations, for the 5km journey back to my guest house, which also sits on the river. To say it was among the most spiritual experiences of my entire life may, in fact, be an understatement, and though I have been fortunate enough to have a lifetime of really generous spiritual moments, well, this was surely in the Top Three. I did [tonglen meditation](#) as I floated, first on my back and then, as the current grew stronger, treading water and with my head bobbing just above the surface. Pema Chodron taught me tonglen, but a friend augmented the practice for me, so I just focused on my breaths, "breathe in pain and suffering, breathe out love and compassion" and I dropped into [trance](#) state fairly quickly in what was about a 40 minute experience that was really quite sensational.

All along the way, Thais burst from their river-side homes to watch me and wave, shouting at me in Thai words I could not understand, but whose tones suggested both fear and awe. Emerging from the river dripping wet, I was greeted with a cocktail by the man who runs my guest house and together we watched the sun set behind the Friendship Bridge over the River Mekong, and later, we played YouTube DJ all night long and it was a glorious time to be alive.

TRACK FOUR: "IS THERE A GHOST IN THIS APARTMENT?"

February 7, 2010

After I emerged dripping and stinking from my journey in the Mekong and decided to remain in Nong Khai, I quickly discovered that deciding to stay and finding a place that suits has been another matter entirely. Prices for apartments near my guest house are absurdly high, for they are mostly populated by farangs, but a few nights ago I got a tip from an ex-pat Englishman who has been here awhile and finds my project interesting, to explore the riverside area between the Market and the Chedi. Having not yet seen the Chedi anyway, I invited a friend along and rented a motorbike (leaving a driver's license this time) and headed off towards it.

The Chedi...well, it's magnificent, quite simply, but along the way I was drooping from hunger and heat and I pulled over suddenly when I saw a sign which read "999." 9 is an auspicious number in Thailand, as it is the sum of [108](#), and three 9s are 27 and the sum of that is, well, 9, and there was a restaurant there with the telltale baskets that serve up Kow Niou ("[sticky rice](#)") and sizzling gai (chicken) on the barbeque. Pleasantries were exchanged in both English and Thai and my friend and I soon had an outrageous meal in front of us, of gai, kow niou, som tam, ([papaya salad](#)) nam jim (a salsa) and a bag of hoy (snails) for 65 baht (around \$2US) and I told the woman I wanted to eat there every day and I began my apartment search from there.

A number of places were looked at and discarded because of price, proximity to raucous lady bars, and lack of Internet, but I finally found a place that seemed rather dreamy - a street-level place with a giant kitchen area with a 'fridge and a desk, as well as a big bedroom with a lovely quilt on the bed, fan, air-con, (which I rarely use but is nice just in case), a huge television, cable that included CNN & BBC and hot water AND wireless Internet, for 5000 baht a month (\$150US.) Added into the deal - if I lived there, the owner would rent me a motorbike (license plate 986, equals "23") for 100 baht a day. (\$3US.) It seemed certain I would take it, but I needed another day to make sure and I promised to return the following day.

I woke up the next morning at the Mut Mee Guest House and wandered into the garden, one of the loveliest places to write I've ever been in, quite frankly, but with an overload of tourists, transients, ex-pats and what have you and hardly a place to get anything done. Like [the Aztec](#) used to be really, a kind of communal living room where people drink coffee all day and beer all night, and the Internet connection is the most unreliable one I've ever encountered in my entire time in Thailand.

I decided at some point to stop being mad about what I didn't like about the place (chaos & bad Internet, with the latter being the real deal-breaker) and to just move out, and as I drank my coffee and had my first cigarette, I ran into Michael, my best friend here, an extraordinarily gentle man from Toronto who came to Thailand four years ago and stayed in Nong Khai to meditate on the Mekong. He was smiling at the table with nothing before him, he neither drinks coffee nor alcohol and he's a vegetarian and he has just the dreamiest blue eyes you'd ever want looking into yours, and he has made a marvelous life for himself living on next to nothing and doing even less. He says that he finally plans to return to North America in the middle of March, and I honestly feel it will eat him alive, but he is optimistic about his chosen career on his return, which is to work with special

needs children - particularly those afflicted with autism and other [spectrum disorders](#).

Michael was humming "[Suite Judy Blue Eyes](#)" by CSNY and the two of us spontaneously burst into song. One of the great rock songs of the 1960s, it talks about a woman who has hold of a man's heart and makes it so hard, something I resonate with rather deeply - and perhaps so can you. Certainly he seemed to also and when we got to the end (the "doo-doo-doo-doo-doo" part) we started rolling in a fit of hysterics, and when the laughter subsided I looked at him and said,

"You know, I'm going to look at an apartment today and I think I'm going to take it."

I described the place to him and he said he knew it, located on a small soi off the riverside road behind the Isaan television station.

"All those rooms are great," he agreed, "except Room 2. It's inhabited by a Hungry Ghost."

I felt my eyes widen, a little taken aback.

"Well, what do I do if they offer it to me?"

"Ah, they wouldn't do that - they couldn't possibly rent it out, not even to a farang."

What little I know about [Hungry Ghosts](#) is that, when a Buddhist person dies, (at least in this country) the spirit hangs around for 49 days or so and then returns ("re-incarnates") into a new body. It could become either human or animal or insect, depending on that person's karma from this lifetime and previous ones, but there are times when someone's karma is so screwed up that they do not incarnate

at all and instead become a Hungry Ghost, locked forever in some sort of purgatorial state where they feast on the souls of living humans. (I have since learned, actually, that there is an entire pantheon of ghosts in Thailand, including something called a "Beautiful Ghost" that seduces living men into doing their bidding, but I'll save that for another time.) This is just one of the reasons why modern Thais have a deep-seated fear of "old houses" and often tear them down, as it is believed by some that Hungry Ghost are happiest in wooden houses on stilts – and this was your modern concrete block construction type place, an absurd building material in the tropics – but perhaps one a lot less likely to be infiltrated by Hungry Ghosts.

I got on the motorbike and headed over to the apartment complex. The man greeted me warmly and led me straight to Door #2 and I must admit, I felt a little faint. I toured the place and it really seemed just perfect for what I wanted, very cheery and lovely, but then again...

"Sonofabitch, Michael," I thought to myself. "I need to talk to him, now."

I asked the man outright: "Is there a ghost in this apartment?"

He looked at me and then laughed, either not understanding what I was saying or understanding full well and not letting on. He found someone else who had better English, but the word "ghost" was lost on him also, and I tried to say "phii" which is the Thai word for "spirit" in one tonality, but there are five different tones and each one has a totally different meaning and of course, I don't have the correct one handy yet.

A Brief Expository on the Thai Language

There are five tones in the Thai language, and each Thai word has five different meanings based on the tone in which it is spoken. Take the word "suay," for

example. Say it like "su-wai," and it means "beautiful," a word that's nice to keep handy when you meet a pretty lady or want to make your waitress blush or whatever. Say it like "su-way" and you are saying "unlucky", and while the Thais generally know what you mean because you're a farang and they're used to you screwing up their language all over the place, the tonal quality of a word and your inability to say it right can make for some confusion.

/language lesson

Back at the guest house that I wanted to rent, the way I was saying "phii" ("pee") means brother, and I guess they may have thought I was asking if there was a brother in the apartment or if I could have a brother in the apartment, or lord really knows what they thought, but by the end they were just laughing and I was standing there feeling slightly embarrassed by the entire exercise.

I really hope you are laughing by now. I certainly am, as I sit here on the Mekong swatting mosquitoes and enjoying my favorite Thai cocktail, a non-alcoholic blend that both Thais and farangs alike find fascinating - mineral water and ice and lime and something called ["Em-Roy-Ha-Sip"](#) (M-150 in English) a kind of supercharged Red Bull that tastes like orange cough syrup and which tuk-tuk drivers gulp by the liter (at least you hope they are, for otherwise they are dropping [yaa-baa](#), and that can make for a really wild ride back to your guest house.)

Now, perhaps you're wondering why I was even concerned in the first place as to whether or not the place was inhabited by a ghost from another culture, Hungry or otherwise, but the fact of the matter is simple: as one who has decided that I not only believe in God but that I now believe in all of them, it is very important for me to take into consideration as much of the local [cosmogonies](#) as I can and to pay certain respects to all local deities (and Thailand has them all over the place, quite frankly) whomever they may be. Since I've been in Thailand, I have learned to [wai](#) the Buddha, of course, but also to wai [spirit houses](#) (a product of an

[animism](#) that probably originated in Indonesia and is at least 5,000 years old) and I have more than a passing acquaintance with [Garuda](#), (the bird deity who protects Thailand from evil and is in fact on the official national seal but who also served as the winged steed of [Ram](#), a major deity from the [Hindu](#) religion) and now, of course, the nagas - I was told flat out by one man that not only had I swam with the nagas but that I had certainly slid along their scaly back-sides as I floated.

Therefore - if a Hungry Ghost was indeed going to be living in my otherwise perfect apartment, I needed to know a few things, including:

- 1) Is there really a Hungry Ghost in this apartment?
- 2) Is he/she good or evil?
- 3) Regardless of his/her intent, am I meant to live here anyway to satisfy some greater need to further understand the remarkable intricacies of Thai culture, of which I have become quite fond?

I had already channeled a ghost once before, in my house on Bob Street in Santa Fe in the early '90s. One night I was writing away at my desk (stone-cold sober, by the way, i can't write a thing on even one beer) and I felt this sudden coldness in the room and felt something enter into me and concentrate its energies inside my head. Within minutes I was on the floor crying hysterically from pain and fear, feeling this extraordinary thing inside me, and friends came into the room to hold my hand as I lay down on the bed and forced myself to meditate to make it go away. I wasn't doing tonglen then, back then it was this third-eye sort of concentration thing that I picked up from one of the many weird books I read while living in San Francisco, and I just sent out [white light](#) in what I really thought was a vain attempt to make it go away. Oddly enough within about

twenty minutes it was gone and I was drenched in sweat and totally exhausted.

I later discovered that the previous tenant of the room was a late-stage AIDS patient who had purposely overdosed on heroin and died on the floor of that very room, but I tried my best to pretend it was a [migraine](#) because I didn't want to dwell on it too much or think about what it might mean if the scenario of ghosts and [channeling](#) were true. Sure, I was interested in the weird ideas of other people, but I certainly didn't really want them to be happening to *me*, I was a serious person then at the age of 23, and I wanted worldly success, not other worldly events, really, and so I conveniently forgot about it for years but I certainly remembered it while contemplating the prospect of trying to build [a sanctuary](#) and needing to feed a Hungry Ghost, all at the same time...

I took my questions back to Michael. I found him in the garden with an ancient farang named "[Krishna](#)" who lived in India for twenty years and dresses like the [Maharishi](#). (Yes, it is true, Thai culture actually makes more sense than most of the farangs who live here.) I asked, as I have learned to do from all the well-mannered Brits I meet here (who nevertheless as nearly all "Mad as a Box of Frogs," to quote another English phrase that I love quite dearly) if I could "have a word" with him and we quickly stepped into a quieter part of the garden.

I quietly explained the situation as best as I could. He sighed and said we definitely needed to check it out, so we jumped on the back of my motorbike and sang "Suite Judy Blue Eyes" at the top of our lungs as we darted through the sois and back to the apartment building on riverside. We arrived quickly and Michael greeted the man, then addressed him in astonishingly good proper Thai and everyone laughed and spoke rapidly at one another until Michael finally turned to me and said,

"It would be tremendously bad karma to rent an apartment with a Hungry Ghost residing in it, even to a farang. I felt the vibe in there and it really is quite cheery,

so if there is, in fact, a ghost, it may be quite helpful in what you're trying to do."

I breathed a tremendous sigh of relief, and yet still, I hesitated just a little. Fine, there was no ghost in the apartment and even if there was, my picture of it was quickly turning to [Caspar](#) rather than [Yog Shoggoth](#), and it seemed like it might be okay, but I told the man I still needed another day to think about it. I had promised Michael lunch anywhere he wanted if he came with me, and he took me to the cheapest place in town with the best vegetarian food and I got a lead on a gig teaching English ("Americans only") to a 5-year-old Thai girl for around \$50US a week, and as we exited the restaurant he turned to me and said, "Do you have to live between the Market and the Chedi? Is being near the Mekong really important to you?"

And I said, "No, actually, I could live in a small shack with a fan anywhere in Nong Khai so long as I could sort out the Internet issue," and he soon directed me to a place far beyond my wildest dreams - a traditional wooden house on stilts with enormous ceilings and many rooms that could have had a thousand Hungry Ghosts and I would still live there for less than 3000 baht a month (\$100US), wireless Internet included. Whether I get it or not is an open question, for Thailand does not move quickly - suffice to say its a constant adventure and I am more or less loving every minute of it.

love & quisses

- gregoryp(tm)

February 7, 2010

ps: Suffice to say, I did not get the house of my dreams and it's certainly just as well - it was incredible and romantic and amazing, but the landlady was an American [Scorpio](#) with a [Leo](#) rising and I am a [Pisces](#) with a Leo rising and while the attraction was immediate (as it always is with that combo in my experience) I

knew instantly that we would either fall in love or we'd kill each other, (we were, in fact, at loggerheads from the moment we met) so when she told me that it was already promised to someone else, I was sorta relieved. The question of where I will live and where I will spend my 40th birthday (on the 20th) is really quite an open question at this point, but Thailand and her mysteries continue to provide me with incredible food for thought and I think I'll be here awhile. Maybe.

A Lesson in Thai Culture: How to Remove a Hungry Ghost from Your New Apartment (In Case You Have a Need in the Future)

I recently learned that Thais just naturally assume that any dwelling that has been empty for any length of time is surely inhabited by at least one ghost, and there is an elaborate ritual for its removal. First, you must build or buy a [spirit house](#). Then take it to a wat and have it blessed by a monk, an act which involves some incantations and water being tossed on you and the spirit house. Dry the spirit house in the sun and take it inside the dwelling and festoon it with [garlands](#) and "feed it" with food and lit cigarettes to entice the ghost to go inside. After some length of time (unknown at the moment, but Nine Hours might be a reasonable guess) carefully pick up the spirit house and take it outside and place it on a pedestal. Now you have your very own ghost inside your spirit house, which is now your responsibility to feed, burn incense around, and wai to when you leave or enter the house. Mission accomplished. You may now move in.

5) Literary Outlaw: A Journey to Isaan

February 14, 2010

Source music: ["Where is My Mind?" by the Pixies](#)

"May you live in interesting times." - [Lao Tzu](#)

"If society treats you like a criminal, you better be prepared to act like one." -

[William S. Burroughs](#)

"To be great is to be misunderstood." - [Elvis Presley](#)

Two days ago, I made an early morning executive decision to try my level best to do...nothing. I wanted a typical boring tourist day, and so I decided that I would a) read a book until its completion, and b) get out of the Mut Mee garden, so as to avoid the many distractions that fellow travelers have to offer me. I de-camped to Rudy's German Bakery, an ex-pat coffee shop in Nong Khai, and ordered a coffee and a danish and settled in with a book that would no doubt give me interesting food for thought, - a book called "[The Dice Man](#)," by Luke Reinhardt, about a psychiatrist who gambles it all away with a pair of dice, making all decisions based on the roll of the dice, allowing him to give free reign to his [subconscious](#) desires. I had never read the book - friends read it in college and raved about it at the time, but I was too busy reading the Wilsons (Robert Anton & [Colin, Leary](#), Burroughs, etc. to bother with something so current.

The book had been picked up by Lana in the bookstore one day while we were paired, (however briefly) and left "accidentally" (she said) in my room the morning after our only sexual encounter. At first I thought it meant that I **must** read it, then I discarded that notion, deciding I would avoid it completely, but then the morning came and I realized it was a choice between that, re-reading "When Things Fall Apart," or taking a stab at "12th Step Buddhism" and I decided, what the hell, it might be funny, and for the first 54 pages it certainly was.

I had a lot on my mind, as I have had since the day I was told that a publishing house in the mid-west (of all places) actually wanted to **publish** the strange little text called SubDrop which really began as a long-form suicide note. So many questions were bouncing around in my mind, primarily as to whether or not I wanted to publish such a thing at all. Surely, anyone who knew me personally knew I was a total party animal and sexual opportunist, the former role which I had

really tried my level best to avoid, the latter which I had pursued since the age of 17 at least with incredible zeal, and had, more or less succeeded, though through the narrative unfolding that makes up SubDrop I had certainly learned that while I loved seduction and the temporal intimacy and power that has happened in the course of my many affairs with both women and men, that there really are limits to my sexual appetite and that there really are people out there with much stranger sex lives than my own.

And I was mostly thinking about Burroughs' words, displayed above, recalling that it was one of the things that Burroughs had to say to me in my early 20s that really rang true, but now on the cusp of publishing an explosive text about just how weird my life could be, it just sounded really hollow and ridiculous. It's one thing to want to be a "[literary outlaw](#)" at the age of 25 and joke with your friends about how you'll set the world on fire with the things you want to write about - it's another thing entirely to actually write such a thing and then go through with it. For after all, how did [Miller](#), Burroughs, [Ginsberg](#) and the rest of all those crazy people actually live? In a more or less permanent exile, wandering from country to country, occasionally stopping off to breathe and smoke [opium](#) with [Paul & Jane Bowles](#) in Tangiers - certainly, it sounded very romantic at the age of 25 to flit from one end of the earth to the other seeking both [enlightenment](#) and a way out of the limelight and a decent meal and a good lay (the latter of which, continues not to be such a problem, really, even if I limit myself to just seducing [gap year](#) travelers from Europe & North America) but while I had certainly burned every bridge and had no good reason to ever return to New Mexico other than to see my step-father, my own work had showed me that there was a very real part of me that wanted both some kind of "normal middle class" stability with a loving single partner and a chance at some kind of family and a place in the community of other normal humans.

Bollocks.

By now I was aware that this seemed not to be my path - after moving at a snail's

pace for fifteen years, I had more or less decided (without dice, I never got around to even trying craps during my gambling addiction) to let loose the reins and write about reality as I actually live it, and oddly enough, some strange little publishing house found what I was saying so interesting that they decided to pick it up less than six weeks after I finished it. A document that I had initially viewed as a complete piece of crap and by this time really believed was, in fact, an outstanding example of America literature, (not new at all, I was standing on the shoulders of giants, they just didn't have Blackberries and facebook) but I still needed time to think it over, and I decided just to stay offline, not listen to anyone from my VAST CIRCLE OF FRIENDS on the Internet for One Whole Day, and just lose myself in the work of someone other than myself.

But it was not meant to be.

I was on page 54 (sum = 9, giggle) when a man seated at the table opposite me began to talk to me. He was drinking cola and adding to it from a clear plastic bottle of liquid that looked exactly like urine, and which I correctly assumed (later confirmed when he offered me some) was [Sang Som](#), the devil's whiskey of Thailand. It was barely noon and it seemed certain that he'd been drinking 'round the clock for days, stopping here and there for a nap, perhaps, in whatever hovel he called home, and yet, like any really hard-core alcoholic (many of those that i have met, certainly, especially around here) he was lucid and intelligent and clearly had a handle on a great many topics of interest to me, including the Thai language and a certain slice of its culture. I was already thinking that perhaps I would abandon "The Dice Man" in the middle of the day and go off and find a beginner's text on learning proper Thai, when he moved over to my table to join me and we began to talk about him, Thailand, the culture, the language, Thaksin and a great many other topics.

Henry J. was Norwegian and 45. He had come to Thailand in his early twenties when he met a Thai lady in Oslo and promptly married her. Together, they

moved back to Thailand where he acquired a job as an IT engineer for the United Nations, working officially for the government of Norway. He was a computer technician, essentially, but his job gave him security clearances, a good salary and a damn good reason to learn to speak real Thai, as well as Lao and the Isaan dialect. He could bounce between those and also English, Norwegian, French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese. He was, after all, European, as used to jumping across borders as I was to hitch-hiking to California or Boston, and in the days before [the Euro](#), he surely would have been the kind of person who knew the exchange rates of the various European nations off the top of his head. He had been an adventurer of sorts, before meeting the Thai lady, wandering around Europe doing this and that, and when he came to Thailand he was still young and had a lust for life, women, and the culture of South East Asia.

As our time together progressed, however, I would learn that he was now certainly unfit for either computers or the UN or the Thai police department (whom he eventually ended up working for) owing to a truly traumatic event that occurred when he was ordered to set up computers on a base somewhere near the Thai-Cambodian border and he was shot and captured by Khmer fighters and held and tortured for 14 days. Everyone talks about how ferocious and insane the Khmer can be, and in Henry J. I saw living proof of their insanity, whatever they'd done to him during that fateful fortnight had certainly ruined his chances at any kind of normal life in any other place but Thailand. He was well-aware that he suffered from [PTSD](#) and had read innumerable books about the topic but found that the only medicine that worked to keep the [flashbacks](#) and the nightmares at bay was alcohol, and though I myself was currently suffering a bit from own (albeit, garden variety [trauma](#), compared to his, anyway) and was seeking help from the local Western natural/energy healers floating around MutMee, I had to admit to myself that I had yet to find a real cure for the traumas that no doubt have ruled my life and there was really no good reason for me to pass judgment on his copious use of alcohol, since I had no other remedy to offer him.

He drank and talked, a boisterous man but clearly one with a kind and gentle

heart. That he was insane was clear to me immediately, but when he introduced me to his lovely Thai wife (a new one, the first one left him years ago and re-settled back in Norway with their two ha-sip/ha-sip (fifty-fifty) children) and glibly told me that while he had in fact paid a dowry of 400,000 baht for both her hand in marriage and her then 18-year-old [virginity](#), he was quick to point out that he had paid it in pure gold rather than cash because he knew they would simply spend it, “Thais are like children with money,” he said, between swigs of the Sang Som.

With the gold in hand, he explained, they could always use it as collateral on a loan, should things ever get dire, but that in the meantime he would more or less provide them with increased creature comforts and medical and food and things like that, because after all, his pension was 150,000 baht a month (around \$4500, an enormous pile of money in Thailand, by any stretch of the budget) and while he improved the house they were living in with a "proper farang bathroom" (and, as I would discover, a television the size of Manhattan, plus satellite uplinks and downlinks for 500 channels of shit in both English and Thai.) In fact, you could listen to both feeds simultaneously via headset, he and his pregnant child-bride spoon together at night watching the Discovery channel, his in English, hers in Thai) the family does in fact continue to work - cultivating rice as they have done for centuries, as well as acceding to the every absurd need and demand of this man, who was indeed kind-hearted but was most certainly an absurd, damaged, drunken abusive demanding lout on occasion. Perhaps often - I didn't stick around long enough to see.

Yes, indeed - my day was about to make a turn towards the weird, and while perhaps I should've stuck to the original plan and stayed and read my book (which was more or less a profound refutation of modern psychiatry and all it stood for, something I would no doubt enjoy) when he asked me if I would like to see "real Thailand" and have lunch with his family, I found that I could not refuse. We were loaded into a magnificent pick-up truck - brand new and with all the trimmings, the first automobile I had entered in months, quite frankly, and festooned around

the rear-view mirror were all the garlands of good luck that the Thais use in their cars, as well as a small Buddha statue that guarded the dashboard. I was introduced to the mother-in-law who asked for money for the lunch, but he immediately shushed her and said something sharp in Thai - the father-in-law spoke no English whatsoever and would've actively glared at me if he felt he could, but he did keep his mouth in a permanent frown the entire time I was there, and it rather quickly began to dawn on me that this was a variation on the equation of the Thai-Farang relationship - you CAN INDEED purchase not just a virgin, but a wife, not just a wife, but an entire family that you can call your own, but they don't have to like you and they don't have to respect you and my heart cried out in compassion for this poor broken man and this absurd "solution" that he had found for the demons in his heart and mind.

I asked many questions - he answered them well, about the garlands, the language, the culture. He gave me copious amounts of unsolicited advice of how to find "the right Thai woman" and how to keep her family happy - the irony of the reality and his advice were, as usual, filled with the kind of sharp and glaring contradictions that had followed me throughout Thailand, for while it was clear to me that this poor family had made an unfortunate choice in selecting this rich man from the West to be their son-in-law, they had no doubt made it, trading their virgin baby girl (who was just stunning, honestly) for 400,000 baht in gold and the privilege of living with this lunatic until he either died from overconsumption of alcohol or a car accident from driving drunk or they just simply killed him outright. His [aura](#) suggested to me that he didn't have very long to live - in the course of the afternoon he must've drunk two full bottles of Hong Thong, (another Thai whiskey) and though he kept offering me whiskey or beer, I was able to keep my senses together enough by refusing to be polite and just have one, telling him instead that liquor before nightfall always made me very sleepy and preparing a plan that would get me off the premises before the sun went down.

Of course, it took all day to really find the moral of the story, which was that if I

chose not to treat my own PTSD then I could most certainly find an end in a scenario like this one, locked far away from civilization and real friends in a remote Thai village watching television and playing (you guessed it) [Mafia Wars](#) on the Internet. He does it all day long, of course, though because he had a guest he instead wheeled out the gigantic tv and the kick-ass sound system from the bedroom to the living room and we talked and talked with various Thai music video channels as our backdrop. I got to see who [Ke\\$ha](#) is, finally, after seeing friends talk about her on facebook, and she really is a trashy little whore whom I'd love to hang out with and go shopping and dish on boring people with, which is probably what she's into most after performing, recording, and getting her rocks off by seducing and teasing an endless flow of young admirers, in the vein of [Madonna](#) in the early days before she got all serious about [tantric sex](#) and [yoga](#) and the [kabbalah](#), and that's certainly part of her sex appeal and current absurd popularity, because it certainly isn't about the music, which is trashy and funny and party animal like the [Beastie Boys](#) used to be before *they* got serious with [Bodhisattva Vows](#) and the [Dalai Lama](#), but the Beasties have managed to grow their music as they've grown up and I don't think this will be the case with her...but who knows, right?

Nevertheless - on the street in Nong Khai the mother asked me what I would like for lunch - clearly, she was prepared to make anything I requested, but of course, I wanted Isaan food, and said [laab](#) and som tam, and when the food arrived (they ate in the dining room, which I thought would be lovely, but Henry insisted we eat together in front of the television, far away from his bitter in-laws and his gorgeous and very pregnant wife) He, in fact, did not eat, said he got sick from Thai food and insisted that all his food be farang food and that he purchased every last bit of it from Tesco-Lotus (which is a terrifying place, frankly, quite like taking a teleportation device out of Thailand and back into the West in a flash. The place makes me nauseous and frightened, I've more or less determined that if I can't find it in a street stall I just simply don't need it. Though i may need to go back there soon to get voicemail installed on my Thai phone, an errand I dread and which I

hope to find some nice young gap year to take with me.)

The food was like a [psychedelic experience](#) - the beef laab was perfectly cooked, which is to say slightly raw and it was pungent with spice and the som tam literally made me feel faint it was so bloody great. I had asked for soda and the 9-months pregnant Thai wife named Nong boarded a motorbike to go get some, and she quickly returned with six bottles of it and a giant bag of nam keng (ice) in one hand while driving with the other (the Third World doesn't know the kinds of fears that we have in the West, let me assure you.) But by the time I was finished with it I was starting to get a rather intense bead on just how crazy and damaged poor Henry really is, despite his intelligence. Indeed as we were driving to his house, which is really in **quite** a remote area of Eastern Isaan, I became a bit nervous that there was no easy way to escape and I wondered if I might be stuck there for days on end or might have to pay someone to take me home, the thought actually occurred to me while we getting into the truck, "What the HELL am I doing, really? This is madness," but of course I too have become a bit fearless since entering the Third World again (it comes with the territory) and I went anyway, enticed by the food and whatever it was about "real Thailand" that he might have to show me.

Real Thailand is rural and poor, and the thickets of [eucalyptus trees](#) are destroying the water table, but what he wanted to talk about mostly was how not to get killed in Thailand, and at the top of his list (imagine) was that one should NOT be in [Udon Thani](#) on the 26th (of course.) No one knew what was going to happen, really, but it seemed certain to everyone that the Supreme Court would **indeed** rule against Thaksin and he would either do something on his own or the Red Shirts would march with or without him, because they need that money for the "revolution" or the coup or whatever it is that Thaksin has in mind, and whether or not it will involve mercenaries from Cambodia and the public support of [Hun Sen](#) is really an open question. But the fact is certain, he maintained that IF there was a public demonstration of support for Thaksin anywhere in the country, it

would certainly begin in Udon Thani and then spread to Chiang Mai and Bangkok, and that as a former police officer and UN official, he had pretty good reasons to know (or guess or extrapolate or make up, one never knows for certain around here about ANYTHING, EVER) that the police and the army would be called out (and that they were, in fact, already in place, waiting) and would certainly be ordered to fire into the crowd, something they would do rather gleefully because who really cares if the supporters of Thaksin die in a bloodbath on the streets?

"Will they shoot at farangs?" I wondered meekly, aloud, thinking again about how my beautiful wonderful mother had absurdly decided to fly into Udon Thani on the 26th to visit me.

"Of course not," he said, shaking his head. "Not on purpose. Everyone knows the country is bankrupt and that shooting a farang is like blowing up the [Ministry of Tourism](#) live on [CNN](#). If you happen to be there and a riot begins, just slip 200 baht to a policeman and I guarantee they'll protect you with their lives and get you out."

Note to self: When I get out of Isaan, call my mother immediately and have her change her flight date. Better to be safe than sorry. I hate riots, personally, they change your personality and force you to pick a side, there is no "objectivity" going on in the middle of a live riot, and with my luck I would surely pick the wrong side, caught up in the thrill of the moment, and would surely end up in jail or dead, or worse with [a very painful gunshot wound](#) that I'm sure I'd love to live to tell you all about, but honestly, the thought of ferreting my MOTHER in and out of that kind of madness was just a little bit too much for me to consider.

He told me these things as we drove around a lake surrounded by eucalyptus trees, that I believe are being grown to provide the Japanese with wooden chopsticks, (I fact-check nothing, it's nearly impossible to do so anyway with all the weird data and weird people around here, so they could be being grown to make wooden

[Legos](#) for the Danish bourgeoisie for all I know) and finally we made our way to a lovely little shop in the middle of nowhere, where he has a credit account and I had a bottle of Em-Roy-Ha-Sip and he picked up two more bottles of Hong Thong. We headed out of there and drove through an ornate entryway of an otherwise humble little soi and drove along very slowly.

Already I could hear the sound of a gentle drum beat followed by an equally serene bang of a hand gong, and we pulled into the driveway of a rather faded but very civilized looking wat, out in the middle of the rice paddies of Isaan. I was greatly relieved to be in such a place, and stepped out of the truck and tried to grasp a sense of the serenity and sanity that [Buddhism](#) has to offer, watching a very old monk beat the drum (boom. boom. boom. boom) and the sound of a gentle smiling monk a little bit younger than me hit the gong after four beats on the drum. My consciousness was locked on the [ritual](#) and I was rather hoping that it would never end and that this could be my final moment on an [Earth](#) that was clearly spinning out of control, that I could just ascend right fucking then and disappear from this [insane](#) reality that was now quite present every last place I looked, but eventually it was over and I just aimed to be in the moment with it, holding on to the calm I felt and hoping I could use it to carry me through for another day.

The young monk smiled at me as he put down his gong and Henry called out to me to come and sit down beneath a awning away from the drummers. I chose the floor, taking off my shoes as he spoke to two middle-aged Thai women who were sitting there also. Henry sat on a blue plastic chair and drank directly from the Hong Thong bottle, but still he was lucid in two languages simultaneously, talking and laughing with them and then translating for me while I sat and tried to find a toehold on the [Nirvanic](#) bliss that had held me when they played the drum and the gong.

I didn't see the older monk leave the drum but in but a moment he was seated directly behind me and he spoke something in Thai and Henry instructed me to

turn around, bow my head below the monk's head, place my left hand forward and my right hand against my forehead as if in a half-wai and I scooted forward reverently with the head bowed and the hands in place and just stared rather meekly into the eyes of the monk as he examined my hand and spoke in Thai or perhaps the Isaan dialect, a chanting prayer that was as handy to him as the national anthem is to me. Whatever he was saying was too quick or too ritualistic for Henry to bother to translate for me, and as he spoke he rapidly tied a yellow bracelet around my left wrist and occasionally made quiet spitting motions with his mouth as if to punctuate whatever he was saying.

The prayer took forever, honestly, and I was seated rather uncomfortably to begin with and began to shake from lack of balance and pure bewilderment at what was happening as I felt my entire body consumed by a transfusion of energy, similar to the physical sensation of a chill but it was very warm and comforting. Henry could see my discomfort and instructed me to shift my legs and the chanting-prayer continued, as I felt tears well up in my eyes and felt yet another level of grief leave me, vanish, perhaps, into thin air and perhaps forever, but there were still so many levels of [grief](#) for me to process, there seemed a bottomless well of it, I had tried my best to live a medicated life and feel nothing, when [the meds](#) were metabolized and I was more or less "stable" I had fought for normalcy in a lot of ways but quickly fell into all those weird patterns I touch on in SubDrop, drinking beer daily, (but not too much, I always told myself,) picking up a gram of coke every week or so to write into the night, and then all that weirdness with [the fucking gambling](#), and when I left the meds behind at [Burning Man](#) I had found myself open to every weird level of information on earth and moments like these just found me, glaring contrasts and unbelievably poignant moments and weird [spiritual experiences](#), just like before, back in the day, [1994](#), when I was really truly overwhelmed by all the data that came at me and I sought help from [psychiatry](#), but I had left all that behind now and was determined to stick with it, and as this beautiful [monk](#) spoke his prayer and looked into my eyes he seemed to know exactly what was going on, and as he finally tied off the string and burned the end

with a lighter, he took a long look into my hand and finally said something that Henry thought I should hear in my own language.

"The year you are 39 will be very hard," I heard Henry say. "But when you are forty, it will all change."

Tears began to roll down my cheeks. Without a doubt 39 had been the hardest year of my life and yet, there had been some kind of redemption when the Acquisitions Editor wrote to my agent and said, "The writing is phenomenal, we'll take it," and I thought about what it was **really** going to mean when everyone I had ever met was going to find out that I had really turned into an outlaw degenerate sex addict coke head alcoholic lunatic after all, they'd always suspected it was possible, if not likely, and now they could all walk away smugly with the knowledge that they'd been right after all, and they'd pour themselves a glass of wine and turn on American Idol or Project Runway or never wonder why US newspapers never carry news about any country but our own, they'd never even heard of [Copenhagen](#) and they didn't care in the slightest what it was about in the first place, but now they knew for certain that [Gregory Pleshaw](#) was a total fucking lunatic after all and that they were so much more content with their lives, they'd never taken those kind of insane risks in their lives and surely they were correct in not having done so, because they were now safe and comfortable in middle class suburbia and no, they'd never heard about what really happened in [Dubai](#) and it didn't fucking matter anyway because it was half a world away, didn't Beckham and one of the Spice Girls have a house there and what does it matter anyway that New York and London economists never gave a rat's ass about "[sustainability](#)" when they provided the funding for that behemoth, that Tower of Babel of [hubris](#), it wouldn't affect them in the slightest because they had [their pension funds](#) and their stability, and I just began to laugh a little inside, because really, it was all kinda going to hell in a handbasket and the image I'd tried so hard to project as a serious person was always a total failure, really, no one who got close to me ever thought I was part of the crowd, really, that's why they sought me out in the first

place and why I had so many great friends from all walks of life...

Or did I anymore? A mildly insane project of late had involved developing a list of people I thought were really my friends, to send light-hearted dispatches to about what I was seeing around here, and I found myself writing short notes to people asking if they were really my friends. It would reach a crescendo later on that night, when I found myself writing to people that really have a special place in my heart (like Elizabeth and Turi and [Chicken John](#)) all of whom I was certain for some reason were through with me. I ended up abandoning the project entirely the following day, when I logged into the Internet only to tell my agent to piss off for confusing me about some legal document I was supposed to sign that struck me as totally absurd, (a conflict that ultimately would lead to me losing the publishing deal entirely, an outcome that I actually do not regret in the slightest because I always thought SubDrop was a piece of shit anyway.)

"Please tell him that I am 39 now," I said, my voice barely above a whisper, and he did so and the monk looked directly into my eyes and said something in Thai and Henry translated again and he said, "He says that you must be very close to your birthday," and I simply said, "Eight days," and the monk smiled brightly and held my hand and said, "It's only a matter of time. Stay safe."

To say that I was profoundly moved - fuck it, words cannot describe it, it was sorta like spending your whole life rushing through a very confusing tunnel lined with television screens and catching only a snippet of every program that you'd ever watched and knowing instantly where it was going, which was absolutely nowhere, and then emerging into a beautiful place with a happy pond and plenty of friends to talk to about how good the world really was and how lucky we were to be living in it, and how from now on we'd spend all of our days rejecting the "natural" laws of capitalism as bastardized from [Darwin](#) and that instead of competing all the fucking time we'd share instead and see how that worked out. [Goddess](#), if I've ever had a vision of what heaven on earth looked like, that's what it would be, of

course, another naive vision by a simpleton like myself who *doesn't understand* the way the world "really works" despite every last text I'd read and every last person I'd talked to in my almost forty years on this ridiculous planet.

I was sad to leave the wat, honestly, and began to think that if I ever took up the robes of [Theraveda Buddhism](#) even for just a couple of weeks I would do it here, on this strange little soi in this strange little place deep in the heart of Isaan, and I made a mental note to hold onto Henry's number in case I ever wanted to do that, as it turned out he later friended me on facebook and I accepted his friendship, so surely I can find him again if I don't unfriend him from what I am certain are going to be copious invitations to play Mafia Wars, a global addiction that I have somehow managed to avoid.

A Short But Necessary Rant About Mafia Wars

You know, maybe it's because I am lucky enough to be too busy reading the news on the Internet and posting the links on twitter (my favorite Internet game, you should try it sometime, you might learn something and it's certainly entertaining) or writing awful screed like this that probably no one will ever read that I have, in fact managed to avoid sitting in front of the screen like a [zombie](#), click, click, click, finding ways to kill other people or score drugs or jump borders via the Internet or whatever it is people do in that game, I am smug enough to say that I have never played it and never plan to, that I have thus far avoided becoming interested in it at all, something I wish I could say was true for the rest of Western humanity, which when given **[a tool for communication and connectivity and information and news and inspiring ideas and possibilities](#)**, chooses instead to waste their privileged educations and their expensive toys on really doing nothing at all, alone in their houses, pretending to be "playing a game" when in reality, we are very close to the brink of something and you are really hiding like I am in Thailand or hiding like I used to do on cocaine and alcohol and gambling, hoping against all odds that it will all just simply go away.

But it won't. And you know it. Which is why you'll never read what I write, or indeed what anyone writes. You'll figure out a way to dismiss it all because you just can't be bothered knowing, because you feel like "there's nothing I can do" and perhaps you're right, perhaps there isn't, but if I told you to your face, ([like David Bowie did once](#) that you had FIVE YEARS left to live (it may not be that dire, but pretend for just a moment that it might be, [the Beats](#) were wrong and so was Bowie, but that's no reason not to consider the possibility that it might not happen anyway) and ask yourself this question: "What would I do if I knew for certain that I and the rest of the planet was five years away from total calamity, chaos, and death?" And if your answer is "I would hang around my shit-hole apartment with a [crappy job](#) and spend all my off hours playing Mafia Wars and watching "[reality](#)" [tv shows](#) rather than stripping down every last [neurosis](#) I possess and even selling my ass if I had to live the life I always wanted to live," well, then, I suppose humanity is even less interesting than I have always imagined it to be.

Madness, but I'm just making up for lost time - if you had any idea what happens when a diagnosed [manic-depressive](#) actually decides to stop taking the fucking meds and just live life in the way his diseased body demands, you would know for certain that I may, in fact, be quite crazy by your ridiculous standards of sanity, but you would also know that I really DO have BALLS the size of BRASS COCONUTS, and I honestly wish you did as well. If one-tenth of you were willing to do what I'm attempting to do, (I really do live in rather constant fear that I'll fail and will have to live in exile in [Cerrillos](#) for the rest of my life) we MIGHT have the opportunity to turn this shit around, but it requires openness and [honesty](#) (as much as you can muster, I become more honest with each passing day to the point where I can only keep friends for three or four days before they go stark raving mad and take a night-train to Bangkok or the islands or Laos or *anywhere* to get away from the irresistibly ridiculous things I have to say to them.) I exaggerate, of course - most of the people I meet at the Mut Mee Guest House are on their way to somewhere else anyway, and may decide, (as the lovely gap year that I seduced into holding me last night as I cried over the total lack of **intimacy**

that I crave so intensely got the better of me, AGAIN) once meeting me, that they're going to stick around a lot longer than they intended.

Jonathan, the perfectly polite British ex-pat who owns the Mut Mee Guest House, is currently talking to new guests about how insane he is. Goddess, I love the man, though I keep wondering when he's going to ask me about my bill. I have been here for over three weeks and so far, no one has said anything about when I'm going to leave and when I'm going to pay and no one seems the slightest bit concerned. Adam, the bar-tender, said that in the entire twenty years Jonathan has run this place, he claims that there have been only two runners on the bill and that one came back guilt-ridden days later, apologized tearfully to Jonathan and paid the bill in full. I have no idea if it's true or not - I know nothing in Thailand - and I don't know if Jonathan is wealthy (he claims he is not) or just mad, but the level of trust around here is really astonishing, and by all accounts, it actually WORKS.

Try that on for size, America. Just savor it in your mouths for ten minutes and imagine what it really tastes like, to trust and help and offer and give, to create a medical system in a very poor country where even a rich farang like myself (we're all rich here, and don't you ever forget it) can go to in the middle of the night with an extremely painful tooth ache, (brought about by personal neglect, certainly, but also a ridiculous "health care" system from my own country) and receive a) care from a REAL doctor who speaks Excellent English, b) a two-week supply of ibuprofen 400, anti-biotics and 20 5mg tablets of [diazepam](#) for less than THREE FUCKING DOLLARS and maybe you'll begin to re-think your ABSURD DECISION that [socialism](#) is a "dirty word."

/rant

Or just go back to playing [Mafia Wars](#).

By the time we left the wat, I was already totally overwhelmed by both Henry's bizarre circumstances and what the monk had to say to me, and now I actually had

an artifact around my wrist to prove that it all actually happened. I was really ready to go back to the safer confines of the Mut Mee garden, the Thailand I was in now was really quite something but I was starting to feel outside my comfort zone (which is really saying something, isn't it?), but Henry asked me if I wanted to meet his wife's grandmother, who lived nearby. Certainly, I wanted to, of course, and though it made my trip to Isaan complete, I really rather wish that I had begged off and simply said "no," and that I was tired and would he please take me back, but at that point I just thought it would be nice to meet some nice old Thai woman and perhaps have a cup of tea. "She really likes visitors," he said, "especially farangs," and I sort of expected a wizened old lady who'd be quite pleasant to meet, but THIS IS THAILAND, and I really should've known it was going to be weird and twist my head around again ever further, but soon we were in front of a tiny little wood and tin shack and I was getting out of the car with my best smile and my tenderest wai.

She sat outside (with the rest of the family, it was the middle of the week and towards the end of the day, but clearly they had been there all day with nothing to do in particular, I didn't even spy a television which Thais wheel outside and more or less watch day and night, outrageously funny variety shows with lots of physical comedy and pratfalls that even a farang can laugh at, very spooky and bizarre soap operas where there's always a plethora of ghosts and dead ancestors and family members making the occasional appearance like a [deus ex machina](#), and endless talk and singing shows that remind one of American television in the early 1970s) but they were all more or less loafing in the heat beneath a thatched awning, and all were more or less clustered around her, the aged one. She looked an easy ninety but I later found out she was 76, she was so wrinkled and gnarled with age and her limbs were thin as sticks and she really quite honestly looked like an alien or a reject from a Hollywood zombie movie. It's unkind to say so, certainly, for there was a faint trace of a twinkle in her eyes, but as I wai'd her gently and she wai'd me back I saw that her hands were clearly twisted up with what looked like a really nasty case of some really terribly degenerative bone disease. She could not

walk and would need to be carried inside later, I was told by Henry, and she spent her days on the very spot on which I saw her, surrounded by family and friends from the village, but certainly just waiting to die. And I felt really quite alarmed by her presence, but tried my best not to show it and simply sat beside her and wai'd and said "Sawatdee Krab," and for the first time since I have been in Thailand I was really GLAD I do not speak Thai or Lao or Isaan because then I might've been compelled to talk to her, and lord knows what she might have said to me.

Henry took a chair near the ledge that we were sitting on, and proceeded to introduce me to everyone around, who all wai'd politely and smiled to see yet another rich farang who might appear in the community and provide a daughter and a family with some Western-style largesse. Henry, for his part, had not only improved the lot of his own "family", you see, but had also purchased a slew of trash cans and had taught them all how not to mess up the place with garbage just strewn about everywhere. Had he not been busy drinking himself to death, a man with his intelligence and money could've surely done a great deal more to improve the lot of those within the community. But for now all eyes rested upon me as the next great farang saviour and I hoped we could get out of there quickly before someone offered me their daughter or their sister to become my new Thai wife. Seated there I knew two things for absolute certitude - one, that I could not ever consider purchasing or somehow acquiring a Thai wife because I might end up here like Henry, slowly killing myself with drink and being alienated and alone. And two, that my fantasies of going to some remote Thai village and being a teacher or something equally noble would surely drive me very quickly to the former option and it was no longer an acceptable idea AT ALL, even as the women are very beautiful and submissive and attend to your every need. Even if they did not kill me outright (as some of the stories suggest) the alienation and loneliness and despair of such a place would surely drive ME to drink and screw every woman in the village before I just fell apart completely, and for the first time since I was in Thailand I actually felt really truly homesick for the West, with its order and rules and rigidity and clear boundaries, for in Thailand there really are

none at all. Cambodia, I hear, is even worse, and I have pretty much decided never to go there, yet anyway, for if Thailand is a country without limitations for the vagaries of the Western mind, then surely I had to make ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN that I had a few limitations of my own before I ventured any deeper into the core of southeast Asia.

And I had a few, already - I had recently been offered the services of a 14-year-old girl for 1000 baht (\$30 US) for the night and I had politely refused, and I had also been offered a month of services (cooking, cleaning, sex, sodomy, anything I could want, I imagine) of a comely 26-year-old who probably had years on the Game and would fulfill my wildest fantasies for an entire month for a mere 10,000 baht (\$300 US) and I refused that also. Needless to say, I had displayed some morality in the minor whoring I had done so far in Isaan, picking mostly women in their 30s or above and making sure they could speak English and being as tender with them as I wanted them to be with me, and I had the pleasant fortune of seeing them later in the street and having them greet me as someone they would want to see again, but I was trying to abandon all that, honestly, trying to find a way to deal with my mind and heart's terrible need for greater [intimacy](#) with another human being by trying only to speak with women from my own culture, not just to save money but perhaps to "[save face](#)" in some way, in the West it just isn't uncommon at all to have a few drinks with a stranger and end up sleeping with them, but no money is ever exchanged and very few of those people have any expectation that it's anything more than a casual fling that might last a few days or a week or even a month, but not one of them ever has any wish or expectation that you'll marry them or take care of their children and parents for the rest of your natural life, and despite the fact that I had toyed with the idea of having a [submissive](#) "toy" girlfriend in the West, where that's sort of devious and breaking the rules, in Thailand it IS the rule and I no longer felt a desire to break it. I wanted Real Intimacy with a Real Person and yet that is rather hard to find here, it's as valuable a [commodity](#) here as it is in the West and perhaps it isn't even a commodity at all, but instead an impossible dream that would never be fulfilled, by me, perhaps - or

perhaps not by anyone else as the world continued to fall apart.

Despite my best efforts to hide it and the fact that he had been drinking for days on end, Henry seemed to sense my discomfort and offered me a slug of Hong Thong, which I politely refused, and then he said we would be going in a minute and I began to count down the seconds in my head. I continued to just smile at the old woman, but though her mind was clearly elsewhere, she smiled too, showing a small handful of teeth and talking in quiet Thai to herself, words that Henry didn't bother to translate, a fact for which I am now quite grateful, because I didn't really want to know what she had to say, whether it was a greeting or a fortune or a [prophecy](#) or just commentary about the fucking heat, because I was slowly beginning to realize that this day (like so many others in my mad existence) was without a doubt a clear example of that "living in a narrative" thing that I had been rambling on about since 1994. And in all the days and night I had lived it since around March of 2009, I just couldn't take it any longer and I was really genuinely happy when he told me we could leave. I had, really, for the first time in months, again experienced REAL-LIVE [CULTURE SHOCK](#), and I was desperate to get out of the Isaan back-country and back to a place where Westerners were grumbling about how a tuk-tuk driver had ripped them off or asking stupid questions about how to get a Thai visa or to go visit the [Nong Khai Sculpture Garden](#), and I began to get a very clear understanding of why the people who worked at Mut Mee and the many hangers-on who lived there knew so Very Little about Thailand - the shit just freaked their shit, straight up, and they were very happy to just sit in the Mut Mee Garden on the Mekong River drinking fruit shakes and not thinking about any of that at all, reading "A Passage to India" on their [Kindles](#) or gazing into a crap novel from the used bookstore - or, as I was about to do myself, going Deep Into One's Self with a course on [yoga](#) or [chakra](#) healing. That Thailand offers many deep and glaring contradictions was not anything new to me, but this was really going over the edge now, for the moment (in a week or two I will have metabolized it and will think nothing of going into Isaan to wander about on a motorcycle, (like a small pox vaccine your tolerance to

the absurd violence that is happening to people all over the world increases day by day) but for the moment I was happy to get in that big garish pick-up truck and roll away as quickly as possible away from that woman and out of that village and make my way back to a safe place.

But I had to ask a few questions, ([masochist](#) that I am, I don't like physical pain but emotional and informational drama seem to be my very real Drugs of Choice) and it was then I discovered she was only 76 and not 90 or 100, and that the bone disease was most probably the result of the shit they spray on the fucking rice or perhaps a remnant of the days when the US government sprayed [Agent Orange](#) all over Southeast Asia.

"I don't permit my wife to go anywhere near the rice paddies," he said, confident that both he and his wife and their soon to arrive newborn daughter would somehow be immune to whatever misfortune befell that old woman. "But Laos is just across the river, you know, and who knows what the [half-life](#) of Agent Orange really is?"

Shudder. By this point I was utterly dying to get out of Isaan and back to the safety of the Mut Mee, and I felt like I might actually burst into tears when he took me back to his house. We went inside and he switched on the television, more [Thai pop](#) of the friendliest and most upbeat variety, followed by a Norah Jones video where she appeared to be piloting a building through downtown Manhattan. All at once I longed for the relative safety of the madhouse that is [New York City](#), and I got up and went to the bathroom and looked into the mirror to make sure that the [soul](#) of myself that I love so much had not yet been scared away entirely, and there it was, staring back at me and smiling, but definitely with a slight tinge of fear that said to me very clearly, "Please get me the fuck of here, now," and so I went back to the enormously garish (red with tassels) that he'd had imported from Norway just so he could have "proper" European furniture in this renovated shack in the middle of northeastern Thailand, and I very politely informed him

that I was "wiped out" by my "very profound experience with the Monk" and that I would be deeply grateful if he could either pilot me back to Nong Khai or lead me to someone I could pay to take me home.

He sighed and took another slug and shouted what was clearly an order in either Thai or Isaan (I still can't distinguish the tonalities yet) and his father-in-law appeared, a wizened fellow himself at the age of about fifty, looking weary and unhappy. Suffering from [diabetes](#), (my farang friend was very proud to tell me that he pays for all the insulin and doctor's visits) he nevertheless continues to work twelve hours a day in the rice paddies producing a crop that he may earn as much as 8 baht a kilo for, while his son-in-law spends 180 baht a day just to feed two kilos of premium beef to his dog, Fanny, a very spoiled and very happy German Shepard that I had played with earlier in my visit, tossing a broken tile around in the yard that he was only too happy to retrieve and bring back to me) and he kept his eyes on the ground as he heard the order and led me back to the truck. He speaks no English, I speak no Thai, so our ride back was silent for which I was very grateful, because this time I was goddamn certain that I couldn't take in another bit of data.

I retreated to my room upon my return to Mut Mee, stopping only briefly in the Garden to say hello to the assembled crowd of ex-pats and tourists, who sat drinking [Beer Lao](#), arguably the best lager in southeast Asia and something of a delicacy in Thailand, for even though Laos is but a stone's throw away, for some odd reason, Beer Lao is hard to find in Thailand. Adam, the gentle giant of a bartender who runs the Gaia floating bar that sits beneath the Mut Mee Garden, was pleased to inform me that the evening's entertainment would be a proper English quiz night, and that my attendance was mandatory since I would certainly help my team win. I almost wept with joy at the thought of something so normal, and I said I would certainly be there, retreating to my room with tears in my eyes for a variety of good reasons, before switching on my [Blackberry](#) with the [Desert Dwellers](#) playlist and drifting off into tonglen in an effort to forget the entire day.

A day like that, of course, is hard to forget, but I was about to recall again that nights in Thailand can be even more unforgettable.

TRACK SIX: LOVE, SEX, POSSIBILITIES & CHOICES IN THE KINGDOM OF THAILAND

February 16, 2010

Following my journey to Isaan, after trying [meditation](#) to make the day go away, (and failing) at promptly 8:30 in the evening I made my way down to the Gaia bar and found friends from the UK whom I spent time with in Laos and I was so grateful to see people who hadn't had as strange a day as I had had. The two of them - Jenny & Lisa - have been traveling together for months and have stopped in Nong Khai to volunteer for Isara, a children's charity and to also volunteer at the orphanage, a "wonderful place" by all accounts where a Christian preacher has taken it upon himself to feed and house the orphaned children of [AIDS](#) in Isaan. Most of them are also HIV-positive, and he's done some incredible things, I understand, to find the money to keep them happy and healthy and I keep meaning to go over there, but everytime Thursday rolls round (the official day for volunteer visits,) I seem to be on the verge of tears for one damn reason or another and i have no desire to let a pile of little kids with AIDS push me over the edge quite yet.

Clearly, neither Jenny and Lisa are as sensitive as I am, for all they could talk about was how sweet the children were and they showed me lovely pictures and I knew it was just a matter of time before I would go too and I would, in fact, be strong and not fall apart. I made an executive decision to allow myself two beers and then

switch to soda water, and with my quick and ridiculous mind we were able to win quite handily over the other teams and my second beer was free for the win. I pulled absurd trivia out of my head ("which football club's name is the anagram of Red Admiral?" answer: Real Madrid) things I shouldn't really know because I can count on two hands the number of "football" games I have seen in my life and at least six of them were during the World Cup of 1990 when I was living in Ireland, though I did manage to miss the names of the Fantastic Four, which rather irked me, really, for about a minute, but my team won and I got a free beer, and then we all gathered round the Number One recreational toy of southeast Asia, YouTube, to watch Eddie Izzard make jokes that struck me as surreal and unfunny. The cute gap year kids (ages 20, and too young for me, really, but whom I was hoping to chat with just to wile away the time) all left early and I found myself needing some kind of connection to get through the very weird day I'd had and I decided to take a walk.

First stop was a lady bar that is comprised of older hookers who really are more or less retired, they all have houses and take care of their mothers and children, but they still like the Game for the fun and extra cash. They're a good crew and they all speak at least a little English, and I had one friend there named Sunny that I had really lovely sex with one night after she gave me an outrageously good [Thai massage](#) for free. I was limited in my options, however - Mut Mee has a rule about bringing home bar girls, and though people do it all the time, I had one strange misadventure with a woman who did not leave discretely during my first week here, which led to a gentle talking to by Jonathan and a promise to never do it again, a promise which I intended to keep. Getting another room was out of the question also, because I was trying to be very conservative with my funds, I still didn't know what my bill was here because it hadn't yet been presented to me, and really, I just wanted someone to talk to and maybe a 200 baht massage and a genuine hug, but the lady bar was closed and so I headed for the rough'n'tumble alley way of three lady bars near the river where I pledged to only drink soda and just flirt with the women I know there.

It was a good night there, really - the [mamasan](#) is about 33 and her name is Kwon, she has the loveliest heart of any woman there and I would date her in an instant if she gave me the green light, but as she always tells me, it's her job to sell ladies and there are so many lovely ones to choose from and no, I can't have her because she's neither emotionally available (she takes care of both a mother and a son and she's very conservative and well-educated) nor is she financially attracted to farangs, which more or less makes her a casual friend. The place is packed with lovely ladies, honestly, including an 18-year-old who always wants to sit on my lap and tease me because she knows I won't take her home - she hates what she does, she told me, but she doesn't have a choice and I'm wasn't about to fuck either a teenager or a whore who really hates the work, there are plenty of whores who really truly seem to love the Game and I was about to meet one.

I was chatting with an English bloke about fifty who just completed his third divorce and was interested in Thai ladies but was totally subsumed by guilt and couldn't bust a move no matter how much he drank. I listened to his story and tried to tell him that really, he made an ideal john for a Thai woman, he was dripping with guilt and shame about what people back home might think, and he was smart and well-educated and rich and polite and he would surely be gentle and caring and tip well and that really, the equation around here was fairly cut and dried - either a woman from these bars goes with farangs for money at 1000 baht a night, OR she marries a Thai man who may be a drunk and may also beat her and then she's confined to poverty for life. Shudder. It's gross and it's weird but honestly, you do get used to these sort of things even when you find, as I have, that you really don't want to act on it anymore, that your loneliness and your desire for some kind of casual encounter with a woman for hire is really just a desire for an honest and legitimate human connection.

But sometimes all the yoga and meditation in the world cannot take away the fact that you ARE lonely, you ARE in southeast Asia, Thailand DOES have a

prostitution culture that stretches back at least a couple hundred years if not thousands, and that really sex here is a different thing than it is in the West. There's no shame about it just discomfort, perhaps, if the john is particularly sadistic, but word gets round about these types of men fairly quickly (everyone knows if you sleep with a whore, absolutely everyone, and they compare notes) gets shut out from taking anyone home because pain is really seriously un-Buddhist and there are plenty of nice farangs like the one I was talking to who'll take a girl to dinner and take her home and fuck her nicely and tip her well and come again to see her the next day that drunken louts who like to beat up girls don't last very long at the bars.

He was very impressed with this knowledge and very impressed at my casual flirting with all the girls and very impressed with my limited Thai vocabulary, but pretty soon I was called away by a young whore named Dop who was really hitting the Hong Thong and really wanted to play pool with me. I groaned. Never play pool with a bar girl unless you're really really good. A good portion of a bar girl's income is derived from hustling pool and in the hours before the farangs show up they have a LOT of time to improve their skills, and most of them, even the tiniest little girl straight from an Isaan rice field, could whip the shit out of [Minnesota Fats](#) without blinking an eye or breaking a sweat. The penalty for losing is that you must buy the girl a drink - generally Malibu rum and orange juice or something equally grotesque, the price from Bangkok to Pattaya to Patong to Isaan is generally 120 baht and she splits the drink price with the bar 50-50, *and* she gets to drink the drink. Everyone wins, (except you, farang) and I hadn't played this girl yet but I was certain she would win, she was a feisty little girl (27, I later discovered, practically near retirement age) and though I tried to refuse her pleas, she begged so hard and so desperately that I finally figured I could just as easily give her 120 baht to make her go away, but I decided I'd play the goddamn game because the English chap was really boring and all torn up with his [Victorian morality](#) and so I ordered another soda and she proceeded to rack the balls.

She was drunk, but not that drunk, and I still, surprisingly, beat her. Turning the tables around (because I had never before beat a bargirl,) I glibly informed her that she now owed me a drink.

"Gary," she said mournfully, and tried to pretend she was going to cry (all the girls call me Gary because "Gregory" is a real mouthful for a Thai) but she quickly ordered me a Heineken and insisted we play again. I took two small sips of the beer and remembered I'd already made a rule and switched back to soda, then figured I'd give her a chance to recoup her losses (list price on the Heineken was 80 baht but she probably got it for half) and I played her again - and won again. She looked crestfallen and I didn't even try to make her buy me another beer, I told her the one that I had was just fine and not to worry, but she looked concerned that I would just go away. She was obviously trying to get more from me than just a game of pool, but I wasn't going there. Sure, she was cute and hot and young but not as young as I thought (I would've guessed 23, max) and just about then, in walked a very beautiful Thai woman who very clearly was NOT on the Game. I soon discovered that she worked at the motorcycle shop where I rented my first manual bike and she had been the one who taught me how to ride it, but the context was different and she was made up like a very striking and proper Thai lady. She would be crushed later when I said I hadn't remembered her. Perhaps I should've, but I had been too concerned about shifting gears to really notice how beautiful she was.

She looked at me rather longingly, I thought, and then asked if I wanted to play a game, and I said "Will I have to buy you a drink if I lose?" and she shook her head rather quietly and simply said, "I am not a bar girl." Fair enough, I said, but perhaps we'll make this interesting. "If I win, you let me take you out for something to eat when the game is over." She smiled and I won quickly, she sank the eight on a wild bank shot, and I was eager to go somewhere and talk to her. Perhaps "Didi's" was still open, a kind of late-night [Denny's](#) of Nong Khai, where motorcycle boys and teenage girls and Thai hookers and farangs flock to when the bars shut down for the night. She had a beer to finish, but Dop was seated nearby,

drinking straight from the bottle and offering me some with my soda, which I refused. But every time I leaned in to speak with the beautiful one who claimed not to be a bar-girl,

"Nang," she said mournfully when I finally asked, "don't you remember me?"

Dop would begin to go wild chattering in both English & Thai, something about how soon she was leaving and how much she needed someone tonight. I assumed she was looking for a customer, and I assumed she hoped it would be me, but I kept my focus on Nang because she spoke good English and wasn't drunk and might be someone I could actually *date* in this very crazy land.

Dop said something in Thai and Nang turned to me.

"She wants to join us for dinner," she said, and inwardly I groaned. I just wanted to talk to somebody, I wasn't looking for a party, certainly I would have to pay, because I'm the farang and that's just the way it is, but I found I couldn't say no. Soon Dop was up and tugging at my shirt.

"See that farang over there?" she gestured with her eyes towards a beefy German-looking man slung low over his beer at the bar. "I want him. Tell him he needs to join us for dinner," and I shrugged and walked over to him.

"Hey brother," I said, coming in from the right to face him. His faced was ravaged by drink and despair - he was clearly not your common tourist, he may have been here for years, and his eyes were wary as he managed a smile at me. "Hello," he managed to say.

"Where you from?" said I, the standard farang introduction.

"The UK," he said wearily, as if wondering where this could lead and so I quickly

cut to the chase.

"There's a young woman in this bar who rather fancies you," I said, switching to English parlance. "We're all going out to Didi's for a bite to eat and she requested that you join us."

His face stretched into a grateful smile, as if he couldn't believe what he was hearing, that anyone wanted him anywhere for anything at all, but without looking round to see who it might be (for drunk as she was, Dop was really quite endearing to look at) he blinked a couple of times and just said, "Ah, thanks mate, that's really nice to hear, but I'm really very tired and I'm going to go home after this one."

Dop looked crushed when I delivered the news and I thought that maybe this meant she'd go home and i could have quality time with Nang, but of course, that wasn't the case at all. She invited me to ride with her on her motorbike to Didi's, but I simply said I was riding with Nang and again she looked sad, but I knew I would be too tempted to feel her up as we raced along the sois because she was a whore and it would an easy gratification, I'd already set my sights on Nang. I was a perfect gentleman with Nang, or tried to be, but she instructed me to put my hands on her waist because it was better for her balance and I could feel the soft skin of her belly as her blouse rose up on a turn and I felt the heady rush of an [erotic](#) charge and she turned to me and smiled as we went faster. Didi's was closed so we headed for the sidewalk restaurant at the Pantawee Hotel, and I hoped that Dop wouldn't find us, but soon she did and the three of us were seated together and we ordered and then Dop began to make her pitch.

"Gary," she said, taking a gentle sip from her whisky and soda and reaching out a hand towards me. "I really like you," she said. "Why don't you take me home?"

The [paradox](#) was sublime and overwhelming though I did manage to stay on my

feet. To my right was a proper Thai lady, (albeit one who likes to hang out at lady bars late at night drinking beer and shooting pool with farangs) with whom I could actually imagine a courtship, to my left was a bar girl whom I could surely sodomize like a wild pig in heat if I wanted to on this very night, if I said yes, but I wasn't torn for a moment really, because I'd already made up my mind. Later I realized the whole thing could've been a set-up, they were speaking back and forth in Thai and Nang might've said, "He doesn't really like me, offer to fuck him and we'll see what he'll do," but I held firm and simply said, "I can't do that, Dop. You're very nice but I like Nang - and besides, you're really drunk."

She gave me a short gentle glare and began a long [soliloquy](#). "Gary, I know myself. I am having a party for me, I am leaving soon for America but I really wanted you before I left." Tears began to well in her eyes. "I wanted to sleep with one nice farang before I left, and I was hoping you'd take me tonight. Everyone says you're so nice and that the sex is really good. I want good sex, Gary - you can have me, free, tonight. Please."

My erection took on a turn for the very worst, it was practically a forked tongue, straining towards both Dop and Nang simultaneously, threatening to split in half and my mind whirled at the thought that I might already have a rep as a "good farang lay." I had slept with only three different bar girls here. I still remembered each of them, the 26-year-old who offered herself to me for a month for 10,000 baht, the early 30s lady who first offered me her 14-year-old friend before taking me home on her bike and (easily) convincing me she needed to stay with me, and Sunny, who was on a whole other street and yet, clearly the jungle drums were beating that the weird farang with the shaved head and the hot pink purse was someone who should be had. If he wouldn't pay, he might even be good enough to go home with for free. The mind reeled, certainly, maybe I could have her tonight and still date Nang later and have a proper girlfriend for a change, a Thai lady who was gracious and cultured for introducing to my friends around here as evidence that I was a serious person with a real desire for love, instead of a

drunken lout here in Thailand out for nothing more than the chance to get my dick wet for thirty dollars a night. As I have learned in Thailand, [karma](#) is instant around here and surely this was an example of mine - that when I found someone good and lovely and proper, there would be a bar girl there, crying that she "needed me" and begging me to take her home for free.

Split at the genitals, however, my mind was still clear.

"Listen to me, Dop, I think you're very nice, but honestly," I said, reaching over a bit to take Nang's hand in mine. "I really like Nang and I don't think she'd like it very much if I left her to go home with you."

"I know you like her," she said insistently. "But I need to relax and everyone says you're so good!" I rolled my eyes towards Nang and she just smiled as if this was the most normal conversation in the world.

Just then, the food arrived - a platter of a whole pla, (fish) and some kind of curry and all talk ceased as we began to dig into it and I was glad. I ordered another soda and Dop's phone rang (phones don't "ring" anymore, do they?) with an aggressively bad Thai pop song that was actually a much more welcome sound than her voice as she practically screamed into the phone for several minutes, the word "farang" popping up again and again before she finally cradled the device and turned towards me.

"That was my friend, he's coming here to meet you," she said.

"And to take you home perhaps? Surely he might sleep with you instead,"

"No, he won't," she said. "He's gay."

An enormously attractive young man arrived a few minutes later. I had assumed

she meant a [ladyboy](#) when she said that he was "gay." Gays are in surprisingly short supply in Thailand, given that the [transgender](#) of "the ladyboy" is really quite simply all over the place, but this one actually looked "gay" - with a couple of earrings, well-dressed, and a quiet and gentle demeanor. He looked me up and down a bit before settling in for a beer and spoke with Dop and Nang in rapid-fire Thai about something that I couldn't catch at all. I focused on my food, which, generally speaking, is **always** good in Thailand, a fusion of spices and natural ingredients cooked up fresh a few moments after you order it. My erection disappeared when I began to eat, and I made a conscious point to try to ignore Dop completely and focus my attention on Nang, who really was a lovely and gracious lady. We ate, we chatted a bit, and eventually Dop and her sweet gay friend went away, I paid the bill and we got on her bike and roared off into the night, she put my hands around her middle before we left and I gave her a few strokes and a squeeze, and she leaned her neck against my face and I kissed her gently there as we drove. Arriving back at the guest-house, she dismounted with me and we hugged, a long and lingering hug that was really quite lovely, and then her lips brushed mine and she began to speak.

"I am not bar lady," she said quietly. "So we need to have time first. Stay here for a bit and maybe we can be together, but I need to know that you know that I am not for sale."

My heart nearly leapt out of my chest - to have a Thai woman that was really yours, not because you pay her but because for some special reason she thinks she really likes you. I had already found out that she had a child already with another farang but he'd already fled back to the West, clearly she liked the Thai-farang equation because it meant a man with some education and a shot at a better life, but it was really entirely possible that she actually liked **me** and the thought of an extended courtship, with dates, and hand-holding and quiet talks seemed so much more appealing, then raucous sex with strangers and the endless offerings to become your "wife" for money. Clearly, my decision to not choose Dop for the

night had been a linchpin in determining that I was really off the Game, and that I really wanted something more from Thailand than a cheap holiday in other people's misery and aimless wandering nights of cheap sex with impoverished women who simply see sex as a ticket out of a life that has no other offerings.

I have often thought that Thailand really is a culture without limitations, at least for the Westerners who flock here in droves to vacation and where many fight hard to stay forever, and it's definitely a place where sexual energy hangs over everything like a dusty cloud, infecting everyone who comes in contact with it. If you decide to turn your back on the whore culture for a few days, soon your fellow Westerners come into sharper focus as possibilities you might not otherwise have entertained. Whether it's the woman from Canada who's in her thirties and pondering the end of a long relationship with whom you develop a deep connection charged with sexual tension and who suggests you get drunk together in order to explore it, then checks out the following morning without saying goodbye but whom you still talk to via gmail chat every couple of days. Or the beautiful 24-year-old gap year girl from South America who looks like an Italian model and who you start talking to because you figure "there's not a chance in hell, I'm safe with her" who ends up holding you [platonically](#) one night while you cry, wondering about who your friends are and talking about how much you miss your dad, only to return the following evening, stoned, to flop out on your bed and ask you very politely to kiss her breasts and fondle her [clitoris](#) roughly (because she likes that) because she needs to get off but please not to kiss her because "I really just want to be friends." Or how about the buff and sexy man from the UK who teases you about being [queer](#) and then gets drunk and kisses you and begs to be sodomized by you, (and who you really want, because he's sexy and smart and funny and who kisses you really gently as he runs his hands against your ass, but whom you wisely decide is way too [hetero](#) to really handle it in the morning and you instead feed him a [diazepam](#) and tuck him into bed instead.)

In being totally out of control, Thailand offers more than endless possibilities - it

offers you the ability to figure out that endless possibilities might not be what you're looking for after all. If Thailand really is a culture without limitations for the Western imagination about sex and love and mysticism and magic, then it's also a place where you can really begin to think about what your **own** limitations might become, in reality you are **totally** unfettered here because it's all available and there's no shame because there's no [Original Sin](#) in Buddhism. Here, you find yourself drifting away from notions of the "[zipless fuck](#)" or the casual screw because after all, it's the common currency in Thailand and you've always prided yourself on going against the grain, and you may suddenly find yourself re-thinking again about "[romantic love](#)," (you know it was only invented 150 years ago, according to your feminist history classes in college, that "love" before then was for fairy tales and rich people (and only sometimes) and that marriage throughout human history has mostly been a matter of convenience and the consolidation of power and wealth.)

But you do find yourself thinking that if you could just say "no" to **every** possibility that found its way to you, then maybe you could begin to determine what you actually **want** because you're finally in a place where anything is possible - and sometimes, not just **anything** will do. The [Casanova](#) that you've always striven to be has finally arrived, (in spades) but all the inner work you've done puts your heart on your sleeve and you realize that you really **can** be hurt now when a relationship goes south, particularly with someone from your own culture whom you don't have to pay. Suddenly, hanging out in the garden with your cool friend Michael (who is basically sexless but whom you would probably renounce every last bit of your own [heterosexuality](#) if he would just come out of the closet a little and say he wants to be your boyfriend) and the very sexy and beautiful Susan who you're certain is [cruising](#) you every time you walk into the garden but is on a personal crusade for a year of [celibacy](#), which she says she's enjoying immensely - and you just find yourself thinking, "If I just got out of Thailand and went to [India](#), where there's no whore culture and no impending civil war, then maybe then I could just say no to all these possibilities and figure out

what I really really want,"

Next.

TRACK SEVEN: "HIDDEN DOCUMENT (BUT IN PLAIN SIGHT)"

February 21, 2010

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2LNEIEXARM>

...and after she got off the first time, she rolled over suddenly and mounted your backside like a tigress, using the friction of the small of your back to aggressively bring herself to a second climax, then she softened, rolling slowly this time against you, to bring herself to a third and final orgasm before finally collapsing on top of you in a heap. It was a position you enjoyed immensely because of the incredible erotic charge it brought you, as well as the enormous sense of comfort and security it gave you, and you'd asked other lovers to do it for you in the past but they'd done so rather reluctantly and not nearly with the passion she had, save for one girl, the first who'd ever done you like that, and you found it so wonderful and good that as it became a habit and not merely a one-shot experience (for you were with that girl for a very long time and you made love quite a lot) you found yourself questioning not just your sexuality but also your gender, and you soon after came out to her (timidly at first, as if asking for permission) not just as a girl but as a [lesbian](#) also, you came out to both her and a small group of young queer friends in Seattle, as well as a few close friends on the Internet, ex-lovers, one male, one female, and they helped you out as best they could, you briefly explored transgenderism and full transition but you dismissed it as "an unnecessary procedure, an invasive Western medical solution to what was essentially a spiritual issue." (Ironic, really,

because you had used the Western model to deal with your own mental health for many years longer than perhaps you should've) and you recalled the [Two-Spirit](#) movement (had even dated one and rebuked him/her because of your own fears about your own self like the callous bastard you can be when you're frightened) and the [Radical Fairy](#) ideas that you had uncovered while in college and had been fascinated by ever since. But in the meantime you were her girl, (not a woman yet, you knew you were just a girl) and she called you her girl and you were really her girl, especially when you were [manic](#) or anxious or crying. She'd stroke your face and dry your tears and strip you down and mount you from behind, grinding her clit against you until she came in a fit of giggles and then she'd roll off you, and you'd roll on top of her and then you'd enter her for a gentle or manic screw like the anatomical man you are, or maybe she'd suck your cock, (which she referred to as your clit) or better still, you'd stroke your clit/cock, masturbating while she licked your "pussy", really your balls, but when she was touching you there or licking you there she always said it was your pussy and you would come so hard when she did that for you. And then you'd curl up in each other's arms and go to sleep, you were a lesbian couple, except on those days when you felt especially aggressive and macho and needed to reclaim your [masculinity](#) to deal with the outside world, and then she would be your little girl and you would be her [daddy](#), and then you'd fuck her as hard as you could until she came again in a fit of giggles, and then you'd roll over and masturbate until you came all over her face.

And finally when the relationship ended in too many tears and total disgrace, you tried to forget all about being a girl, because you'd just been her girl and she was gone. It didn't mean a thing, it was just role-playing and you were going to be a good patient now, and take your meds and get a straight girlfriend and get married.

But with the beautiful girl from South America building tension against your back, it all came back to you in an overwhelming flood of memories and you had to fight hard to hold back the tears, you had just simply forgotten a very deep and possibly

real part of yourself because it was simply more convenient, less messy, less complicated, hard to explain and live by. You'd written the word "Queer" on your forehead and let the Santa Fe Reporter take your picture, but you spoke only of [bisexuality](#) and [polyamory](#), and never really once dared to let people really know that you honestly felt like both man and girl because you didn't think they'd get it, thought they might really think you'd gone crazy this time, and you were certain that it would be so hard to have a family if you admitted to anyone just how queer you really are. A girl who needs tenderness and someone to dry her tears, a man who loved to play with pussies and perform cunnilingus for hours, but also a cocksucker and a sodomizer and a daddy and...a girl.

And the thought occurs to you that you made a huge mistake to date any of the ones you were with after that, Karen and Jessica and Allie and Laura. For while they were all wonderful women and the sex was well-worth having, they were really all straight women and you really are a girl and you really are a lesbian (maybe.) You can, of course, fuck anyone in any way at all, but it was with her the girl that got away that you felt the most like you really are, and that instead of maybe finding a nice boyfriend and being gay again that you're really just a girl, and that you really want a girl who wants a girl who also has a penis. It's such a tall order, you think at first, but you know that girl is out there, and that if you're really clear and not afraid that she will just appear because that's just how your life works, you can sleep with almost anyone you want to, it's never been a problem for you to seduce practically anyone you want, but then you wonder too if maybe you wouldn't also want a boyfriend, a man who could hold you in his arms and enter you slowly while you were inside your girl, a girl and a lesbian on one side and a gay man on the other to help you integrate your *split*...

But then you think, "c'mon, [identity](#) is fluid. Why "fix" it or define it or make declarations of identification," when in all "reality" you really know, as you wrote recently in a letter to a famous [trans-man](#), that you really are in fact really all of it, gay and straight and bisexual, male and female and [third-gendered](#), two-spirit and

fairy, lesbian and girl, top and bottom, sub and dom (but you're really not a sadist, as you discovered recently, nor a masochist either, at least not for physical pain) and as you wrote to that wonderful transman who surely might understand, the only word that ever really made sense to describe it all is **QUEER**. But the recollection that you might in fact be a girl that likes girls certainly goes a long way towards explaining why you tend to prefer women over men, but you still have to admit that you like men quite a lot as well, a least, some of the time.

anyway

TRACK EIGHT: A LETTER TO DARMA

February 20th, 2010

These messages were sent while you were offline.

9:29 AM Darma: YOU ARE AGELESS . . . AND I WILL LOVE YOU ALWAYS. HAPPY BIRTHDAY,

Dear Darma:

On this occasion of my 40th birthday, I am taking time out to write to certain people in my life who have offered me guidance and influence throughout various times of my life, and I want to let know that you have been and continue to be a source of inspiration to me.

Why you inspire me, quite honestly, is this: at a very young age (15 or so?) you and your friends introduced me to an alternate [paradigm](#) of health and wellness and personal growth, and though a part of me scoffed at it a little bit, I was really really taken in by the ideas of the [Harmonic Convergence](#) (even if it was crap or a hoax or whatever, it still had Great Impact on me at 17) and it eventually led to all the vast reading in first the [Human Potential Movement](#) in general and then [magick](#)

and a bunch of other things. When I collapsed in 1994, however, I simply hadn't read enough to understand how *I* personally could access those tools, and anyway, I was just your typical Western person that would naturally turn towards [allopathic medicine](#) for what was viewed (by my doctors and everyone else) as a [chronic](#) illness with no cure.

I am very pleased to tell you that I have been off-med for six months. It has not been easy and I don't know if I could pull this off in the West (eventually, yes, I will be able to, perhaps.) Learning how to cope with the extraordinary amount of information that just "appears" out of nowhere for me (which was the defining characteristic of my breakdown in 1994) is without a doubt the greatest challenge that lies before me. But between yoga and meditation and just being in a place that's fairly cheap and comfortable to live in (but no longer "safe" necessarily, as I talked about in my letter to everyone) and sitting through all the dreams, visions, flashbacks, shakes, tears, etc. and writing copiously (and mostly privately now) about all of it, as well as being in daily contact with some really excellent people who believe in what I am trying to do, (my agent, my best friend, and lots of other people here and there) well, let's just say it's really been something.

Today, however, was marked by deep [paranoia](#) – there are lots of good reasons to be paranoid in Thailand, quite frankly, at this moment, but trying to figure out a way to cope with the body's response to that kind of fear was not terribly successful and I finally broke down and took a valium. (I do keep a *very* small supply on hand just for this specific purpose.) I still *have* all my meds (i carry them in a little cloth bag) but I had the thought that maybe today I would actually toss them in the river, but I won't yet, I still need to carry them though I am very very resistant to the idea that I would ever go back to the Western model of psychiatric medicine no matter how hard it gets. Like I said, it takes a "safe" place to do this right now, and my research here in Thailand is almost complete anyway and I'm fairly certain that as soon as I can pull off the financial issues and the courage to actually go, I will be heading to India, (probably [Rishikesh](#) and [Dharamsala](#)) to continue to

unpack this dream without end, and perhaps eventually, to share with other people a bit of what I have discovered.

love you bunches!

gregoryp(tm)

TRACK NINE: A LETTER HOME

February 21-26, 2010

Source music: "Lose Yourself" by Eminem

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mReO7t_f1X8

Greetings, everyone. I hope you are well. If I think too much about how much all of you mean to me, I might cry, so I'll try not to. I miss you bunches, especially today, the 21st of February, 2010, five days away from whatever is happening next here in Thailand.

In the very short interim period between writing to you last (Feb 19-20, 2010) to invite you to review a collection of texts about my experiences here in Thailand, I have made an executive decision to make a few key edits that are both structural and designed to protect my personal safety in a nation where things are, well, rather tense.

Thanks to the generous support of the enormously talented designer Gregg Weiss of Santa Fe, New Mexico (a long-time collaborator and truly one of the best friends I've ever had, which is really saying something because I've been gifted with quite a lot of them) I have decided to release these pieces as a "limited edition"

stand-alone "EP" titled "Tales from Thailand." Play it loud. I have not yet seen the mock-up because I am avoiding the web for a little bit to get these edits in the can, but I am sure it will be something excellent. (The Internet is actually down *again*, probably owing to Monday surges from all the people throughout Thailand & Laos busy reading [thaivisa.com](#) and the Bangkok Post and the blogs of all the various factions for clues as to what *they* should be doing next also.)

I also want to take the time to thank a couple of other people, including web designer, musician and also extraordinary friend (really a brother, in fact, every person I mention here is really a part of the "family adhocracy" of my mind) [Canton Becker](#) (also of Santa Fe) who once gave me the gift of a blog called *Strident* for Xmas (which is now quite private, one of the best creative decisions I have ever made, quite honestly, because now I can write about anything with total abandon and have an archive that he continually backs-up for me in case my notebooks or computer ends up falling off the back of a boat, taxi, plane, or tuk-tuk) and who has also provided me with an unending supply of free web support since 1994 as well as quality technical advice across the web wherever I have been in the world since that time.

I'd also like to thank [Gerald Hausman](#), my good friend and ninth-grade English teacher, who once told me at the age of fourteen that if I did anything other than become a writer I would be wasting my life, a statement that I have cursed him for in the night more times than I care to count.

I'd also to thank Mark Pesce for his support and peerage over the course of the past fifteen years. Both Pesce and I are fairly certain that both the age of the writer "toiling alone" is about to change radically and that linear texts will almost certainly change to include multiple media inside what we used to refer to as "a book" (later, point your browsers to ["Static Books are Dead, Can't Believe I Wrote One!"](#)) an emerging medium that I hope to live long enough (I now plan to live to be 81, but we shall see, won't we?) to pursue to its very limits.

The rather delicious irony that a person with a known mental health history that includes mild [paranoia](#), [apophenia](#), "[magical thinking](#)" (and most certainly, "flights of fancy", and "[delusions of grandeur](#)";-) is currently wandering around off-med in a country whose various religious traditions and current political situation might be deemed as perfectly appropriate responses is not lost on me in the slightest, and the fact remains that Thailand's cultural and political scene is really quite "crazy" at the moment.

The British government did indeed issue a rather strong [travel advisory](#) about Thailand two days ago regarding the insurgency, coup, revolution or whatever is about to happen on or around the 26th of February, so I'm now well-aware that I'm not completely making this up. ;-)

In my decision to use yoga and meditation as the tools to deal with my "unquiet mind" (shout out to [Kay Redfield Jamison](#), whose medical advice I am currently not taking and believe I am a much happier and healthier person for it), I have had excellent support from Santa Fe-based musician and brother Amani Friend of the [Desert Dwellers](#) who has been providing me with musical tracks designed to bring about [theta-state consciousness](#) quickly and easily, something I really quite honestly *need* at this point to keep from going completely bonkers. Unlike most tourists in Thailand, I actually know a great deal more about the situation than perhaps I should, to be quite honest.

Last night I spoke to my step-father [Jerry Faires](#) about all of this, with an eye towards maybe just pulling the plug at least on being in Thailand on the 26th to ease some of the pressure on the decision to go off-med and my recent decision that I would soon be leaving Thailand to go to India. Traveling to India right now is really out of the question, as I would have to travel to Bangkok and hang out for five days to get a visa to India, (and there's just no way I would be willing to go to either BKK or Chiang Mai between now and the 26th, that I know now) and if

there is one other thing I know for certain is that the time I have spent in Thailand has certainly helped quite a bit in preparing to go to India, a place that I have always been afraid of for its poverty and contradictions but am now really quite drawn to for the opportunities it may offer me to continue to balance my [body-mind](#) without medication.

There is some talk around here about fleeing the country and going to Laos, and a rumor that if Thailand gets really hot, Laos might close her borders, (I have no idea if that's true, but if things were hot enough, surely the border would be jammed whether they were open or not.) The basic reason that I haven't charged the border to go into Laos is that I don't really have the money to leave (after paying off my guest house this morning, I have about 5,000 baht (\$150 US) to last until the end of this month, enough to stay here, sure, but perhaps not enough to be alright in Laos.) But I really can't say for certain that I would leave right now anyway - I don't know anyone in Laos, and I'm currently safe in the Mut Mee Guest House in Nong Khai with a truly lovely community of European and North American travelers and ex-pats, most of whom also have no idea what's really going on in the slightest, god bless them all.)

Mut Mee's owner, a man named Jonathan, is quite simply the most polite and intelligent Englishman that I have ever met, and he's been in Thailand for 20 years and has massive connections in both Thailand and Laos and London as well, so if anything is about to happen here, he will surely know what to do to protect his guests. I haven't yet asked him directly what he thinks, however, because he has so far not mentioned it aloud at all to anyone, and I have a feeling that his discretion is deliberate because he doesn't want to unnecessarily alarm the guests until it's time. Though there's no "rule" per se about talking about what's being played out on the pages of the Bangkok Post on a daily basis that anyone with a basic grasp of the English language can pick up and read for 30 baht (US \$1), most people are talking about travel and music and their friends back home and the food and the weather, though that wasn't always the case, as I have met ex-pats and journalists

and poly-sci analysts here also who are in Thailand exclusively to cover whatever's going to happen, but most of them have de-camped to Chiang Mai or BKK to catch the action on the streets.

I have just re-read this several times and I'm sorta wondering if it seems a lot less like an introduction to a small collection of what I hope is interesting reading about both Thailand and my experiences here and more like a last will and testament, a tone that I might greatly regret if the situation here turns out to be nothing more than "two people getting shot, the radio stations being seized, the government changing overnight and nothing changing for anyone else" which is how one whip-smart analyst from a blog called [Small Wars Journal](#) described your typical Thai coup. That description eased my ferociously "diseased mind" (chuckle) greatly for a few days and I decided to stop reading all the news and manifestoes that are floating around the web about what's supposed to happen next, a decision I've decided to keep, but as is usual in my ridiculous life, total strangers still walk up to me and inform me of the latest movements of various factions in various cities or C4 seizures or grenade discoveries or whatever else is germane to the situation at hand, despite my steadfast desire to just try to pretend I no longer give a fuck and I'll just let Jonathan tell me what to do. If it turns out to be absolutely nothing to worry about at all, I will of course begin to consider that perhaps my med management strategy (i.e. "none at all" other than the occasional valium or a couple of beers and a small belt of Lao Cow, along with the yoga and the meditation) is totally out to lunch and I really *do* need to consider finding a nice mental hospital stateside and go live in exile in Cerrillos, New Mexico with Jerry Faires for the rest of my then certain to be short life.

On February the 22nd, I did a meditation at a swimming pool in Nong Khai and had a sudden thought that whether my fears about what might happen in Thailand were warranted or not, I should "face my fears" and travel to Bangkok and see it for myself. Just then, the phone rang with an invitation from a member

of the [Student Federation of Thailand](#) asking if I wanted to "observe" the events on the 26th at Lumpini Park.

On February the 23rd, I boarded a night-train from Nong Khai to Bangkok (lower berth 23/24, and I'm just not kidding) and arrived on the 24th to discover I had lost my ATM card again. I huddled in the Overstay in Pink Lao for two days until I found another guest house, located in Sukhumvit where I am writing this now. The Thai baht has been shaky all day in regards to the decision, but I am just waiting here, meditating, to see what happens next.

so much love

om nava shivaya

gregoryp(tm)

February 26, 2010

ps: It is now 3:06pm in Bangkok on Friday, February the 26th. The decision has been made but it is still being read and it could be hours before we know the verdict, but most people seem pretty certain that the Supreme Court will rule against Thaksin, and the headline in this morning's edition of *The Nation* seems to say it best, "Let Justice Be Done - Though the Heavens May Fall."