



88-2337

A DREAM OF KINABALU

NASKAH PEMELIHARAAN  
PERPUSTAKAAN NEGARA MALAYSIA  
11 OCT 1988



A DREAM OF  
**Kinabalu**

STEWART WAVELL

NASKAH CONTOH

ANTARA BOOK COMPANY  
KUALA LUMPUR

Antara Book Company  
399A, Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman  
50100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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*First published in 1988 by*  
**ANTARA BOOK COMPANY**  
*399A, Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman*  
*50100 Kuala Lumpur*

**ISBN 967-80-0045-8**

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310.852  
61P2

**476833**  
**APB**

*Divesak oleh*

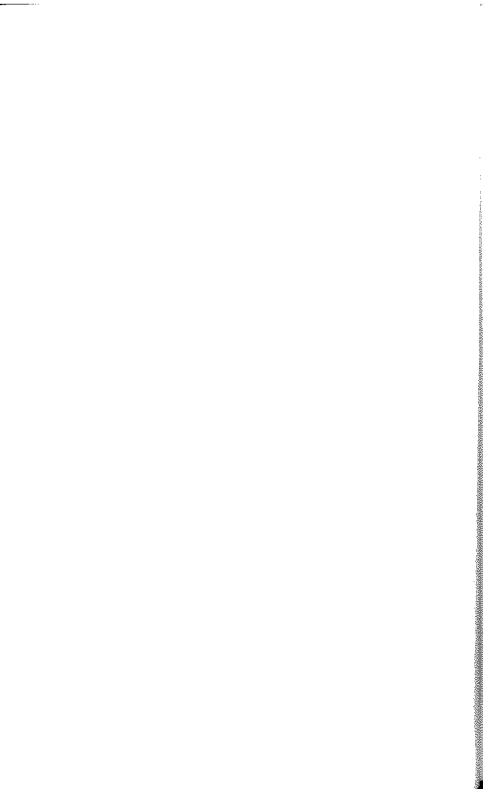
Pencetakan Sentosa (K.L.) Sdn. Bhd., 17 & 19, Jln. Bunga Raya, 00100 Jln. Pudu,  
55100 Kuala Lumpur, West Malaysia. Tel. 2423755 + 2 Jln. 2414088.

— 8 DEC 1988  
Perpustakaan Negara  
Malaysia

## Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my two sons, Derek and Stuart for their encouragement and criticisms of the original manuscript. I am particularly grateful to Derek for producing the Map covering parts of Brunei and Sarawak where much of the action in *A Dream of Kinabalu* took place.

I am most grateful to His Majesty, the Sultan of Brunei, Sir Muda Hassanah Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah for the many opportunities afforded during my work of visiting the remoter parts of his kingdom. When I did so I had no idea that the knowledge gained would provide me with accurate details of geography for the setting of my story. Bandar Seri Begawan, the capital of Brunei, in its idyllic quietness, with its splendid Mosque so close to my study, proved the best place on earth for the writing of such an epic on Borneo.



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## Introduction

Throughout my life I have tried to reach the heart of experience – by recording sounds, by broadcasting, by living among village and tribal peoples, by exploring jungles, climbing mountains, sharing in sacred ceremonies and trance dances, and by returning to Malaysia where I was born. As a two year-old on a Malayan rubber estate near Klang, I chanced upon a tapper's knife lying on the ground and knew, from watching tapper's at work that it was used for cutting the bark of trees to let the milk-like sap flow into a tiny bowl.

“What a lucky find?” I must have thought. “What else can I use it for?”

The nearest object for experiment was my own foot. I slashed at it happily – or so I was told – and was delighted to find red milk coming out! This was my very first discovery: I still bear the scar.

During eight years of the Malayan Emergency I made many discoveries. Some you may have read about in my first book published by Antara called *The Lost World of the East*. In those far-off days – more than thirty years ago now – Kuala Lumpur was my base; and it was from this charming old-world town that I gazed across to the hills, always planning the next occasion when I would reach out beyond them to explore some new mystery. Time and its disappointments has not dimmed my mood. That is, perhaps, why it seems fitting to me that the extraordinary revelations which flow from this epic story set in North Borneo – in Sabah, Brunei, and Sarawak – should first be published in the Malaysian capital.

The most remarkable thing about *A Dream of Kinabalu* is how it came to be written. Its origins, I suppose, go back to my first visit to the Tenggiri River in Kelantan among a group of orang asli called Temer. Their daily habit of responding to spirit instructions in dreams set my feet in a direction which ended years later in Borneo in this very record of my own dream. I call it a dream: in fact, it was a succession of dawn visions which came to me involuntarily in the course of about a year. My own function as an author was merely to write down and give some coherence to what I had seen. In no sense was the resulting story contrived by my imagination. Nothing has been made up. I have reported accurately and clearly, I hope, what was revealed to me either visually to my inner sight or in words by the actual people caught up in this extraordinary conflict.

I remember lying on my bed in a small room on the fifth floor of the Raja Isteri flats in Bandar Seri Begawan listening to the amplified Call to Prayer from the Mosque. At first the sound disturbed my rest, but after a few weeks of listening to a variety of voices, I was able to discriminate between a skilled impassioned call and the comparatively mediocre. Months went by. I still awoke at 4.30 a.m. but growing familiarity caused my mind to absorb this magnificent sound without consciously listening. It flowed into my being. It was on one such morning like any other that the strangest thing happened to me. I experienced what I can only describe as hallucinations. I saw a battle. Then I was transported to a mountain top and a great ceremony unfolded before me. Of course I was excited because I seemed to know the people; I was certain they were Nagas; I could tell by their clothes. And then I heard voices which I actually understood. I was thrilled!

Instantly I leapt from my bed, switched on the light, and wrote it all down in my diary. I still have that diary: it is a record of how these visions came. When the visions stopped, I switched off the light, lay back on my bed and relaxed totally, hardly daring to give thought to what I had seen. Indeed, on the first occasion I was shattered, sensing that I had shared in something numinous and sacred. After awhile, if I didn't press my luck and

kept my mind empty, I knew instinctively that new visions would come. Sometimes these revelations came to me twice or even three times in fairly rapid succession. It seemed to me in these ecstatic moments that I was deeply privileged to receive such intimations, even confidences from peoples who had lived as long ago as 2,000 years!

I discussed my first dawn experience with a Malay friend. He immediately asked why should the Muslim Call to Prayer induce a vision of Nagas? And why 2,000 years ago? Surely, living at the time in Brunei, I should expect some revelation about the royal family of Brunei when the Muslim power was at its height, say, in the 16th century! I must confess I, too, was puzzled; but, on reflection, I soon guessed how it might have happened.

Firstly, let it be said I had no control whatsoever over these revelations; at least, no conscious control. The Muslim Call to Prayer had, in a sense, served as a powerful trigger to open a door in my mind. Its effect on a Muslim is normally to draw out from the depths of his brain all his love for the Prophet and to recall from those depths His teachings as they had been imprinted in the course of many years of worship. Not being a practising Muslim, I had no such storehouse of memories to draw from. I did, in fact, know a great deal about the Nagas, having come across their traditions in many parts of Southeast Asia, particularly in Sri Lanka. I had studied their ancient civilisation – what was known of it. In that sense, all the known facts were in my mind waiting to come out. I had also made a study of the Borneo tribes and only the previous week-end had visited an Iban long-house in Mendaram. I remember seeing a huge artificial lake nearby – a Naga-built reservoir, I had thought – and I stopped for awhile beside a remarkable pool I found deep in the jungle. I knew instinctively that pool was a sacred place, and I gazed at the reflecting water and the adjacent hill almost with a sense of awe. Rarely had I been so deeply affected by atmosphere. In retrospect, I now feel certain this jungle pool was the ancient home of the Goddess Varuna of my story. Thus the trigger call from the Mosque, opening a door in my mind, had

called forth my imprinted knowledge of Nagas and tribes people and linked it with what I can only describe as 'memories' of what happened 2,000 years ago in Mendaram. How else can this coincidence of people and events be explained?

The question then arises: do the events recalled in these pages bear any relation to truth, to what actually happened in history? Does it really matter? Certainly no Naga invasion of Borneo has ever been reported by historians. If it is truth you want, then you will have to test the validity of each statement for yourself, just as I had to when I wrote it down. In those dawn sessions I heard the voices of serpent-worshipping Nagas and of the head-hunting tribal peoples whom they sought to conquer. Each spoke in his own language – the Nagas in their own dialect mixed with Sanscrit; the tribes-people in Teraja. How I managed to understand them I do not know, but the problem of communication never occurred to me. They spoke: I understood; that is all. Even now, more than a year later, I can see the Goddess Varuna standing before me, attended by her serpents, and her voice comes back to me as vividly as I recall the cadences of Victoria de los Angeles singing an aria from the Opera *Simon Boccanegra*.

That Varuna was brought up as a child by serpents does not surprise me. Such practices of that period in the Middle East are attested by no less authorities than Herodotus, Plato and Aristotle. That she was a Goddess combining divine powers with human weakness can be understood in the context of ancient Hindu and even Greek traditions where humans acquired divine status but retained some of their human frailty. That she was poisonous, I found hard to accept, but Greek historians confirm that Nagini were reared, in many cases, with a single object in mind: to poison those Kings to whom they were presented as gifts.

The Goddess Varuna, however, was a Nagini of a very different kind. The serpents who reared her were divine: her upbringing was entirely spiritual. She ministered to the soldiers before and after battle, and to her people. Nevertheless, there were times, she freely confessed to me, when she was tempted

to forego her divinity to fulfil her love for Kenyalang. That she remained inviolate until her death should, perhaps, be remembered by those readers unfamiliar with the sacred customs of both Nagas and Hindus; at the same time, realising that the sacred ceremony of Maithuna of which she was the focus, had one purpose only – to unite her devotees in trance with the very Source of their Being.

Kenyalang, the Teraja, did not possess the sensuousness nor subtlety of Varuna. He was highly sensitive but was more direct and practical, despite his penchant for committing his Spirit to long journeys. As a European, I found this habit a little disconcerting, but it should offer no difficulty to, say, Malays who gently awaken a friend by gently wagging his big toe, thus allowing time for his Spirit to return safely to his body. An ancient Chinese proverb reminds us that your Spirit hovers only three feet above your head, so the Chinese also attribute to each Spirit its own facility of independent motion!

A word of explanation, if I may, about the Nagas. The term *Naga* may be especially confusing to Asians familiar with the many Naga tribes of Burma and Assam. The Nagas of my story might be very distantly related to these since they, too, came originally from Mongolia in pre-history; but over 4,000 years ago, one large group moving south through China turned westward to Persia where they were taught engineering skills of a high order, specialising in the arts of irrigation and building massive reservoirs. They continued their advance southwards through India to Sri Lanka where, more than 2,000 years ago, they were memorialised in the form of guardian statues at the entrance to Buddhist shrines. Their serpent deities in stone, exquisitely wrought, have been found guarding ancient reservoirs; and much is made of their Naga Kings in the early chronicle known as the Mahavamsa. At the time of our story, they still had great influence in both Sri Lanka and Kaveripatanam in South India. The word *Naga* in most Asian languages means serpent or, specifically, cobra.

While the jungle setting of Mendaram and its Naga Pool serve as the main focus of this epic, our attention is drawn

towards action among the majestic peaks of Kinabalu, at 13,455 feet, the highest in Southeast Asia. Kenyalang's compulsive search for solutions requires his Spirit to glide between peaks, plateaus and gullies to seek the aid of Gods and teachers of Sabayan, the Tribal heaven to which all people go when they die.

I did not myself make the journey to Kinabalu until after this book was completed, but when at last at dawn I stood gazing up at the stark outlines of this sublime mountain, I was overwhelmed by the symbolic truth of Kenyalang's quest. If you, too, can make this pilgrimage, you will experience that same sense of awe and wonder and share my conviction.

Should you be fortunate enough to visit Sabah, please take my book with you and, with it, a fitting companion, the 1978 monograph published by the Sabah Society – *Kinabalu Summit of Borneo*, an incomparable guide to all the flora so vividly described by Kenyalang in a landscape which has guarded its treasures with more plants and flowers than anywhere else in the world.

STEWART WAVELL

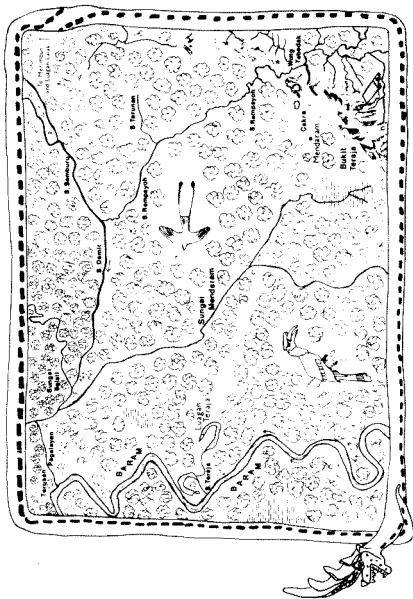
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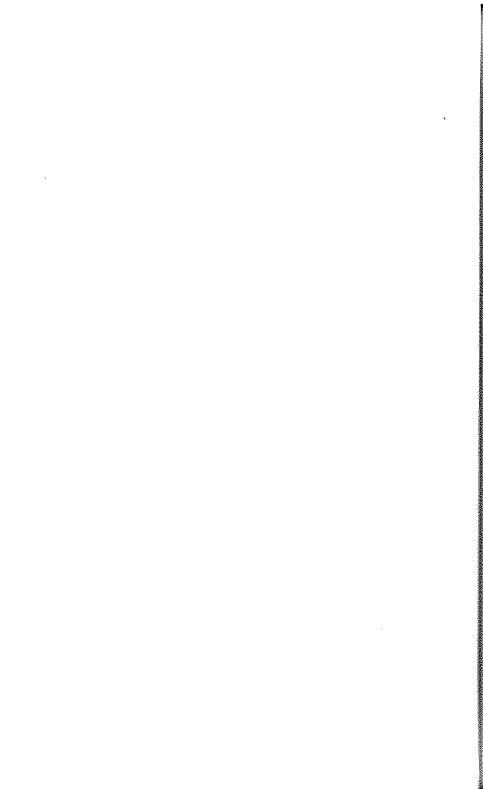
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# The Scene of the Conflict







## Chapter 1

### **Kenyalang's Vision**

**T**hey moved less obtrusively than shadows because in the jungle there is no sun and no shadow. They moved swiftly to their mark, silently overtaking a Naga patrol returning to its outpost guarding the reservoir at Luagan Lalak. Once ahead, they waited poised above the jungle path, peering from the concealment of overhanging branches. Then they leapt upon the Nagas, striking off their heads each with a single swish of a blade. They shrieked in triumph and disappeared, bearing their trophies with them. Five Nagas died. Four remained to gather up their comrades' bodies and carry them to the Naga headquarters to be burned on Cakra mountain at a ceremony fit for heroes.

The victorious warriors returned to their longhouse on the steep slopes of Bukit Teraja by a stream tumbling happily down between rocks towards the Sungai Mendaram, eventually joining the broad Belait River flowing onwards to the sea. It was the longhouse they had built, even longer ago than it takes a tapang tree to reach its full height, fleeing to high land from the great flood which had inundated the north Angadvipa plain, drowning the jungle, drowning the homes of countless animals, birds and insects, and sweeping away the old longhouse in the Mendaram valley and, with it, men, women and children.

Teraja had been known for its hornbills since the beginning of Creation. Only Selampandai existed before them and he was the Maker of Men. To each warrior the hornbill was the symbol of bravery and his personal link with Sabayan, the great heaven set among the upland peaks of Kinabalu. To those who were not brave the spirits would remain invisible. To live among hornbills, to see them flying majestically overhead, to hear their wing beats in the sunrise and in the darkening evenings – this was joy personified. Teraja was the retreat of the argus pheasant. It was remote, almost inaccessible and cool – *chelop* was the Teraja word which implied a state of grace. And Teraja was a refuge from enemies demoniac and human.

After the flood a new scourge had come – demons from across the sea who worshipped serpents and constructed great lakes to steal the jungle waters for their rice fields; demons who captured the *mlecchas* or 'wild people' as the Terajas were called, and turned them into slaves, forcing them to work in the hot sun in the very same valley which had once been their home. These demons proudly called themselves Nagas and built temple-mountains, terrace upon terrace, to please their Gods. What else could they be but demons, the Teraja people wondered, for they worked with iron like the Rakssassas on the coast and along the Baram River; and like the white-skinned nomadic Punans who tipped their blow-pipes with metal heads of spears?

Uplifted by their victory, all the Teraja warriors returned at once except two – Kenyalang and Temegoh – who remained squatting on a riverside rock in the shade of a *temiang* bamboo. After dynamic action, Kenyalang preferred silence. The others would return to Teraja and be forced by custom to wait overnight in the jungle before entering the longhouse. To do otherwise might spread contagion after an attack and was *pemali*, or taboo. There was time enough for him as *Tuai Burong* to hand over the ceremonial duties to his uncle, Melaka, who liked that sort of thing. Not for Kenyalang the praises of the *timang*, stirring as it would be in its epic imagery, nor the gloating procession of women singing in exultation to the bleeding heads of

once-proud men. Nor had he the slightest inclination to share in the feasting and frenzy of the week to follow. Kenyalang understood well enough the customary need for captured heads and ceremonies: they contributed to the tribe's morale at a time of continuing danger. They built up an invisible wall surrounding the longhouse to protect it from demons of all kinds. Such, indeed was the traditional belief; but for some years Kenyalang had doubted this. An invisible wall 'that reached the sun and the sky': how effective was it? Perhaps it stopped evil spirits from entering, and stopped the souls of human from straying in dreams beyond the longhouse and getting lost, but it could not be nearly as effective in defence as the system in depth he had himself recommended – an advance warning by his own guardian spirit; a network of calls by Kuong Kapong birds, aerial vine swings for surprise counter-attack; concealed pits on approach paths lined with *tukak*, or spikes of belian wood; and the stream bed running past the longhouse seeded with the sharpened spears of *muding* palms.

Kenyalang, before his elevation to *Tuai Burong*, the most important role in the community, had been, like any other warrior, thrilled by his early victories. He had known the pride of battle and the shining eyes of girls who had longed for him to share their sleeping mats. A count of twenty heads had given him a reputation unequalled in all the jungles beneath Sabayan. He was neither tall nor dominating in manner, yet he possessed indefinable powers. He moved cat-like: some said with the relaxed grace of a tiger before it tenses to spring. He would be caught listening to sounds that no one else could hear; and yet again he would be found dreaming. He was at once a creature of the jungle and the stars. It was this unique gift of dreaming and precognition which had made him the youngest *Tuai Burong* in the long history of the Teraja people. As such, he was expected to deal with auguries, see visions, converse with spirits, and give warnings. As a youthful and skilful fighter he could still join the others in battle; but on no account must he usurp the leadership of Kajup, an experienced warrior, more subtly cunning than the pelandok, and gifted at planning unusual forms of attack.

Now, as a breeze rustled the bamboos overhead, and cumulus clouds built up in the late afternoon, such a vision came to Kenyalang by the riverside. It was a dream of what was about to happen in the Naga encampment in the dark before dawn the next morning. Kenyalang found himself gazing inwardly upon the summit of Cakra mountain. Culodaro, the Naga King, in resplendent regalia was attended by Drona to his right, the renowned young strategist who commanded the Naga forces; and Upagatri, his Security Chief, to his left. They sat on camphor wood thrones upon a carved ornamental platform on the far side of a square facing a central ring of water, itself encircling a smooth upraised surface of marble. Piled high on the marble base were mangrove trunks for the funeral pyre, and all around stood seven torchbearers, their torches flaring in the darkness, waiting for the signal to set the pyre ablaze.

Great drums rumbled far below. Soon emerged out of the darkness Utama, the Buddhist monk, in a saffron robe, to take a standing position below and to the right of Drona; and two Hindu priests in white – one to place in position a cauldron of butter, the other to arrange plates of food as oblations to Agni, the God of Fire; to Indra, the sustainer of the world; and to Varuna, formerly a God in India before banishment but now a Goddess reincarnated in human form. A blaring Nageswaram gave warning of the start of the slow ascent of an unseen funeral procession, terrace, upon terrace up the mountain side.

Until they came into view, Kenyalang peered upwards into the darkness above Culodaro's head seeking the statue of the great Naga Serpent made visible only in the briefest flickerings of torchlight; and there, below the Serpent, as he had hoped was the startling vision of Varuna herself standing naked upon a small dais protected by the Naga's overspreading hood. From her shoulders, supported by a diadem at her neck, and blown by the wind flowed a transparent cape in shades of blue and red.

Kenyalang's inner gaze took in the magnificence of the Naga soldiers with ornamental cloth fluttering from their left shoulders, shining neck ornaments, and flashing spears lining the four sides of the summit, leaving a space in the foreground

for the approach of pall bearers; and, as the procession came into view on the sixth terrace, he saw the Nobat Orchestra in the lead – the drums, conches, nageswaram, trumpets, serunai and a single flute combining to create such ear-tingling sounds they over-topped the shrieks and wails of sobbing women.

As Kenyalang watched the unfolding ceremony – the priests pouring butter on the flames, the priestesses singing the hymns of the Rigveda, the coming of dawn, and the immolation of corpses, – his spirits rose, uplifted by the mounting climax of the music and the deep religious fervour of the mourners. His mind reached out to grasp the meaning of what, for him, was a totally new experience. He glanced across to the rapt but so vulnerable figure of the Goddess, searching her body, her eyes and her long flowing hair for proof of her divinity. It was she whom they were worshipping with Agni, the God of Fire, and Indra, their Sustainer of the World. But she appeared to Kenyalang too weak, too mortal. Where was the strength he was looking for? And where the terror?

What Kenyalang sought for intensely was a sign that the fable, widespread among the peoples of the plain, was true: that Varuna had been reared from infancy by serpents; that as a Nagini, a reincarnation of Vritri, the serpent god who controlled the clouds, the rivers, and the rain, she wielded the most terrible supernatural powers. Yet how could this girl, beautiful as she was, conjure up such awe? And how, almost in the same breath, could she be reputed to have such great virtue? Kenyalang's inner mind was deafened by the soaring Nageswaram, his senses confused by the stabbing conches, the weaving serunai and the drums. And then suddenly the turmoil ceased. All that remained in the sky was a single flute rising with ineffable sweetness to the emerging disc of the sun. The entire throng upon the summit remained still. Kenyalang glanced swiftly at Culodaro and the proud Drona; at Utama, the gentle monk; and, high up, once more through the smoke, to the unwavering gaze of Varuna. He sensed in that moment, the flute and Varuna and the sun were all one, and he saw in her utter stillness, despite the flames and the smoke billowing and obscuring her face and

## A DREAM OF KINABALU

body, the very proof he was looking for: the sign of her serpent divinity – Varuna did not blink!

## The Death of Ugau

**T**emegoh knew better than to disturb Kenyalang in trance. Most Terajas relied on spirit information in dreams to be interpreted by analogy the next morning, but this direct revelation of detail in daylight placed Kenyalang's accomplishments of pre-vision far in advance of any *Tuai Burong* in memory. Indeed, his clear insights defied the normal tradition of interpreting dreams, since their meanings were usually inferred, Teraja dreams being discounted if they were explicit. To Temegoh this gift of 'seeing' was nothing less than miraculous: it clothed Kenyalang with an aura of divinity and, although the two had grown up as friends together, their intimacy was occasionally screened by an invisible barrier of respect.

As the wind freshened, blowing strongly through the soaring bamboos overhead, Temegoh was relieved to see Kenyalang smile. Instantly on his feet, Kenyalang removed his war hat with the black and white banded hornbill feathers, his sword and sword belt patterned like the tongue of a coral snake, stepped over his shield carved with a fox's tongue design, carefully removed his *pengaruh* charm around his neck, the tigers' teeth from his ears, dropped his *cawat* (bark loin cloth), and grasping his modesty with his right hand, leapt into the river buttocks first with a splash. Temegoh, with a hoot of delight, followed.



The water was cold, clear and exhilarating. They both jumped and swam and played, pelting each other with small *tapang* fruits, their laughter filling the jungle. Neither feared the Nagas would return: was not Kenyalang's vision of the immolation on Cakra mountain indication enough that the Nagas were even now carrying their dead towards Mendaram for the funeral at dawn? Moments like this were to be savoured without restraint. Should danger intrude from trees, river or bank, Kenyalang relied on Tumok, his *ngarong* or guardian spirit – a racket-tailed drongho from the summit of Kinabalu – to alert him instantly with her electric cry. Yet, even without Tumok, Kenyalang's mind was so closely attuned to his surroundings that he could, above the tumult of the rapids, pin-point the slow, almost soundless progress of a tarsier in the topmost branches of a 300 ft *raja kayu* tree. He could become alive to a hornet's nest at a distance of thirty yards; and instantly alert to the sideways motion of a *tediong tiang* cobra swimming at least ten yards behind his back. And, as far as his modesty was concerned, he would become aware of a girl's unseen arrival on the bank by the faint smell and contact with her own skin of her necklace of *balong* flowers.

This degree of awareness was due to instinct heightened by a lifetime of training. Kenyalang had refined his own sensibilities and others of his tribe for two reasons: to sense and avoid danger, and to prepared for their spirit life to come in Sabayan.

Impulsively, just as he had leapt into the river, so Kenyalang now reached up for a rotan and pulled himself out. A clean wind and a colder flow of water had warned him of rain. He deftly adjusted his *cawat*, tied up his long hair, his coat, belt and sword, fitted back the tiger's teeth and *pengaruh* charm and started back with Temegoh on the return journey following the path taken by Kajup and his companion in battle.

They had travelled only a few paces when Kenyalang sensed misfortune. Splashes of blood on leaves at the path-side he had expected – these would have dripped from Naga heads, including two additional heads taken by Temegoh and himself. What disturbed him now was blood adjacent to and mingling

with Ugau's easily recognisable footprints – too much blood! Ugau had made little of his wound after the battle: “a glancing blow”, he'd said, “from a Naga spear”. That was typical of the brave Ugau: he would die rather than complain. Perhaps he had hoped to apply his own *danan* charm, the blood of a fowl, turmeric and spittle and recover quickly. But as he hastened forward along the path, Kenyalang began to fear the wound was far more serious. Approaching the stream near the long-house, Temok the guardian spirit gave his usual warning of the presence of a Naga spy concealed among the flowers of a *raba* tree on the bank, but Kenyalang took no heed – these spies were easily deceived and often passed back to Mendaram wrong information – and went straight to Ugau lying prostrate on the bank. He saw at once that Ugau was dying.

Kajup, bathing in the stream, showed only indifference. For him the battle had been swift, fierce and successful. Ugau was dying but so might any one of them. There would be time enough for burial ceremonies and relatives to mourn. Kenyalang's impulse was to leap towards Kajup and force his head below water, but as he rushed forward he hesitated: Ugau's need must come first. Racing instead along the sandbank, he returned with *bunga huot* flowers to revive him, rubbing them carefully round the wound and over Ugau's face and forehead. He also shouted for Manang the healer. Although, perhaps, Kenyalang could not prevent Ugau's death, at least he could advise him on his course of action in Sabayan: and to do that he needed Ugau's full attention.

While the Manang built a fire on the sandbank, and prepared food for Ugau's spirit journey, Kenyalang talked to the dying man quietly, gently massaging his forehead. When Ugau opened his eyes, Kenyalang smiled and said: “You have been very brave, Ugau.”

“Am I dying?” asked Ugau.

“Yes,” said Kenyalang. “You go soon to Sabayan.”

“Have I got my sword?” asked Ugau.

“It is here,” reassured Kenyalang. “That is the custom, but you will not need it. Remember my training for you. Clear vi-

sion, psychic power – these will be yours, increased by your courage.”

“What shall I do for food?” asked Ugau, wondering how he could kill animals without a weapon.

“The food is here,” said Kenyalang, “according to custom, just to please you. But you won’t need it. Remember: from now on you will have no body, no mouth, only spirit. It is the spirit you must make strong. Keep to the exercises I told you about. Go to the place of teachers and study.”

“How do I get there?” asked Ugau, as if he had not been told innumerable times before. “In a flash. Like lightning,” Kenyalang said.

Ugau winced momentarily with excruciating pain. It was two or three minutes before he again opened his eyes.

“My wife?” questioned Ugau, “my children?”

“They will come. Don’t worry. You know the custom: for three days they will be at your side before you leave for Sabayan. To come now is *pemali*, taboo. Resigned, Ugau lapsed into unconsciousness. In the case of a serious illness the *Manang* would watch for the departure of the *semangat*, or spirit, from the body, and would have to decide whether it had been captured by a hostile spirit. If so, the spirit would have to be cajoled or forced to return the *semangat* by barking at it or even killing it. That was the custom. But it was clear to the *Manang* there was nothing further he could do. Ugau’s death was now just a matter of time.

Together, Kenyalang and the *Manang* sat and watched. Each respected the other’s experience and skill. The difference between them was that Kenyalang had made frequent trips to Sabayan in trance and knew exactly what to expect. To the *Manang* on the other hand, the spirit world was filled with unseen beings with unpredictable motives, whose messages in dreams came always in parables, forcing him to guess their meaning. Because his job was to manipulate spirits who caused sickness, he could only assume the great majority were malevolent. His was a thankless task for which he occasionally received payment but little prestige. Kenyalang’s approach to the spirit

world was positive and creative: the Manang's negative and often frustrating.

As rain began to fall, there came the first flash of lightning and a roll of thunder. Ugau was seized with a spasm, opened his eyes and spoke in forceful jerks to Kenyalang:

"You.... will come.... visit me!" he uttered urgently.

"Soon," promised Kenyalang. "Very soon," and with that assurance, Ugau died.

In the waiting period before Ugau's death, Kenyalang had pondered deeply on the reasons which lay behind his own powerful impulse to attack Kajup. The desire to strangle or drown him, had now gone, dissipated only, however by a conscientious examination of his own motives. He grudgingly admitted to himself his admiration for the older warrior's achievements. The Nagas were highly trained and disciplined soldiers – in open country – but, within the jungle, Kajup could devise a hundred stratagems for humiliating and destroying them. It was easy, for instance, to observe the Naga method for marking trails. Every few yards, they slashed a triangle in the bark of a tree as a sign-post for their return journey. When a Naga force had passed by, Kajup merely covered the triangles with fungus, moss, or tree cabbages, and then cut fresh triangles, rerouting the Nagas to a prepared ambush position. At other times, when bird omens were unfavourable for battle, he merely sign-posted a new trail to lead the Nagas deeper into the jungle, making them hopelessly lost.

Terajas, unlike Naga officers who understood Sanskrit, were not literate, yet they communicated information about the presence of the enemy with bird calls, and cut signs on bamboos indicating the direction, size and time of passage of a Naga force. Kajup had been most zealous in training his warriors to perfect their communication skills. A nasty trick, which amused his sadistic nature, was to divert a Naga force by cutting a path leading directly to a group of poisonous *rengas* trees. Even to walk beneath these trees produced intense irritation of the skin and painful swellings, forcing the Nagas to return to Mendaram for treatment. Kajup knew that Nagas had little knowledge of

jungle plants and fruits. At one point on a path he would cunningly leave a *buan* leaf containing rambutans, – a fruit, as delicious as *lichee*. Elated by their discovery, the Nagas would continue forward, enjoying the fruit, only to find another *buan* of apples, – unbeknown to them the dreaded *rengas* fruit, inflicting on the swallower the most excruciating agony. Such a deception could only be successful once.

One of Kajup's ploys which had succeeded repeatedly was to approach a sleeping encampment in silence and render the enemy unconscious by burning up-wind the roots of *datura* plants, the white-flowered Angel's trumpets. So effective was the *datura* as an anaesthetic that the Terajas merely had to wait until the air had cleared, then walk into the camp and chop off their heads, the guards lying inert in a *datura* stupor.

In retrospect, Kenyalang saw that Kajup had steadily over the years canalised all his skill, craft and feeling towards the single pursuit of killing. Not merely to defend the tribe. Not for the noble cause of building up an invisible wall against demons, but solely for killing's sake: he enjoyed it. Kajup also enjoyed surprise and terror. He listened with relish for a victim's cry of agony and recalled the sound with harsh laughter in the *timbang* celebrations which followed every successful battle.

In perfecting his skills, Kajup had become as hard as a rock from which all the soil and ferns and flowers of the spirit had been eroded. Sati-Ati, his wife had once worshipped him, but nowadays she no longer wore the *empili* patterned cloth to please him: she had been derided by Kajup too fiercely and too often. Kajup had once loved his two sons and presented them with *berayang* fishing spears. Now they were sickened by his lust for killing and dismembering his victims and refused to accompany him on head-hunting forays.

Unfortunately, many of the warriors fiercely loyal to Kajup shared his savage ways, being contemptuous of others whom they described as "weak" or "cowards". Together they formed a cruel elite who received special favours. "Times are dangerous", they insisted, "demanding the skills of warriors who revel in the delights of battle."

Kenyalang traced in his mind the ways in which the single-minded pursuit of terror by the cruel elite had altered relationships and behaviour within the longhouse. Where formerly there had been love, sincerity, affection and respect, there now existed deception, conceit, arrogance and indifference. In some cases, love had given way to hate; affection had withered, trust had vanished.

While such thoughts paraded clearly before his mind, Kenyalang was aware that he must seek out deeper motives if he were to account for his sudden impulse to kill, and the obvious place to look was in their natural rivalry for leadership. For years, Kajup had been the undisputed war chief of the Terajas; indeed he still remained so: there should be no reason at all why Kenyalang's role of *Tuai Burong* should contend with or usurp Kajup's function. Neither had Kenyalang in the past made any move to that end which might have been misunderstood by Kajup. Yet, it was daily more apparent that Kenyalang's own superb fighting skill allied to his supernatural gift of "seeing" gave him a growing ascendancy over Kajup in the counsels of the elders. Kenyalang's aura, composed of his combined skills of augury and war, had begun to outshine even the mantle of achievements that made Kajup feared in longhouses throughout Angadvipa. Could, therefore, he reasoned, his impulse to attack Kajup be similar to the natural impulse of the wild pig to overthrow the leadership of an ageing boar? Or did he realise, jealousy of Kenyalang's growing reputation might entice the older man towards an act of treachery in battle? Was that blind impulse to attack perhaps instinctively motivated by the need for Kenyalang to make a pre-emptive strike? Kenyalang shuddered at his thoughts and tried to banish them.

In considering his course of action, he realised that nothing could be gained by killing his adversary: Kajup's callous influence had penetrated too deeply. In death, he would seem more heroic and his exploits would be recalled by the *lemambang*, the priest - cum - orator - historian, at every timang. What was needed to bring the killing to an end was a complete transformation of attitudes towards each other by the Nagas and

## A DREAM OF KINABALU

their enemies; the substitution of the head-hunting ethos by a new principle which guaranteed full protection to the tribes; and the wide dissemination of knowledge already introduced in the Teraja long-house acquired from the Spirit Teachers of Sabayan. But how to accomplish all this seemed far beyond the powers of Kenyalang; indeed he had no inkling how or where to begin. As the next three days would be taken up with the departure rites for Ugau, and the following week with celebrations for victory, Kenyalang thought he should seize the chance to retire from the longhouse for awhile to the leopard's lair in a cave downriver where in his boyhood he had practised the traditional confrontation with spirits known as *nampok*. There he would meditate and send his *semangat* or spirit, on a journey to Sabayan.

Before leaving he called Temegoh to request Melaka, his uncle, to take over the duties of *Tuai Burong* until the next new moon. He told Tumok, his *ngarong*, to take a holiday; and then disappeared down the jungle path by the river. Apart from Temegoh, the only ones to see his going were the trees and a Naga spy concealed behind the *raba* flowers.

## The Sacred Pool

**V**aruna had been deeply affected by the immolation of young Nagas whom she remembered best in their moments of ecstasy within the *cakra* circle. She had danced fire into their veins and uplifted their bodies and spirits to explode in radiant climax. And then at dawn, the most creative moment of the day, she had stood helplessly watching their cadavers consigned headless into the flames. Why the Gods allowed this to happen was beyond her comprehension; the fault she felt certainly must be Indra's. There were sustained periods when a great wind blew through her soul, when Lord Shiva charged her slender frame with irresistible power, and energy surged through each movement of her breasts and tongue. Through such entranced surrender of her will flowed her divinity. Yet now she felt shrivelled, humiliated, mortal.

Varuna was only eighteen years old and had served as a Nagini since the age of 13. She was brought to Angadvipa by ship at the age of six months from Kaveripatanam, the Naga capital in Southern India. All she knew of her parentage was that her mother had been a temple dancer and her father Lord Shiva. On arrival at Mendaram she had been placed in the care of a family of cobras which inhabited the roots of a huge banyan tree by the Naga pool. Being of divine origin, she was reared by divine serpents.



From her foster-parents, she acquired a whole range of knowledge that lay beyond human understanding; indeed it was obvious from an early age that she could communicate with cobras with even greater facility than with children of her own age, some of whom would come to stare, and some to talk, but none came close enough to play. Her greatest pleasure was to swim serpent-wise in the pool, gliding with unique thrust using sideways undulations of her body. Her serpent skills were expressed in a sinuosity which not even the most gifted temple dancers in India could hope to emulate. To say that all her features were delicate, even exquisite, would suggest a refinement of quality imaginable in dreams but still recognisably human. Varuna was more than human. Her sacred duty to the *cakra* was to remain inviolate and perfect, a virgin whom all could love with exalted passion, but only at a distance, and one whom none could ever hope to marry or even touch. To single out the smooth curve of a hip in motion, her floating hair, her numinous eyes reflecting cool water and sacred flames was to attempt to encapsulate an eternally flowing waterfall in a spoonful of spray.

Yet Varuna discovered at the age of thirteen that when the *maithuna* ceremonies were complete and she returned to her shrine beneath the great banyan tree, the energy which flowed almost unbidden from her body seemed swiftly to vanish, leaving her weak and pathetically human. Then she returned to her family of serpents, to her sacred pool, and to the *dakini* damsels in red and blue and green who served her in silent affection. There were times of happiness when the *dakinis* would laugh and talk with her and give her news of the tiny world of Mendaram beyond the shrine, but they instinctively knew that after each performance within the *cakra* her body needed slow refreshment in silence, or just occasionally, to be relaxed with the soft music of the *ravenastrom*.

It was to the *ravenastrom* that Varuna turned now. She lay back naked against soft pillows of *kapok* on a wide bed on a raft surrounded on three sides by diaphanous curtains. On the fourth side, the mauve folds were drawn apart to allow the free

flow of a cooling breeze. A low table was within arm's reach with a bowl of fruit, containing mangosteens, rambutans and papaya. Beyond the table seated motionless and listening was Tillotama, whose body dyed blue bore the only distinguishing marks of white circles underlined with white dots on her cheeks and breasts, and white interlaced triangles high up on her chest. Coiled in her lap was Karuna, a cobra sister of Varuna.

It was still early morning. A storm the previous night had left the air cool. Fortunately, the sun could not penetrate the symmetry of leaves from the ornamental crowns of kapur trees soaring above. Nothing and no one could gain entrance into this private world of Varuna. Not only was the pool screened by thick jungle, but the presence of cobras freely gliding through the undergrowth would discourage intrusion by the curious. To the Nagas themselves, the sanctity of this sacred pool made it unapproachable. Although many devotees attended the shrine beneath the banyan each morning and evening, none had ever dared to explore beyond.

Nevertheless, over the past year, Varuna had noticed a disquieting change in the attitudes towards her of Culodaro himself and particularly of Upagatri, his security chief. Drona, the youthful leader of the Thunderbolts of Indra had always been her natural enemy. From time to time, Upagatri's spies had been seen by serpents peering through the branches towards her loggia on a raft in the centre of the pool. Varuna's intuition warned her that some swift move would be made against her, and the instigator might well be Drona whose chosen few warriors since puberty had been deliberately withheld from her shrine. The increasing daring of the Terajas in staging ambushes close to Mendaram created an atmosphere of heightened unease, and Culodaro's black looks at the immolation of Nagas at dawn made her realise that a climax was near.

Varuna's divine intuition was almost as sensitive at smelling out danger as her tongue to smell out food and the human exhalation of treachery. A summons to appear before Culodaro written in a brief note in Sanskrit came within the hour. She promptly sent back the messenger with a crisp note to say

she was resting after the ceremonies and did not wish to be disturbed. Whether this reaction was wise, she had not fully considered, but what Varuna did appreciate instantly was the folly of obeying a summons which by its arrogance and tone diminished her supernatural power. Had she not been quite so young, Varuna might have adopted a more conciliatory manner, suggesting that perhaps a royal palanquin could be despatched to bring her, accompanied of course by a royal invitation.

Culodaro realised he had been hasty, but a third ambush in two months in which Nagas had been killed was cause enough for concern. He was in fact old enough to be Varuna's father and regretted at once his brusque behaviour towards her. She was too useful to offend needlessly. She gave the force of religion to his men, and uplifted their spirits under threat of continuing danger, thereby ensuring their loyalty to him. That Upagatri and Drona constantly spoke against her, and from time to time even accused each other, was to be expected from ambitious men determined to win the power which flowed from the King's esteem. But Culodaro usually disarmed them with some mild extenuation, reverting to an earlier point in every discussion. In recent months, however, he had not been sleeping well. The early morning dew affected his head, giving pains which persisted for an hour or two after the sun had risen. The cold weather from incessant rain had left him with an aching back which required frequent attention from a masseuse, a *mleccha* slave-girl called Selinka with powerful fingers and a magnificent torso, who prattled far too much, often making his headache worse. Continuous disparagement by Drona of Varuna had begun to nurture suspicions which he would have discounted in a stronger state of health, but now with intense frustration forced upon him by a succession of defeats, he sought to vent his irritation by summoning his aides for decisive action. Although he relented when he received Varuna's note and sent an apology with a palanquin to fetch her, he was determined that she too should play her part in effecting the submission of the Terajas.

## The Naga Invasion

**V**aruna had thus been mollified by the arrival of a splendid palanquin for her use accompanied by a guard of honour. She remained determined, however, that if she did go to the Palace, it would not be in a subservient role but as a Goddess and all should know it. Between the time of the original summons and the ultimate arrival of the palanquin she seized the chance to enhance her beauty with *an hsi* oil, perfumes, jewellery and her most magnificent clothes. These were of the finest Persian silk, light and diaphanous in texture and shot with silver and gold. Her melding of blue, dark red and dark green tones resembled the bloom of a hamadryad. Her golden coronet was wrought in the shape of a Naga with a crystal flashing from the serpent's head.

In advance of her palanquin strode the royal guard. Behind came six *dakinis*, each carrying a golden filigree cushion on which lay an upright cobra facing forward, swaying gently with the *dakini's* movements. The nakedness of Varuna's handmaidens seemed less obtrusive than it might have been, so brilliant was their colouring, but the total effect of this extraordinary procession fully achieved Varuna's purpose – to accentuate on this occasion her supernatural alienation. She appeared in this radiant setting at once both exquisite and sinister, a figure of grace and power.

Varuna's arrival was heralded at the palace by the sound of a conch followed by a sharp flutter and crescendo of drums. Culodaro, Upagatri and Drona were already seated waiting, and all three stood and bowed perfunctorily as she entered the throne room. She looked up towards Culodaro, her eyes returning his greeting. The others she ignored and moved over towards a cushion prepared for her, followed by her serpents gliding across the marble floor. The cobras surrounded her like the stamens of a flower each gazing with silent intent towards the throne. Drona could barely conceal a grimace of disgust, while Upagatri recoiled in fear.

Culodaro was angry with waiting. He had meant to be calm. His plan for a reasoned approach leading to co-ordinated action was replaced by an outburst of pent-up feeling. "I have brought you here because we must do something drastic about these Mlecchas. We have come to Angadvipa to uplift and civilise them, but they attack us constantly. We are their superiors in every way – in intelligence, in skill, in weapons, in strategy. Our soldiers at Mendaram are the strongest and fittest of all our forces. Why then do we lose every battle?"

"You Drona have been with us for only five years. You Varuna I know have been much longer. Only Upagatri, however, was present at the beginning and will remember our terrible experiences when we first came to this island. That storm when we lost five of our best ships was unforgettable. All our Sinhala masters were destroyed but, by a miracle, Utama survived. The remaining fifteen vessels staggered towards the coast, missed the Baram river and landed up in the mouth of the Belait. For awhile our lives were a nightmare. We had our tents, our food, our weapons, it is true. We were equipped to face any hazard, and our men were full of patience and courage. And then it rained. For weeks it rained. That eternal rain I shall never forget. Many of our people died of fevers. Others ate strange foods from the jungle and were poisoned. However, we survived. We sent out parties to reconnoitre the land. Swamp, mangroves, nipah palms everywhere. No solid ground on which to build. At first we met no one – not a *mleccha* in

sight. They were sizing us up, hiding and waiting. Then a few daring *rakssassas* started to trade. They were all blue with white faces, and they came out of the darkness offering us rock crystals like diamonds. We wanted fresh fruit and meat. They gave us damar to flare our torches and we gave them beads. They loved beads.

"For a month we never saw them in sunlight. They were getting used to us, or so we thought. Then some of our soldiers were missing. Each had wandered off on his own carelessly. Some got lost. Some were killed and robbed. Some even were eaten – we found their bones. Although, face to face, the *rakssassas* still appeared to be friendly, we knew they wanted our possessions. They even seemed to think they had a right to them. And whenever we refused they became sulky. After a little while they smiled again but we were quite sure they wanted us to go. This feeling became a certainty when late one evening we were attacked by pirates. They came in from the sea, rushed upon us taking us completely by surprise and killed ten Nagas before we repulsed them. It was obvious the *rakssassas* had guided them and told them where best to strike. Within a fortnight, we suffered three more pirate attacks. Fortunately, we were better prepared and had few casualties.

"It then became obvious that the *rakssassas*, although continuing on the surface to be friendly, were in fact our enemies, and our safest plan was to move further inland as quickly as we could. Good soil and a tactically safe area that we could defend – that is what we needed. But these blue *rakssassas* – the sooner we got beyond their reach the better."

"That is what you always said, Culodaro," said a soft voice as Utama in his Buddhist saffron robe entered the throne room. He, too, of course, had been invited to attend but as he spent so much of his time in meditation, it was quite impossible to expect him to make more than a casual contribution. His wisdom was never in question. He was deeply respected, but on military affairs his opinion was not usually called for. He sat down unobtrusively, close to Varuna, totally unconcerned by the presence of her cobras.

"It is true, Utama, that in those days you were the only one who argued that we could still befriend the *rakssassas*, but so much has happened since to prove that all these *mlecchas* are out to kill us. However,...." As Utama made no further comment, Culodaro continued.

"So we moved further upriver, always on the lookout for food until we came to Kuala Belait. Where the two rivers joined were plentiful rumbia palms which gave us sago. It was far enough from the sea to be free of attacks from pirates. Here we consolidated and made our plans. Our forces were split into four. We sent one up the Sungei Belait as far as Bukit Puan where they established an outpost. One set off down the Sungei Damit eventually ending up at Rampayoh. One went down the Mendaram arriving here, and the fourth set off through the jungle westwards in search of the Baram. As you know, they reached the Baram in three days and eventually set up outposts on three river bends. Their leaders all reported back to me and we decided, because of the excellent soil, with a row of hills at our back, to build our headquarters at Mendaram. We had discovered what we came for - rich black soil - a place to build our reservoirs and lay out our padi fields. And that is when we first met the Terajas."

Culodaro ignored the interjections of 'swine' and 'bastards' from Upagatri and Drona. "If we are to be fair to them", he continued, and here Culodaro picked his words carefully to forestall opposition. "our soldiers treated them with deep suspicion expecting them to be fully as treacherous as the *rakssassas*, but in those early days we were never attacked by the Terajas. They brought us fruits. Their women were friendly. Some soldiers even married among them, and Selinka became my masseuse. Our first shock came when their leader invited a few Nagas to join in the celebrations of the *Gawai Burong*. For the first time our men saw the mutilated heads of enemy warriors on display. Our soldiers were plied with endless *tuak*, or rice wine. They listened to the dirge of the old women gloating over the bleeding heads, and they were nauseated. Of course, they made insulting comments which, fortunately,

the Terajas could not understand, but our hosts could see the disgust in our faces. At first they laughed. Then they became embarrassed. What did eventually infuriate them was when our soldiers, not content with sleeping with unmarried girls, began to grab Teraja wives. There was a fight. Everyone was drunk. Some Terajas were killed and the first of our Nagas died to the relentless blades of our hosts.

Culodaro paused, sounded a gong, and called for refreshment. "Well, you know the rest. I have been very frank. I suppose things could have been different, but that night we took the wrong turning, and there has been war and enmity ever since. It was only a matter of time before we drove the Terajas out of Mendaram and out of the whole valley of Rampayoh. We were too many for them, and too well organised in the valley, but of course, in the jungle they have reigned supreme."

"It could never have been different, my Lord," interjected Drona. "They were head-hunters and savages. They delighted in killing and they still do."

"You may be right, Drona," said Culodaro thoughtfully, "but that night was a tragedy from the point of view of our long-term occupation. We need labour to build our reservoirs. In Lanka, our Nagas worked closely with the Yakkas. There were many thousands of them, and together we erected massive structures in laterite to contain the waters. Here we have no labour and no laterite. That is why in twenty years, we have precisely four incomplete reservoirs to show for all our efforts. Clay is fine as a base but it's not much good for walls: our reservoirs are therefore too shallow. But how much more we could have done and still can do if we can only tame these wild people."

"Tame them!" shouted Drona. "Tame them. They are mad. They are bloodthirsty demons!"

"That is exactly the point," said Culodaro. "We call *them* demons. The Terajas call *us* demons! Yet, who really are demons – us or them? And, if we are not demons, perhaps *they* are not either; in which case, they must be human! I said



'human' Drona which means their motives can be understood. They can be manipulated, enslaved if we must, or befriended."

"You go too far, my Lord. Think of all the comrades they've killed. Would you replace the dead, our life-long friends, with Terajas?"

"I will do anything to help my people to survive this hostile country," said Culodaro impatiently.

"We will kill them all," cried Drona. "The Thunderbolts of Indra are trained and ready for action."

"No Drona, you were always too impetuous. I want to build reservoirs not burial grounds. Utama, what do you think?"

"There is more to head-hunting than killing, my Lord. If I had a solution I would have given it to you. We have to allow for three factors – tribal morale, posture, and tribal religion. We know there are many better ways to improve morale. As for posture, think of the honey-bear. He sees you standing in an upright position and thinks you are going to attack, so he rushes forward to get his blow in first. He doesn't really mean to kill you: he merely wants to defend himself. It may be the same with Terajas. If you sit down on sighting a honey-bear, your posture is no longer aggressive, so he does not attack – he is merely curious. He will walk round you, sniffing you three times, perhaps piddle on you, and walk away."

"What, sit down to the Terajas," cried Upagatri. "Let them come and chop off our heads while we smile! You can't be serious!"

"I am quite serious, Upagatri. Do you not remember what my Lord has just said when he described our arrival at Mendaram? The Terajas were friendly because we were not then regarded as a threat to them. Once we took their wives, our behaviour created anger. We had become a threat and must be destroyed."

"So you propose," said Culodaro, "that we try to find a way back. I wish we could, but the battles have been too many. Too many Nagas and Terajas have been killed. How can we find a way back now?"

"I do not know, my Lord," replied Utama, "but a moment ago I mentioned three factors – the third is tribal religion. And in this I must defer to Varuna. Gautama Buddha has said that to remove suffering you must remove desire. The basic desire of the Terajas is to build an invisible wall against demons and enemies of all kinds to ensure their safety. Head-hunting, and the heightened morale it brings to the tribe as a whole, serves to establish this wall. Real or not, it gives them the illusion of safety. So how do you remove an overweening desire for safety?"

Culodaro seemed thankful that refreshments had arrived. He had heard so many disquisitions by Utama in the past. They were learned, penetrating, but they never pointed a way to action. He wanted action now. The new concoction of passion fruit offered to his guests was incomparably better than anything they had tasted in Lanka or India. The soil seemed to be just right in the hills to the east of Rampayoh. Drona and Upagatri were effusive with their congratulations and small talk, so much so that no one noticed the change that had come over Varuna until Culodaro brought them back to the point where they had left off. "So it is now up to you, Varuna," said Culodaro and all eyes turned in her direction including the heads and eyes of her serpents, which turned in unison slowly towards her.

Varuna sat upright with eyes closed in a trance. There was a pause, a silence which continued long enough for Culodaro to be reminded of his early decision to bring the girl from the Naga temple at Kaveripatanam. It had been a fully justified gamble. There had been rumours about her lately, suspicions, but without a doubt if anyone knew how to use religion to preserve morale it was Varuna. She had been a source of strength to his soldiers, if only that fool Drona would stop meddling. However, there were times when her erratic behaviour became an embarrassment. As he spoke Varuna opened her eyes.

"The solution you are seeking will be here in a moment," she said. "Here is your spy, Upagatri, from the Teraja camp. He seems in a great hurry."

Upagatri walked across to draw aside a beaded curtain which gave a full view of the approach path to the Palace, and was astonished by Varuna's prevision to see one of his Nagas running up the hill. He ordered an attendant to bring the man into the throne room immediately. The spy hesitated when he saw the serpents, but Culodaro reassured him and told him to begin.

"My Lord," he said. "One Teraja died in the ambush. He will be buried after three days, and then the longhouse will celebrate what they regard as a great victory."

"Yes, yes, yes," said Culodaro. "Surely you haven't come here to tell me that?"

"No, my Lord. Just before I left, I followed Kenyalang some distance from the longhouse to a leopard's lair where he goes to meditate. I heard him dismiss his guardian spirit and he is now alone in the cave except for the leopard. He could be there for a week. As for Kajup and his warriors, in three days' time, they will all be drunk. That is all my Lord."

Culodaro commended him and asked him to wait outside for further orders.

"So let us strike now!" shouted Drona. "Leave them to me my Lord. I promise you within a week our troubles will be over."

"No, Drona. I've told you I don't want them all killed. Kajup, perhaps, yes. He is their leader. He is the one on whom you can wreak your vengeance. But not the others, and certainly not Kenyalang. Capture him, if you can, unhurt and bring him to me. How you do it is your business. But take care of the leopard. And remember, I said 'unhurt'."

## The Leopard's Lair

**K**enyalang had long been familiar with the leopard's lair. In earlier days, the leopard having departed, the cave had a reputation for housing an assemblage of ferocious spirits. Kenyalang, according to custom, would sooner or later be required to face up to spirits to prove his bravery; and the time to do so was after puberty. In his own case the need was imperative due to his unique upbringing which led him to believe he possessed unique powers. As a baby, his mother had placed him in a small basket and set him adrift on the river. A cobra, seeing the child, managed to propel the basket towards a sandbank and there, poised above it, remained on guard protecting it with its hood. A passing flock of *kenyalang* or rhinoceros hornbills, seeing the snake poised, about to strike the baby, swooped down and snatched basket and child and flew off to Sabayan. That was the story. The baby was discovered a week later, unharmed, at the foot of the longhouse steps and everyone marvelled at his return!

The child, of course, was never able to find out who actually saw the snake or the hornbills, but the story was accepted as true and he was called Kenyalang after his rescuers. That he had been to Sabayan was never questioned, although, of course, Kenyalang himself had no recollection of such an extraordinary visit. Nevertheless, the story enfolded him with a

certain aura. Great things were expected of him and, as he had already visited the world of spirits, it was thought natural enough that his special gifts would lie in the realm of spirit communication and augury.

By the age of thirteen, Kenyalang thought it was time to put his powers to the test. Aware of his destiny, he had consciously trained himself to be fit, strong, highly observant, and in close rapport with the trees, plants, birds and animals that thronged his jungle home. Now, he felt it was time to undergo the test of *nampok*. Usually, Terajas had recourse to *nampok* when they were seriously ill, their aim being to provoke a direct confrontation with the spirit world, the hope being that a good spirit present would overwhelm the evil spirit causing his sickness. The site chosen was usually a crocodile pool, a leopard's lair, a graveyard, or some part of the jungle, visited by wild creatures, which had never been cultivated. But in special circumstances there were times when a young man sought spirit confrontation to prove his own resourcefulness not only to himself but to the whole community.

The choice of this particular lair for *nampok* had been Kenyalang's own. If asked why, he could not have given a reason except to say that the demons inside were known to be fierce and now was his chance to face up to them and prove himself a real *tuai*. Kenyalang had remained alone in the cave for three days. He not only survived the terror of the demons but also pacified them and persuaded them to show him the way to Sabayan. They told him to remain seated cross-legged, gaze through the cave-mouth towards a distant star, and his *semangat*, or spirit, would be carried away. For Kenyalang it proved easier than expected, but since his whole life seemed to be leading towards this particular goal, what happened to him seemed perfectly natural.

After that experience Kenyalang was never frightened of demons again. Not only had his reputation soared as a consequence within his own longhouse, but his name had become familiar to all the tribes inhabiting the Belait plain. Trance flight soon became a habit and he made a point of visiting the leo-

pard's lair frequently. His main requirement within the cave was to remain undisturbed. Once or twice he had been followed to the lair and interrupted during trance, so that, to discourage the curious, he introduced a young leopard into the cave as guardian and warned his own people that the leopard was *keramat* or sacred and must never be touched. The warning, in the event, turned out to be unnecessary, since the leopard grew into a powerful brute and terrified anyone who came near that bend in the river.

We can now understand why Kenyalang after Ugau's death, sought the solitude of the leopard's lair. This time he planned to be in Sabayan until the moon was full and he was anxious that nothing should cause a premature return. As he walked towards the cave in the growing dusk, he was uncomfortably aware that his mind was still clogged with bitter feelings. Long experience of recounting his own dreams to others and interpreting theirs in turn had taught him to enjoy the freedom of an uncluttered mind. Emotion was like a poisonous *tuba* root clouding up a river; it brought dreams like dead fish to the surface. The sooner water flowed clean again, the better.

The cave itself was difficult to enter. A short gradient leading to the mouth was steep and slippery after recent rains and, if Kenyalang fell, he would plunge about the height of a bamboo to the rocks and river below. Long familiar with the exact places to put his feet, Kenyalang himself experienced no difficulty but this hazard gave to the cave added security.

The leopard, as he approached, was awake after a day of sleep and growled at the sound of splashing in the river, but once Kenyalang came into view, the leopard showed pleasure at his coming.

For an hour or so after dark Kenyalang played with the leopard but realised that soon his friend must leave to hunt food, returning perhaps in the early hours of morning before the chill river wind heralded the coming of day. At dawn Kenyalang would be in trance, his body seated in the dark interior of the cave on a floor of soft bat guano, while his spirit made its journey to Sabayan.

## The Thunderbolts of Indra

**E**ver since Drona came to Mendaram he had worked towards a single aim – to place Indra in his rightful place, – a deity above all others in Angadvipa, the solar God, and to achieve this he had trained a force of Nagas unequalled for their discipline, speed of action, and vigour, naming them ‘the Thunderbolts of Indra’. Ostensibly, this unique fighting force was required to overpower the hated *mlecchas*. That it would also add to his own power in an eventual showdown with Varuna and her devotees was a real factor in this thinking about which he preferred to keep silent.

Drona knew his *Rigveda* well. He knew that Varuna had been described ‘as the celestial God who sees everything and therefore knows everything’. Her instant awareness of the Palace arrival of Upagatri’s spy was an uncomfortable reminder of this divine prescience, and as her peculiar knowledge was of a supernatural order it was a force to be reckoned with. He remembered other details from the *Rigveda* concerning Varuna during her earlier male incarnation. “He knows the tracks of birds flying through the air..... the directions of the winds.... He knows everything, spies out all secrets, all actions and all intentions. From the *Atharvaveda* he recalled the words: “Varuna is indeed a powerful God, a great magician and men tremble before him!” How much Varuna, the Goddess, had

inherited those powers in her present female incarnation, he could not tell, but was determined to overthrow her before she could find out.

Drona was strengthened in his resolve by the epic revelations in the *Rigveda* devoted to Indra's victorious battles against the dragon Vritra (Varuna in an earlier form) and the Asuras. When Drona left India five years previously Indra was the most popular of all Gods, and Varuna was forgotten. Why then in Mendaram, he wondered was she regarded as co-equal with Indra? Surely, Indra's victories over Vritra could be repeated to the eternal glory of Drona. He had been specially sent from India to lead the Naga forces in their conquest of Angadvipa. This sacred mission he would achieve, but in his heart the greater conquest would be his victory over Varuna.

However, in building up a force loyal to Indra and to himself as its leader, he found himself handicapped by the Naga tradition of initiation, a tradition in which Varuna's divine beauty and compassion played an unique part. At puberty, the Naga neophytes were led to believe they were entering Chaos in the form of the great serpent Vritra, symbolising darkness, inertia and immobility. Inside the body of the Monster – all this was symbolic since they merely stayed within a jungle hut – they were to be subjected to "those forces which shaped the world at its beginning". They were to be born anew. Within the belly of the Monster, it was firmly believed was cosmic night, the embryonic mode of being; and into that night the neophyte must plunge as if into the foetus before 'the dawn of the first day'. There the boy must wait in darkness, in silence and in terror until 'the dawn of Creation'.

All this symbolism had powerful meaning for the young neophytes because they had been brought up to expect it since childhood. They knew that a period of indescribable torture was to follow, and they must each suffer pain to the very limits of their endurance. Indeed, they welcomed the prospect. How else could they be born anew and become a real Naga?

The neophyte's symbolic death required him to be buried inside a grave, though not actually covered with earth but with



branches, and there he must remain 'as if dead'. After his 'death' his corpse was rubbed with white powder so that he resembled a ghost, and in the manner of ghosts, he was not permitted to eat food with his hands in the normal way, but must pick it off the ground with his teeth. As a ghost, he was circumcised, tortured with flames and with knives, terrorised with weird sounds and horrible appearances, and tattooed with interlaced triangles on his chest, so that after three days and nights his sufferings brought him to the very threshold of unconsciousness. At this point, when the pain seemed unendurable, the incredibly lovely figure of the naked Varuna in wavering torchlight appeared before his gaze. The neophyte's mind, rejected in a flash all his past life and embraced the incomparably compassionate reality of the Goddess before him. In sheer relief from pain, he gladly dedicated his whole life to the pursuit of love of Varuna. The neophyte had thus become a man and a Naga, and here was the rub for Drona – he had also become a life-long devotee of Varuna!

Drona realised that his only way to weaken Varuna's hold upon the young Nagas lay in capturing the boys before puberty and persuading their parents that a greater promise lay for them in a future with 'the Thunderbolts of Indra'. They too would undergo initiation like all Nagas, but initiation under the solar God. Had Varuna been aware of what was happening, she would have resisted, but when Drona came to Angadvipa she was still only thirteen, and was not then consulted by Culodaro. After five years intensive training, in which his neophytes had grown to manhood, Drona now felt confident in their readiness for battle. They had been taught to move silently and overwhelm by surprise. They had studied Teraja techniques and were determined to outdo the Terajas in their own brand of cunning. They could shin up trees, swing on vines, swim, and wrestle with water-buffalo. They could leap and run like deer. Each was an athlete and a killer.

Immediately after the Palace conference with Culodaro, Drona despatched Indrajit, his Thunderbolt leader, together with Upagatri's spy to reconnoitre the leopard's lair and draw

up a plan of attack. On arrival, however, neither the leopard nor Kenyalang were to be seen. At mid-afternoon, they calculated, the leopard would be sleeping, therefore an immediate assault by Indrajit and his companion would be out of the question. So both Nagas waited, concealed by undergrowth on the far side of the river, watching the cave entrance. Indrajit sized up the problem at once: the cave entrance was narrow, and its approach steep and slippery. It could, he thought, be defended by a single, determined fighter against a dozen intruders, certainly by a warrior who could fight with the speed and fury of Kenyalang. And if Kenyalang were indeed in trance, then the leopard alone could overtip any warrior attempting to climb the slope to the entrance and send him crashing below.

Indrajit then considered an approach from above, swinging on a rattan vine fixed to an overhead tree. It was possible that Nagas armed with spears could descend on each side of the cave to floor level and fling their spears at the leopard as soon as it emerged. Unlikely, however, thought Indrajit, as he imagined himself dangling on a smooth rattan holding on with one hand and brandishing a spear in the other. It could work if there were footholds by the cave mouth on which the attackers could rest, but there were none; and to be left dangling on the end of a rattan for more than a few minutes would be unendurable. Only death could result.

The Thunderbolts could, of course, wait down below and, seeing the leopard emerge, hurl their spears, hoping that one or two would strike. Again, wishful thinking. However silent they were as a group moving below the cave, the leopard would be bound to hear them and would certainly avoid becoming a gratuitous target for lurking enemies. He would instantly be on guard, and the chance of surprise must surely be lost. Seeing no direct solution, Indrajit asked himself the question: "What would a Teraja do?" And even the answer to this question did not satisfy him. The Terajas would observe each night the hunting patterns of the leopard and, in due course, they would dig a pit and choose a likely path, and then cover it with branches and leaves. The leopard would eventually fall into the pit and be-

come impaled on sharp spikes of wood. Far too lengthy a process for Indrajit's purpose. Anyway, it was not so much the leopard he wanted but Kenyalang; and soon!

Then Indrajit realised he had made the common human mistake of thinking at ground level rather than thinking, as many animals who live in the topmost branches do, from overhead. He had also been visualising the leopard *emerging* from the cave, *instead of returning to it*. Surely, if it was difficult for a man to enter the cave, so it must be difficult also for the leopard to return – unless of course he jumped! That would be the moment to act. Spears could be hurled from above downwards onto the leaping leopard. Once the leopard was killed, with any luck, Kenyalang would be in trance, and his removal by rattans lowering his body onto a waiting stretcher would not present serious problems.

It was almost dark on their return to Mendaram. Indrajit hastily summoned six of his finest men and briefed them. He told them to rest and be ready to leave when the sickle moon first shone into their huts. Indrajit himself would lead. They would be spaced out single file, moving slowly and silently to the river. Any animal they encountered – wild boar, elephant, or even a honey bear – must be ignored. They would use their spears if they had to, but not otherwise. Undoubtedly, the advice would have been sound to young men experienced in traversing the jungle by night, but these young Nagas were not. Their jungle training exercises had been carried out in daylight, stopping well before dark to build shelter against night rain. Then they had slept. Now they were faced with a journey through darkness with a faint quarter moon barely penetrating the overhead canopy, giving more eeriness than help.

Indrajit drew a map of the cave on a hillside and the river below. They must reach their positions for concealment and attack, he told them, well before dawn when the leopard would return after hunting its food. They must have their spears ready to hurl just below and outward from the entrance to the cave. The leopard would appear without warning and leap. There would only be one chance, a mere flash of a second, for their

strike. If they missed, their task would become immeasurably more difficult on a repeat operation. They must succeed first time. Success would justify five years of the most rigorous training. Their test had come at last!

It was a fine speech and a well-conceived plan. Indrajit was convinced it could be done if he could only get all six men in position on time. That was the problem. If you have trodden a sodden jungle path in daylight you will fully understand how simply the journey can be made with due caution. Pools of water can be avoided. Rattan and thorny creepers can be carefully pushed to one side. Rotting tree trunks can be stepped over. Once away from the path, a hornets nest in the undergrowth ahead can be seen and avoided. But at night? You cannot even see a *kerengga* ant before your feet, let alone the million small ones, swarming incessantly to fulfil some pre-ordained mission quite unconnected with unseeing toes. What you do see is a sudden phosphorescent glow, so brilliant that you must investigate only to find decaying bark on rotten tree stump, uncanny, malevolent, and disturbing. When the variegated chorus of cicadas, tree frogs, and crickets subsides, there is silence everywhere. It is then you feel defenceless and alone. The jungle is full of imagined enemies making no sound.

Undaunted, however, these young Naga heroes began their journey determined to succeed. Leeches held no terrors for them in daylight: they could so easily be dislodged with a flick of a knife, but in the dark no warning of their advance was possible and hundreds of them, smelling blood, descended upon this innocent patrol. A dozen or even 20 leeches steadily sucking blood from each leg might not have caused them too much anxiety, but each man carried within him the private fear that in darkness a leech would loop its way up unseen towards his genitals. It was this fear which compelled him to check his thighs repeatedly to see they were untouched – a distraction sufficiently serious to reduce his concentration on the path ahead. One by one, the Nagas bare feet slipped, bringing them crashing down into the mud. As if such torments were not enough, a strong wind soon came tearing through the trees, presaging

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storm. In the distance, they heard a roar as unseen clouds hurled their contents upon the topmost canopy. Nearer the uproar came until it burst in full fury above them, but miraculously no rain penetrated through. The upper branches and leaves took the full force of the downpour, throwing each Naga into a turmoil of foreboding momentarily uplifted by hope. And then the full impact of the flood fell upon them. Lightning flashes were followed by instant thunder. Trees crashed around them as they cringed to the ground clasping their heads for protection against the icy deluge. In such terrifying displays of cataclysmic power even the bravest are humbled. And as if to mock their misery with a final humiliation, a giant tree ahead was split by a bolt of lightning. It trembled, creaked and groaned as its flaming bulk smashed into surrounding trees, pinning one Naga beneath who died without a sound. The stump flared and sputtered in the driving rain lighting a scene of total subjection, each Naga prostrate and praying for his own survival.

## The Voices of Kinarahengan

**O**blivious to the raging storm and the danger of an imminent assault by Nagas, Kenyalang spent the hours of darkness in the leopard's cave deepening his meditations until the moment at dawn when he would launch his spirit in trance on its journey to Sabayan. He had resolved to seek advice, possibly even help, from both demons and Gods on the summit and slopes of the great mountain of Kinabalu. During his spirit's absence, his body, in trance, would remain inert within the cave until his return, or so he believed.

As the sun's rays spread through the mists above the tree tops, Kenyalang saw the extended dark outline of the mountain's summit and experienced yet again that sense of elation and astonishment which produced wonder, and the more comforting feeling that he was returning to his spiritual home. Wonder came from the striking contrast between jagged peaks clawing the sky and those smooth flat areas called *Darata* which suggested to him the action of two opposing forces in ancient time – the convulsions which hurled the granite ramparts skywards, and some other power, unknown, which sought to bring serenity to the mountain.

On previous visits, Kenyalang had been content to visit the Schools of Illusion on the Darata plateaus to attend courses on meditation and self-awareness. Now he was faced with a more urgent mission – to resolve the more compelling problem of the

Naga invasion of Angadvipa which threatened not only the security of his own tribe but of all tribes on the island. Also, uppermost in his mind, was the problem of how to restore morale to his own people once the present custom of head-hunting had been discontinued.

The ruler of Sabayan was the almighty Kinarahengan, the God whom no one could see, who commanded all the other Gods and spirits living on the mountain. It was Kenyalang's plan to make his obeisance before the massive carving of the God on the upper slopes of Kinabalu and request his protection during his stay before arranging an audience perhaps within a week, by which time he hoped to be fully prepared to ask Kinarahengan the right questions. In the meantime, he had many calls to make, some of them dangerous, but all of them relevant to the fulfilment of his purpose.

It should at this point be explained that while Kenyalang had gone some way towards acquiring the skills of ultra-sonic communication employed by spirits, animals, birds and plants in general, he was still unsure of himself and hoped that Kinarahengan would be able to understand his Teraja dialect. He thus approached the carving on the mountain side with some diffidence if not awe. Standing at two *arm's* length in front of each leg of the towering statue were two giant bamboos, obviously brought up from the rain forest below where giant bamboos were plentiful. Kenyalang waited, mystified. Seeing no one, he remained uncertain what to do, until he heard faintly at first, in the dawn breeze a curious commingling of sounds, fitful and sweet, and deepening as the breeze strengthened and died away. The sounds came from apertures carved in the bamboo nodes. Kenyalang listened again and discovered that the deeper sounds came from the large nodes at the base, and the smaller, sweeter sounds from smaller apertures at the top. The entire effect was exquisitely pleasing, the breeze rising and falling unpredictably producing an ever-changing variety of harmonies, entrancing the mind with melody and swelling occasionally to produce the powerful tones of an organ. Kenyalang could have listened longer, not only for enjoyment, but with the pleasure of

one skilled in creating his own kind of gentle music on the *sape*. He sought for some word to describe the astonishing flow of harmonies, and it came to him in a flash; such a moment of sounds could only be called 'divine'.

"Yes," said a booming voice from the heart of the rock. "Does the word 'divine' so surprise you?"

"Kinarahengan!" gasped Kenyalang. The young man mentally threw himself upon the ground in deep obeisance, but realised at once that, without a body, he was not making very much impression. "Forgive me, my Lord" he said hastily looking in the direction of the voice but seeing nothing.

"What is there to forgive?" said the booming voice. "You think as you think. A flower cannot be blamed for the beauty of its petals."

"I did not expect ....." began Kenyalang.

"There perhaps it would be useful to correct you," said the deep voice. "There is far more to life than expectation. Even my voice speaks according to your expectation, but I am also within this lizard on the wall." The last words were spoken in the high-pitched chirping of a chi-cha. "And in this moth."

Kenyalang swung round to see a large moth with tissue paper wings floating behind him.

The voice had changed again and was as soft as silk. "Here are 10,000 different kinds of moth in Sabayan. I am in each and everyone. So there is more to life, young man, than exists in your expectations." The silken voice changed to a boom. "Anyway, what brings you here?"

"I seek an audience for advice, my Lord," said Kenyalang humbly.

"That can be arranged," said Kinarahengan and a gong echoing across the mountain summoned as if from nowhere a green and gold *kinnari*, a graceful full-breasted girl with wings. "I will see you again then," said the booming voice and for a while there was silence.

Kenyalang felt himself mentally reeling with surprise, but quickly recovered. Not for nothing had he spent years of childhood observing insects and animals of all kinds, and this accu-



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mulated experience made him ask the *kinnari*. "If Kinarahengan is in the moth and in the lizard at the same time, what happens when the lizard captures the moth and eats it? Surely, Kinarahengan does not eat himself?"

"You are still thinking physically," said the girl. "Here, bite my hand!"

The absurd request made Kenyalang's spirit feel momentarily foolish. "I am sorry," he said. "I have really come for an audience with your Master."

"You have already said that," replied the girl. "Can you dance?" Kenyalang began to think the girl was making fun of him and hesitated. "If you are shy," she said gently, "you will never learn. Before you discuss your problems with my Lord you must first learn to dance upon the mountain tops. In mind-modes of course. I will teach you. This time next week at dawn."

With that summary promise she vanished. Kenyalang, having experienced too many surprises for one morning, felt the need to recover among familiar surroundings, setting off down the mountain side for the longhouse of Singalang Burong on the Livagu River. As a spirit, he had the choice of instantaneous flight or gliding slowly above the carpet of white leptospermum, rhododendrons in many hues from blood red to coppery orange, small schima bushes with large red or purple flowers and, above the slopes lower down, the brown wonderland of the moss forest. In Kinabalu, Kenyalang preferred gliding except on those days when the whole mountain was convulsed in booming winds and storm. Today he lingered with a pleasure which in his own language could only be described as *celap* - a sense of grace and enchantment outside normal human experience.

Back among the giant trees of the primeval jungle he felt once again at home. Singalang Burong knew of his coming and awaited him, relaxed on the verandah chatting with some visiting *tuai*. This was Kenyalang's fourth visit and he knew that no ceremony or gifts were expected. As he greeted the War God that same feeling ran through him of humility mingled with admiration for the man who had proved himself the greatest ever

leader of the tribes in Angadvipa. Singalang Burong did not smile. His eyes momentarily twinkled above high cheekbones, drawn face, and tight lips that somehow expressed the accumulated wisdom of centuries of his people, and then relaxed into a steady gaze that penetrated to the heart.

Kenyalang turned to greet all present and sat down, noting the faded barking deer's hoof pattern woven into the floor. Two girls entered, one bearing a tray of intoxicating *marang* fruits, the other, two cups of *tuak*, one for Singalang Burong ornamented with loops of decorated hair, the other richly carved and coloured for Kenyalang. The elders, *tuai-tuai*, were already drinking.

Even after four visits, Kenyalang was still secretly amused by the aristocratic attempt to keep up courtesies practised on earth where food and drink are necessities but in the context of a spirit world the physical intake of food was no longer possible. He knew of course why this was done – to preserve those customs which lent stability and shape to an existence which could otherwise become unbearably insubstantial. The cup he held was not real. The *tuak* was not real, but nevertheless, he would be expected to drink and show relish.

He had learned also not to show surprise at the capricious fading and renewal of the images of those present. This was particularly true of the elders whose images sometimes vanished altogether. The girls serving *tuak* appeared more attenuated than usual, but Kenyalang knew better than to comment. Fortunately, the outlines of Singalang Burong remained clear and strong and his voice, though quiet, reflected his manner of concentration.

“What can we do for you this time?” said the God after Kenyalang had apparently drunk his *tuak* and made all the right gestures of appreciation. Kenyalang should have been prepared for the question but had assumed, according to custom, that the conversation would flow smoothly from one anecdote to another, until his purpose in coming surfaced quite by chance. Momentarily he was embarrassed in the presence of so many distinguished warriors. For good reason too, for what he wished

to propose was heresy, but how to breach the subject without causing offence was an acute problem. However, we know that Kenyalang was not without courage, and neither being foolhardy, he began as obliquely as he could.

"My great Lord and venerable *Tuai-tuai*, perhaps the greatest test of long experience and wisdom is to persuade the entire community of a longhouse to move all their belongings to another part of the jungle and establish a new one in a strange setting further upriver. As you know, countless voices will be raised in resistance. Arguments will be tossed backward and forward on the *ruai* and will become embroidered and exaggerated by the women in the padi fields who will return in the evenings convinced of the folly of such a change, to inflame their husbands over *tuak* that night to oppose it. Yet consider that sickness has caused many deaths. The air is unhealthy, and to avoid further loss and misery, the move to higher ground far upriver has become a necessity." The *Tuai-tuai* nodded sympathetically, murmuring approval.

"Now I give that example, my Lord, as an illustration of the problem facing us at Teraja. In fact, we do not want to move the longhouse itself. Admittedly, we were forced to move out of Mendaram by the Nagas, but our present site is healthy enough and we have streams flowing down the hill-side providing fresh water. No, it is not the longhouse that is our problem but the people in it. The sickness does not come from the land or from the streams but from the spirit!"

"Hai yoh!" ejaculated one of the *Tuai-tuai* and there was a buzz of conversation.

"I repeat," said Kenyalang when all was once again quiet, "that our move from Mendaram to our present site was successful. If anything, we are still too close to the Nagas, but we are proud to remain in the forefront of the battle against them. Yet – and here I must call upon your greater wisdom and understanding – what seems to be destroying the harmony of our people is the very tradition of head-hunting which was designed to strengthen our morale!"

There was a shocked silence, and then a burst of protest from each of the *Tuai-tuai*. "He is like the brainfever bird," said one.

"Mad!" echoed another. "You should not say things like that!" shouted a third.

Kenyalang waited for the commotion to subside, studying the face of Singalang Burong which remained as expressionless as granite. "As you know," he continued. "I have culled my share of heads, and I too have tried to build up that invisible wall to reach the sun and the sky to protect us from demons of all kinds. But now, great Lord, our trouble is not from demons without but from demons within, the demons of greed, and pride and hatred – all these devour us and destroy our love and respect. The new demons are those very warriors among us who have sought so bravely to capture Naga heads."

As Kenyalang had feared, the *Tuai-tuai*, in a body, reacted angrily, denouncing him furiously to Singalang Burong, calling on Kenyalang to retract what he had said. Lashed by their total condemnation, he felt appalled by his own rashness and youthful folly. How could he have hoped to persuade these die-hard warriors to change the habits of centuries? He looked towards Singalang Burong fully expecting castigation for his temerity. Instead, Singalang Burong stood up to his full height, using his commanding presence to bring silence and then spoke quietly and to the point: "Is it not true you are engaged in a whole succession of forays against the invading forces of the Nagas?"

"Yes, my Lord," replied Kenyalang.

"Then are you proposing, my son, to stop fighting?"

"No, my Lord. Every Teraja will fight to the death if necessary."

"So you will fight, but you will not chop heads?" The question, still spoken quietly, carried its own force.

"That is why I have come to Sabayan, my Lord, to seek advice. Of one thing I am certain that we can no longer capture heads. If we can keep our land and our self respect, we are willing to forget past battles and co-operate with the Nagas."

There was a shout of "Coward!" from one of the *Tuai-tuai* which the God and Kenyalang ignored.

"There is much we can learn from the Nagas, but slaves we shall never be. If, however, there is no hope of such a peace, then we shall die defending our land, our wives and children; but we shall do so out of love for our families, not for the joy of killing, nor gloating over the heads of our enemies."

This time Singalang Burong anticipated the outburst from the *Tuai* elders and held up his hand for silence. "You were right to come to the realms of the spirit to find an answer to a problem of the spirit," he said. "I am, as you know, just a myth – a God in the sky. That is why I stay on here in Sabayan. It is expected of all Gods to remain in suspension while the power of their memories still survives upon earth to inspire their people. I am still respected for my fighting qualities, and, as you have rightly said, our traditions require us to chop heads to renew the morale of our tribe. That perhaps is how it always will be until we can find a better way. So what is this mysterious factor called morale? How does it strengthen the will of our people? All I can say is that without it, the spirit withers and the people themselves die, having nothing to live for. Morale is a force, a power, of the spirit. Up here in Sabayan they call it 'psychic power' and, as you have seen on the darata plateaus along the summit of Kinabalu, we have 'schools of illusion' to develop this psychic power; indeed, all spirits are invited to attend these schools for training. Among the warriors on the Belait plain, it is well-known that this strange power of the spirit which we call morale grows out of courage and thrives on the visible realisation of great achievement. That is why in the *Timang* your warriors show your womenfolk their captured heads. This is what they can understand. It may be centuries before they can learn what we are discovering on the darata – how to create this psychic power using the techniques of 'mind-point!'"

Kenyalang fully understood this reference to communal meditation as he had himself attempted to introduce the technique to youngsters at Teraja. However, Singalang Burong conti-

nued with an illustration which threw a light on the whole problem of spirit existence in Sabayan.

"As you know," he said, "for convenience, most spirits like to remain visible in some form or another. It make identification and communication easier, but to preserve a clear image, each spirit is obliged to attend *darata* classes to regenerate their psychic power. As you may have noticed, my two girls have not been to school recently which accounts for intermittent fading of their images, and I don't suppose most of the *Tuai-tuai* have been even once in the last month." The remark occasioned a subdued murmur. "However, how to change the customs of centuries and convince your people at Teraja to accept new ways will provide a challenge which may be even too great for you, Kenyalang. My advice is, don't attempt to bring about change unless you are quite sure that you can achieve it. You know the old proverb: 'Once a people loses its self-respect, it will die.' Customs are valuable and should wherever possible be preserved."

Singalong Burong sat down in silence. The girls entered appropriately carrying *tuak* and distributed cups among the *Tuai-tuai* who seemed to be absorbed in drinking. Gradually the tension eased, and the conversation turned on the methods used to destroy Naga patrols, everyone giving his view of the tactics to be employed. Kenyalang listened in silence, learning nothing new, and therefore making no comment. "While you are here," advised Singalong Burong, "you should call on Rogon who lives in Pakka Cave. He is the Master of the demons of Kinabalu, an expert tactician if there ever was one. Oh, I know he's a powerful demon but don't let that worry you. When you've been up there for some time you begin to understand that the demons are only doing their job. Rogon is first-class: I have battled with him many times. Go and see him and tell him I sent you."

For the remainder of the evening, anecdotes flowed and the reason for Kenyalang's coming was forgotten. He was relieved as he departed early the next morning to know that he still retained the goodwill of Singalong Burong. He looked at the serrated summit of the mountain against a clear sky. What sort of reception, he wondered, would he get from Rogon?

## The Capture of Kenyalang

**I**n the jungles on the Belait Plain, the Thunderbolts of Indra, approaching the leopard's cave, were recovering after the passing of the storm. Indrajit himself, though dazed by what he had seen, now summoned his strength to reassemble his patrol. He felt certain that, if he did not galvanise them into action at once, their spirits would be crushed and their purpose would filter like rivulets into sand.

"All of you come here!" he shouted madly. "At the double!" They responded like sleep walkers. "Hurry!" he cried. "Pull yourselves together. You who call yourselves thunderbolts - have you never seen a thunderbolt before?" One by one, the Nagas came out of the darkness, mere shadows in the gloom of the pale moonlight. "Now listen. Walk straight to that burning stump, find a smouldering stick nearby and burn off your leeches. Quickly!" They came on in a dream. One by one, the Nagas found burning brands and took new heart as they watched their leeches roll off to the touch.

In the silence after rain, Indrajit's unaccustomed shouts had been heard by a thousand ears, awakening innumerable unseen curiosities. Birds and animals were alert at once. Wild pigs, moving in a herd, stood still, and then began to run. Pelanduks, the tiny mouse-deer of the jungle, scattered swiftly to safety. Badgers scurried. Pure white moonrats splashed in haste and,

where they had to swoop. Lemurs and bats, lorises, tarsiers and proboscis monkeys, clouded leopards and marbled cats – all paused high above, listening to the human cries, wondering what danger threatened.

Indrajit knew that he must keep the patrol on the move. Nothing could be done for the stricken Naga who had been instantly crushed, only his feet now being visible. He reformed the patrol and began to march. Whereas before the storm the path had been slippery, it was now a torrent. Fortunately, they could not see the water swirling round their feet nor the snakes and beetles swimming past them: they were far too intent placing each foot securely in front of the other to stop them falling down. Indrajit by his rallying cry and harsh determination had awakened at least the memory of their former purpose and, although they were shaking with cold, they began to feel again that sense of challenge, that surge of will to overcome whatever difficulties confronted them. If they survived this journey and actually returned with the dead leopard, they would indeed be heroes.

At that moment, with a terrifying suddenness, a herd of wild pigs crashed upon them, racing down the path, charging their legs, and scattering them like skittles, while those creatures following swiftly behind trampled in panic over their bodies and heads. Indrajit, having moved off the path for a moment to cut a triangle in the bark of a tree, was the only one to be left standing. The squeals, clatter and shrieks caused him at once to look ahead, realising instinctively that the entire herd were running away in fear, and at any moment the cause of their panic would be hurtling towards him. He braced his right arm, held the spear poised in readiness, and then, out of the darkness, the creature sprang. Indrajit had only a lightning flash of time to react. He saw the leopard's fangs, its mouth open in a snarl of fury, and his spear went right to its mark – into the very throat of the leopard! The force of the creature's body struck with full impact on his chest, sending him spinning. As the beast landed in a great splash, torn by the agony in its throat, it wrenched and contorted its neck and limbs to remove the cause of the searing pain and in its dance of death, it flung its full weight upon three



Nagas lying wounded in the pathway, rending them with its claws, and venting its fury on their naked flesh.

Indrajit was lacerated in the chest and battered about the body but was still conscious. Without a weapon, however, he felt helpless. Remembering his dagger, he dragged himself out of the mire, forcing himself upwards out of the depths of a sickening inertia. He staggered towards the crazed animal and flung himself upon it with his remaining strength, plunging the dagger into its chest.

Many hours passed before Indrajit awoke. There was daylight and mist between the trees. The jungle lay still but was filled with the mournful cries of tree frogs. His arm and hand lay in a pool of blood and the lower half of his body lay across the dead leopard. He was conscious of a sharp pain in his chest, and his limbs, smeared with mud and pig excrement, ached as he moved. But he was alive! One by one, memories of the battle returned. He stood up, looked around uncertainly, and then began to search for his warriors. Three of them lay unrecognisable, their mangled flesh, savaged by the claws of the leopard, already swarming with ants. Two had been flung off the path by the first onrush of wild pigs, their legs gashed by tusks. Both were unconscious, but still alive.

Indrajit felt no joy at survival but sick and desperately weary. He kicked angrily at a cluster of emerald green and velvet black butterflies savouring a pool of urine, annoyed that creatures of such delicate beauty should find pleasure in filth, but regretted instantly the movement which redoubled his pain. He swore silently and steeled himself for the return journey, moving cautiously forward with dogged courage, eager, understandably for acclaim, and feeling anxious for the two Nagas who still remained alive. Help must be brought for them, and reinforcements to attack the unguarded cave while Kenyalang still remained in trance.

The physical capture of Kenyalang and the removal of his body to Mendaram proved unexpectedly easy. A fresh patrol was quickly sent, approached the cave cautiously, and meeting no opposition, entered to find Kenyalang in trance. Kenyalang's

inert body was carefully removed and lowered by rattan to the river-side. On three stretchers, the two wounded Nagas and Kenyalang were carried to the Palace and placed before Culodaro. Though suffering from great pain, the Nagas were gratified to receive the praise of Culodaro who complimented Indrajit especially for his phenomenal courage in slaying the leopard single-handed. Drona was congratulated also for seeing the enterprise to a swift conclusion, but at a very heavy cost, there remaining in Culodaro's mind the unspoken suspicion that the whole operation had been bungled. The deaths of four Nagas was a tragedy and should never have happened. Culodaro ordered the two Nagas to be carried away for treatment of their wounds, and called for his personal palanquin to carry Indrajit back to his anxious friends, before his removal to hospital. Indrajit's task had been gloriously completed. Whatever folly had been involved in the strategic planning of the operation, the personal heroism of its leader was beyond question, and should be recognised with all honour!

There remained only the problem of Kenyalang – how to get him out of trance, and how to handle him once he realised he was a prisoner. Both, thought Culodaro, called for the delicacy and feminine guile of Varuna and her serpents. Despite a protest from Drona, Culodaro ordered Kenyalang's body to be carried to Varuna's shrine, there to await the return of his spirit.

## The Demons of Rogon

**K**enyalang's spirit, unaware of the capture of his body, was reluctant to visit Rogon in Pakka Cave high up the mountain side. If the Master of the Demons were in a rage or practising his demoniac powers, almost anything was more than likely to happen. Kenyalang's return to his body at Teraja by the new moon was pressing: he could not allow himself to be imprisoned or delayed for any cause, and certainly not by demons. Thus he decided first to call on the friendly hornbills of the great gully known as Panataran. This was a huge bite out of the central summit of the mountain, shaped like a 'U' and at least a mile deep. It is one of those extraordinary features of Kinabalu which gives the mountain its awesome – some say 'terrifying' – aspect. One side of the gully rose to a higher level than the other and it was upon this massive granitic upthrust of rock that Kenyalang saw the nests of hornbills.

In jungles far below, the squabbling of young hornbills in the nest is a sound immediately identifiable by its raucous confusion. Among the howling winds, however, which tear through the gully on the mountain summit, the total effect is almost maniacal. However, Kenyalang was quick to realise that the familiar hornbill chorus was merely a performance of welcome and would cease once the reception was over. Hornbills, like any other spirits on Sabayan, communicate ultrasonically or by

direct vision, whichever method comes to them with the greatest facility.

Kenyalang's first surprise was to be greeted by a huge hornbill with an all-white tail, the sides of its head and neck also being white below a chestnut crown. The skin of its throat was blue. He had never seen a hornbill of this coloration before. The whole effect was made more dramatic because the iris and the bare skin around the eye were cherry red. This great bird greeted him with a deep throaty cry which sounded like the tearing of tree bark, and at once Kenyalang knew that he was expected and warmly welcome.

"All our visitors come up by the rainbow" said the hornbill, preferring direct vision speech. "Very few ever fly here direct, but you are especially welcome."

Kenyalang was rather out of practice at projecting images from his brain, not having done it since he last attended one of the schools on the *darata*, but he did his best and the hornbill, if not fully understanding him, saw to it that he did not lose face, any failure to understand merely drawing attention to his poor performance.

"Which rainbow and where?" enquired Kenyalang.

The hornbill explained that the hornbills of Panataran were the guardians and the gate-keepers of Sabayan. When humans were about to die, a warning rainbow appeared above Kisirung, always at the same spot, and, where the rainbow touched the mountain side, this was the place where the guardians of Sabayan welcomed new spirits and carried them up via the rainbow to the summit. "Kisirung," the hornbill explained "is a short distance below Panataran to the east. It is a well-known landmark fully familiar to the peoples of the plain and jungle below."

"So what do you do with them when they arrive?" asked Kenyalang.

"Our task," replied the hornbill "is to decide where they should go. Those who are energetic, constructive in outlook, clear-sighted and even dedicated provide ideal material for the Schools of Illusion on the *Darata*. We send them there. The

western *darata* is only quite a short distance from the gully: it's a fairly easy glide."

"Yes, I remember it well," said Kenyalang. "They were very helpful."

"As for the destructive ones – the killers, the thieves, the rapists, and the skilled deceivers – we send them to Rogon where they feel at home."

"And the others?" asked Kenyalang. "The in-betweens?"

"We send them to dance with the *kinnari*," said the hornbill. "It's the quickest way to find out how they can adapt." The old bird was so familiar with the whole selection process that at first he was not aware of Kenyalang's puzzlement.

"Why the *kinnari*?" Kenyalang asked, remembering his own recent pleasurable meeting with one of these full-breasted bird maidens.

"To see how they can fly," said the old bird. "There comes a time when every bird on earth has to be pushed out of the nest. If it flies, it lives. If not, it dies. It's the same up here in Sabayan. A great many fail the test by the *kinnari*. At first, they think it's fun and so it is until the going gets rough. Then they are hurled around the sky and they have to follow the *kinnari* through patterns which become more and more complex. Many get dizzy and lose their nerve. Others lack determination, and others, the power to concentrate. You know, Kenyalang, that you are named after the hornbill because hornbills are a symbol to all humans of courage. This is why, above all other birds, we are honoured to become the guardians of Sabayan. Courage is the greatest of qualities: without it nothing can be achieved."

The great hornbill waxed eloquent and lifted its huge wings with pride to give added power to his words. Other hornbills responded with acclaim, their rasping cries filling the gully, and echoing from its walls. Kenyalang was happy to see many familiar faces. The subject of courage naturally brought him back to the problem of morale.

"It's all very simple," said the great bird. "Those who prove they have courage, determination and the will to concentrate are able to make headway in the Schools of Illusion. They

soon learn to generate their own psychic power. The others... well, without psychic power they are handicapped. Their images are weak. They cannot travel. They cannot communicate. As a result, they become frustrated and do all kinds of mischief. If they can repossess humans and feed on their energy they will do so. Many just become ghosts and third-rate demons."

"So they are sent to Rogon in the Pakka Cave?" said Kenyalang, "for further training?"

"Hopefully, yes," said the old hornbill. "It is surprising what uses Rogon finds to put them to."

Much in the last few minutes had now become clear to Kenyalang, but he still had one question to put to the old bird. "I know," he said, "that you are more magnificent in flight than other birds, but how have you won this great reputation for courage?"

"That, I fear is not fully deserved," replied the hornbill. "When two males are contesting the ownership of a female hornbill, they launch themselves from two opposite hills and crash their casques together until one of them is senseless." She paused and added: "Of course there are better ways of showing courage."

"What really happened when I was a baby?" he asked. "Was I rescued by hornbills?"

"That's what they say," said the old bird. "But true or not, does it matter? It has shaped your character and developed talents which you might never have discovered."

He paused for a moment and adopted an expression of deep wisdom gazing upwards towards the peak of Nulu Takawas where the great Monastery stood facing Eternity.

"Myths have a symbolic function," he said enigmatically, "and should never be examined too closely. If we examined all our myths there would be no Gods and no Sabayan."

With that powerful utterance, the wreathed hornbill rasped a deep farewell and rose on its great wings to glide down towards the jungle far below. If anything, this noise of Kenyalang's reception was now outdone by the multitudinous commotion of chuckling that came from a thousand throats, the

rhinoceros hornbills, after whom he was named, giving him the greatest send-off.

Kenyalang was glad to have experienced this charming interlude. He felt better equipped to face Rogon, the Master of Demons, and whatever surprises he had in store. The Pakka Cave was almost directly below the Panataran Gully. To reach it he glided over a carpet of myriads of white leptospermum and richly coloured rhododendrons. As he approached the cave, he was enchanted by the tall magnolias, standing well above the level of the forest, with stiff bright green leaves, the young being purplish in colour, and large white petalled flowers turning creamy yellow with a purple base. Surely, he thought in passing, these were not the handiwork of Rogon. Indeed, more characteristic were the *Rengas* trees with their blackish bark, brought up specially from the lowlands and replanted at the cave entrance. Who would dare walk beneath these poisonous trees without permission of the Master of all the Demons?

Being a disembodied spirit, however, this particular hazard was of no consequence to Kenyalang. As he approached the entrance, he heard a roar as if the whole mountain had been shaken. Only once before had he experienced a sound so terrifying that it made him instinctively want to run – when he had stumbled once in the jungle on a tigress with her cubs. Anyone who has not experienced such a roar at close quarters cannot conceive its annihilating effect. The body, in a reflex action seeks instant escape, but finds the whole nervous system totally paralysed.

Kenyalang, without a body still experienced profound shock. He remained poised before the threshold anxiously waiting for the monster to appear. What eventually he saw was more hideous than he had ever imagined. Rogon was huge. His muscles were knotted like the massive roots of a *neram* tree on the river bank. His face was so horrible that Kenyalang hardly dared to look. One large, fiery red eye stared from the centre of his forehead. Above his head were two horns, and from his slaver-ing mouth jutted two enormous canine teeth. He reminded Kenyalang of the kind of giant animals he had seen only in

dreams. As Rogon saw the look of shock on Kenyalang's face, he roared with laughter, beating his thighs with his massive hands. From his mouth came the most disgusting smell of rotting meat, giving to the laughter an evil potency reminiscent of a foetid swamp. His amusement was so great that he soon began to choke and splutter.

Indeed, Rogon was so possessed by laughter that he gave time for Kenyalang to take in his surroundings. In the dark spaces of the cave was a continual emergence and fading of demoniac faces, outlined with a phosphorescent glow. For the most part they leered, evidently privy to some secret humour, but some faces had a look of congealed terror as if they had been practising too long without sufficient strength to recompose their features into any kind of normality.

When he had recovered, Rogon gave another splitting roar which echoed and re-echoed throughout the cave, producing a further burst of uncontrollable laughter which continued until tears rolled down his face. Then he stepped forward and with both hands lifted Kenyalang up to the level of his eye, stared at him as if he were short-sighted, and then lowered him gently to the ground. Kenyalang had been expecting to be hurled across the cave, and was most astonished by this gesture of almost human consideration.

"So, Kenyalang" said Rogon in a voice of thunder, "do I live up to your expectations?"

"Certainly," answered Kenyalang, "You are every bit as terrifying as I thought you would be."

"That is fine," said Rogon. "And what did that scoundrel Singalang Burong say about me?"

"He seems to have a very high regard for your tactical skill," replied Kenyalang.

"Ah, that is why you have come," shouted Rogon and roared with laughter once again. "You want me to win your battles for you!"

Kenyalang protested that he had merely come to seek advice. He was quite prepared to do the fighting on his own.



"Nonsense," cried Rogon. "In the blink of an eye, we shall make a curry stew out of those Nagas."

With that promise Rogon invited Kenyalang deeper into the cave, kicking the serpents from beneath his feet, and calling for a fiery drink. Kenyalang could not help becoming aware of the entire theatrical effect produced by Rogon who, in reality, was nothing more than a demon spirit, but like all other spirits in Sabayan conformed in his appearance to what others expected of him. However, behind that single eye and the bluff manner there was a brain, or at least an insubstantial but penetrating mind, and Kenyalang sensed with growing confidence that Rogon would produce all the tactical terrors required of him.

Two hours passed in a question and answer session in which all the questions were put by Rogon and a contingency plan was drawn up between them. Once Kenyalang complimented him on his swift grasp of all the details involved. It would be hard to say that Rogon smiled, but at least his single eye glowed more brightly than usual.

"Mental awareness is the first requirement of a spirit," Rogon said with deep seriousness. "The psychic energy it produces is the second. Without energy nothing can be created and nothing destroyed. Kinarahengan and I are bound together by a single purpose – to keep the world moving. As you know, creation must always be preceded by destruction: Mine must be the first move to destroy. Just as Kinarahengan is part of every creature and spirit, so am I. He speaks with many voices. So do I. Take that lizard on the wall. Listen!" There was a loud and deep 'Tockey' from a gecko. "And that moth!" There came instantly a sound from the moth like a roaring of flames.

"How they love the flames," Rogon said with pride. "Did Kinarahengan show you his storm bamboos, eh, eh? Like a child he is! Marvellous sounds! All his own invention!" Rogon roared with laughter again, and stopped dramatically. "But who makes the storms, the winds that blow through them? Have you seen the peaks of Kinabalu when the lightnings and thunder crash upon them? That is the work of Rogon! And all those pretty, pretty flowers below, Kinarahengan made them of

course, but who keeps them alive? Who empties the clouds of rain upon them? I – Rogon!”

“And your demons – what do they do?” asked Kenyalang.

“They stoke the fires,” roared Rogon. “Isn’t that what you would expect? Your hornbills talk endlessly about courage – greater courage for greater psychic power! True, my friend, but how do you *prove* your courage? Show me how, without my demons to terrify you? One word from me and you will melt into a black blob of *damar*!”

“Come,” he shouted to the floating heads around him: “Catch fire! Explode! Incinerate!”

Kenyalang instantly felt an intense burning sensation in his eyes, along his limbs and back, so real that it was as if his body was still with him. The surrounding air was filled with whirling shapes converging into incandescent barbs of fire which came hurtling towards him, tearing his flesh, searing his skin with pain, tormenting his very bones. But what Rogon had forgotten, and Kenyalang now recalled, was the experience of *nampak* in his youth when he spent three days in a Teraja cave terrorised by demons. On that occasion, he had emerged unscathed. Now, he reasoned, without a body or nerves to react to pain, there was not the slightest cause to be afraid.

Kenyalang stood upright before Rogon and speaking with word pictures, for the uproar was far too great for his voice to be heard, he said firmly, “You have made your point Rogon. A remarkable demonstration. Now you may call them off.” Instantly there was silence within the cave as the demons vanished.

“So much for your blob of *damar*, Rogon!” challenged Kenyalang. The Master of Demons was hugely delighted by Kenyalang’s impertinence and lapsed into further gusts of laughter.

“Just a small test, my boy,” he said. “If you’d failed that, I’d have sent you and your Nagas to Luagan Lalak to die miserably in the swamps. I’ll give you my help, I promise. Is there any more you want to know?”

"Yes," said Kenyalang. "If your demons, when they first come to you are so short of psychic power, how is it they produce so much energy?"

Rogon became serious again: "There you have pointed straight to the heart of the fire," he said. "How to reproduce the energy released by the flames? That must remain my secret. I am the fire – the destroyer. Think of the effect of terror on a single mind, the effect on a thousand minds! On you, terror produces courage and more psychic power. On my untrained demons, it creates such fear that they could run all the way to eternity. Are not these the same, but in reverse. Both courage and fear produce energy. All the rest is training."

"You make it sound simple, Rogon, but surely there is an end to terror. The mind can only take so much pain. What then?"

"Kenyalang," said Rogon quietly, "you have an uncanny way of diving to the bottom of any pool. I will tell you what I have told you once already. At the end of destruction lies the beginning of creation. The mind moves in a circle. You take it so far and it will always turn back. The most adept destroyer becomes a creator. The finest creator must destroy to create again."

"Now you are baffling me, Rogon."

"Don't you remember the lizard and the moth? Kinarahengan spoke through both, and so did I? The lizard destroys the moth: thus we destroy ourselves, and yet we live on in other moths and lizards, and beetles and birds and demons. Are you beginning to catch on, Kenyalang?"

"You are talking in riddles, Rogon."

"When you were passing through the schools of illusion, you saw them playing King Ravana's game. Do you remember the black and white pieces? The soldiers in the front row. The elephants, the horses, the chariots. It was a battle, Kenyalang! The black pieces fought against the white. Of course, in Lanka where Ravana ruled, they said it was Surpanakha's idea – his sister – who told him to invent a game to use up the hours and days of waiting for news of his armies and generals as they were

annihilated one after another. But Ravana was not called the Demon King for nothing: That wasn't why he invented the game. Oh *no*, Kenyalang!" and here Rogon's voice rose to the approaching climax. "What he invented was a *mirror of the world!* He showed us all exactly what we are doing! We're all busily planning, creating, imagining marvellous stratagems to destroy each other – the black to destroy the white, the white to destroy the black, for game after game after game! We create, we destroy, but it's all a game, just a game! Into the box we go: we're all dead; then out we come in our finery and we're just as before. And who most of all do we seek to destroy? Why, the king – the symbol of all glory, all pomp and all power. Our hopes, our ideals – where are they? Why, centred in our own King, of course; and we protect him, and guard him, and build all our strength around him, and concentrate all our forces to destroy the enemy of the King, and one of us wins, and back into the box we all go."

Rogon was talking faster and faster, his voice getting higher and higher, until he ended with a shout which filled the whole cave; "Psychic power, *Energy*, Kenyalang, for the game! All for the game!" And roaring with laughter, he shouted: "The game, the game. We've all got to play. We've all got to play. The game, the game, the game," and his voice trailed away as he vanished leaving only his demoniac laugh behind.

## Enticement of Kenyalang

**T**he arrival of Kenyalang's inert body at Varuna's shrine created consternation among the assembled worshippers. The evening's ceremonies were due to begin. The entire area beneath the branches of the sacred banyan was filled with seated Nagas who were nudged aside to make a path for the stretcher carrying Kenyalang. His body was then placed to one side of a platform on which Varuna, the Goddess, was due to appear.

His physique, even after the journey from the leopard's cave, seemed remarkable. Without his war cap and coat, belt and sword which had been removed, the two features which caught widespread attention were his long black hair which fell smoothly to below his waist in a single flow, and the striking tattoo designs on his chest, back, arms and legs. Once having observed these, attention was focussed on his face which remained calm with eyes closed. His seating posture was upright with a straight back, and his head was slightly tilted forward as if in meditation. It was quite obvious to the onlookers that Kenyalang was still alive but totally unaware of his surroundings.

It was not long before the Nagas noticed the tiger's teeth in his ears and the *Pengaruh* charm around his neck, both proof to a people educated in Sanskrit and the law, that their owner

was a primitive savage. Their anger at this desecration of their temple soon reached a hubbub. Varuna, the Goddess was expected to emerge from the trunk of the banyan through the wide open mouth of a carved *makara*, the traditional vehicle of the Goddess – half fish and half crocodile with huge staring eyes. To protect her and to play their part in the ceremonies were ranged six cobras to each side of the stage.

Nagas normally enjoyed these evening sessions because they were never quite sure what Varuna was going to do. Sometimes she played her ravenastrom and sang. At others she danced. Always they felt uplifted. On special occasions she was accompanied by drums and *serunai* and taught them one by one how to control their minds and body movements to harmonise with the divine movements of her cobras. Whatever form the ceremonies took, they were invariably spontaneous, reacting to the mood of her worshippers. After a victory, she would be joyous. After a defeat, she would be sombre, gradually changing the mood of her worshippers to one of renewed resolution and hope. Her performances were effortless and divinely inspired, and had the effect day after day of strengthening the Nagas' morale and sending them back with a deepened sense of love for their wives and children, and a sense of renewed purpose to accomplish the missions of the next day.

Slowly a silence came upon the seated throng, many wondering how Varuna would react to this extraordinary intrusion. It is doubtful if they understood the nature of trance. Kenyalang's stillness would have puzzled them; so that whatever Varuna did would not easily dispel the mystery. The first awareness by the worshippers of Varuna's coming was the sound of a flute suspended high above them in the branches of the banyan. Its long sweet notes held them enthralled. It would swoop sometimes like a bird and then climb again to recapture those tender moments of lingering sweetness. The flute seemed to tremble with each flicker of the torch flames, and then finally dived to settle with a deep tremulousness inside the flame itself. Emerging from the shadows came Tillotama in vivid peacock blue, the leaping flames accentuating circles of white dots on her

checks and breasts, and white interlaced triangles on her chest. She moved with natural grace towards Kenyalang, lifting the burning torch to his face for all to see. By some extraordinary magic the flute lingered on in the flame, poised as if to penetrate deep into Kenyalang's brain.

Kenyalang himself remained still and appeared to be unaware of either the flame or the flute. Then Varuna entered, her only adornment being her Naga coronet with its rock crystal set in the Naga's head catching and reflecting the light with every movement. She lifted up Kenyalang's hands, one by one and showed how they flopped to his sides. She lifted and held one arm outstretched in front of him for all to see as Tilotama placed the flaming brand beneath. The flame enveloped his arm as the watching Nagas gasped in astonishment. Suddenly the flute ceased, replaced by low urgent drumming from the darkness surrounding the *nakara* out of whose mouth three green and red *Dakini* emerged with whips, each *Dakini* familiar to the audience in the sacred rituals of the *maithuna* where their exquisite finesse combined with erotic skills in the dance encompassed their movements with a divine ambience. Their brilliantly hued bodies glistened in the torchlight as they glided towards Kenyalang to fulfil a single purpose. As the first whip struck, the drums crashed, and as each girl's whip whistled through the air, the drums crashed again and again.

Varuna appeared to be standing impassively watching the eyelids of Kenyalang, but with each stroke she flinched imperceptibly as if the whip were tearing her own flesh. She herself could scarcely believe that she would react in this way, having on countless occasions been obliged to observe the initiation tortures of her own neophytes.

The drums ceased. The flute returned - a low, plaintive note of waiting, accentuating the breathless silence of the audience. Then, impelled to sing in a deep melodious voice not her own, Varuna recalled the heroism of the Naga soldiers fighting the Teraja demons out of the jungle, the tragic Naga losses, and the treacherous Teraja ambushes stunning in their bestiality, leading to the decapitation of heads of the best of their youth.

This man among all their enemies was the most to be feared and hated, not because he was evil – that term applied exactly to Kajup and his slaughterers – but because he used his demoniac skills of augury and prophecy to delude his people, falsely uplifting them into believing that bestiality was courageous. Her voice which had begun dispassionate and low steadily filled with emotion and mounted to a frenzy. At its peak, her singing abruptly ended as if she were switching unconsciously from being a Goddess to a woman. There was a fractional pause while she regathered her senses and then she spoke to her audience earnestly and quietly, picking her words carefully to say the right thing, and lending to each idea a feeling of explosive passion.

“At the moment,” she concluded, “Kenyalang hides from us using his mask of insensibility, but however long it takes we shall remove that mask, and Kenyalang” – and here she paused for emphasis – “Kenyalang will be brought for trial on Cakra mountain!” These words were greeted with a delirious outburst of approval mixed with protest.

Some shouted: “Don’t wait. Kill Him! Kill him now!”

Almost as if in answer to their shouts a fourth *Dakini* entered. Again she had that strange gliding movement that comes naturally to humans who constantly observe snakes around them. Like Tillotama, her body was coated with peacock blue with bright red circles of dots on breasts and cheeks, and coiled round her waist, swaying to her gradual movements, was a King Cobra poised at eye level facing her. As the drumming increased in tempo, so her undulations increased the agitation of the cobra who skilfully matched her frenzied rhythm. Together they moved closer and closer to Kenyalang, building up the expectation of the audience to a point where they dreaded the unthinkable was about to happen.

“Kill him,” they shouted. “Kill him!” and many swept forward with the fever of drumming in their temples, but suddenly those in the front held back, not daring to press beyond the line of cobras guarding the stage. As they hesitated, the blast of a nageswaram rent the air, the drumming ceased on



the instant, and in the silence that followed, all eyes watched the blue *dakini* take the last two steps towards Kenyalang. In a flash, the cobra leapt to his throat, spitting poison at his eyelids, and coiling itself around his neck and chest. Those who had shouted most were stunned and fell silent. Varuna, then spoke to them, looking white and shaken. Her voice was almost a whisper: "Death is what the Teraja deserves for all the evil he has done, but he must be tried according to our law. Culodaro is a just ruler and he insists that no harm shall come to him. He must have a fair trial. What I have shown you demonstrates clearly that in trance he feels no pain. Flame will not burn. Whips will not cauterise his flesh. So we must awaken him from trance. Tillotama knows the ritual and will see to it with my *Dakinis*. If that doesn't work, I shall force him to return to his body during the full moon."

Having spoken, Varuna left the dais heading for the Makara passage to the pool; her *dakinis* following carrying the stretcher supporting Kenyalang. The King Cobra swiftly uncoiled and unobtrusively vanished. The flute in the torch flame broke the silence, continuing in a sombre mood as the *Dakinis* filed slowly away into the darkness.

Back at the pool, Varuna instructed the *dakinis* to carry Kenyalang first to her own apartment above the waterfall. Later that night he would be placed in the care of Tillotama and Varuna's serpent sister on the raft in the centre of the pool. On the following morning the *Dakinis* would carry through the usual ceremony to pacify and recall the spirits, using whatever skills they had to entice Kenyalang to return. Varuna herself must then be awakened instantly if there were any change in Kenyalang's condition.

In the silence of her room, alone with Kenyalang, Varuna threw herself on her bed struggling with a conflict inside her such as she had never previously known. What afflicted her was more than intense curiosity: she sensed about this savage's demeanour a tranquillity unique in one reputed to be so violent and brave. She wanted most of all to look into his eyes. But why? As a woman she could not ignore the rounded strength of

his body, moulded by a life-time of hard use, traversing the jungle, hunting, fighting, speeding his perahu with spear-shaped paddles on the *Sungai Mendaram*. His frame was shorter but more powerful than any Naga. His feet were broad, indeed exceptionally wide, the toes being oddly splayed. His fingers were long and graceful, strangely at variance with his feet. His brow was high and broad, his nose flat with rounded nostrils unlike the aquiline nose of a Naga. His lips were full without the hint of cruelty she expected. Her glance took in the tigers' teeth in his ears and then fell upon the *pengaruh* round his neck. She removed the cord which held it and, clasping it in both hands, studied it intensively. It was as if she were trying with her own power to absorb the magic in the *pengaruh*. Looked at casually, it appeared to be of no value – a smooth, pink stone which might have been picked up in any river, but as her fingers caressed its surface, she became animated by the force it contained. Her thoughts flowed outwards in a whirl, and found herself transported, as if in trance, to the summit of Cakra mountain to arrive at a climactic point in her sacred dance, the very moment when she overwhelms her devotees with a sublime sense of primordial chaos before clasping partners in ecstatic embrace in the final act of union with her divinity. The drums pounded in her brain. She found her control leaving her, the chaos mounting, mists swirling on the mountain, and then her thoughts came slowly into focus again. Now was being enacted in prevision of the final stage of Kenyalang's trial. Culodaro was speaking gravely, and then suddenly the moonlight was filled with a thousand whirling shadows. They crowded in upon her, tearing at her face and body, forcing her to the ground.

At that moment the *pengaruh* dropped involuntarily to the carpet. Her vision ended, Varuna returned instantly to the surroundings of her own apartment, feeling shaken and deeply moved. Frightened too of the implications of her vision, she quickly struck a gong for her *Dakinis* to take Kenyalang away and down to the pool, postponing her original plan, through incense and the *ravenastrom*, to summon Kenyalang's spirit to reanimate his body at once.

The *dakinis* were somewhat nervous of their savage prize, stepping carefully down the steep path and keeping their silence, but once they had reached the pool, the *damar* torch was shone once again to reveal Kenyalang's splendid physique, his deep chest and his strong buttocks and thighs. They began to comment freely on his tattoo designs and on all those features that could and could not be seen. None noticed, however, that his *pengaruh* was missing. Together they lifted him carefully into a bamboo raft, and, one *Dakini* at each corner pushed the raft slowly across to the waiting Tillotama.

During Kenyalang's absence in Varuna's apartment, Tillotama had given careful thought to the problem of how to entice his spirit back again. She herself was the equal of any *Dakini* in voluptuousness; indeed her skill in the erotic arts had been proved time and again on the summit of Cakra mountain, and she was still a girl of only twenty one years. However, Tillotama was the most deeply committed of Varuna's religious attendants. She was widely read in Sanskrit, and had committed the Vedas to memory. She also fully understood the role of sex in uplifting the spirit of the Nagas. For this occasion, she was satisfied that the normal ceremony for the pacification of Spirits would not achieve its purpose. Kenyalang's spirit had not returned to his body after the highly provocative ritual in the shrine which suggested his Spirit must be far away. What was needed, she thought, was a stronger appeal through the message-bearing power of incense combined with striking visual beauty. To this end she called for all the *Dakinis* to be present to prepare for a ceremony to start within the hour, giving them enough time to renew their colours and body designs and to protect them from erosion by water by immersing themselves in a resin called *guggulu*, distinctive for its unique perfume.

Tillotama's raft was moved to the far side of the pool near the waterfall. At each corner had been positioned large incense burners from which the smoke rose in pale moonlight through overhanging branches. The ceremony eventually began quietly with Tillotama seated beside Kenyalang facing the pool, intoning from the Atharvaveda:

"The earth upon whom mortals, with discordant noise, sing and dance, on whom they fight, on whom resounds the war cry, the war-drum, may She, the Earth put our rivals to rout; may the Earth make me unrivalled.

"Who bears treasure manifoldly, wealth in secret places, may Earth give me jewels and gold. May the benevolent Goddess assign riches to us. She that is the lavish giver of riches.

"The Earth who bears manifestly men of various languages, of different customs, according to their habitations, shall milk out for me a thousand streams of wealth like a steady cow that does not kick.

"You forest animals, the wild beasts located in the woods, lions and tigers who go about eating men – drive away here from us, O Earth, the ula, the wolf, the demon personifying disaster, the raksasa, the fiend."

And here Tillotama began to improvise, playing the ravenastrom and changing her voice to its natural high sweet tone.

"Bring to us, O Earth, the young warrior called Kenyalang, the handsome one who sits beside me. Call him from wherever he may be – by stream, deep in the jungles or roaming the tops of mountains. Tell him it is I, Tillotama, the *Dakini* who calls to give him honey from my lips and enrapture his soul."

As she continued to sing, twelve *Dakinis* came into view carrying *damar* torches circling the pool, the light from their flares reflecting on the water, and overhead, probing the green mysteries of the branches of ancient trees. As they moved round the circumference, from all directions serpents slid into the water and glided towards the raft, their skins glowing in the torchlight. On the raft, they formed a line, poised and watchful, gazing across the pool.

From the banyan tree came the low murmur of drums, Tillotama had stopped singing and stood before Kenyalang. Then taking a small lamp from the edge of an incense burner, she gently blew the smoke into his eyes. Six *Dakinis* with torches flaring moved into position like sentinels standing behind the raft. The others, moving in a dream, brought flowers heaped in

the jungle and placed them around Kenyalang and before his feet. Murmuring endearments in his ears, Tillotama slowly placed waxen white and deep red frangipani flowers in his hair, her breasts grazing his cheek as she moved, and her hair mingling with his own. When she had finished, Tillotama knelt before him, gazing into his eyelids, and leaning gently forward, singing softly, with her lips touching his ears and neck, she slowly massaged the back of his head. She sang fervently, offering to him all the love she had; indeed so deeply was she involved in the role of supplicant that her eyes misted over with genuine tears.

The remaining six *Dakinis* with their torches had moved round to the side of the pool, climbed the broad sloping trunk of a massive Neram high into its branches, and then in rapid succession with whoops of delight they plunged, each with her flame, into the pool below directly in front of Kenyalang. It was a startling performance and, as each emerged dripping from the pool, they began singing, Tillotama and the sentinel *Dakini* joining them with ecstatic song. Then, laughing and playing, they splashed water at each other and at Kenyalang, dragging him into the pool with them.

Unexpectedly out of the darkness above the waterfall, a cry from Varuna: "Enough! I will recall his spirit tomorrow night in the Cakra." The *Dakinis* hastily balanced Kenyalang firmly on the raft, pushed it back to its normal position in the centre, and then vanished to their quarters. Tillotama, taking a silk cloth from the flower-strewn bed, gently brushed away the globules of water from his skin. As silence settled on the pool, all that could be seen in the pale light of the moon was Varuna's serpent sister on guard, while Tillotama slowly and lovingly combed Kenyalang's long black hair.

## To the Schools of Illusion

**H**aving spent so long with Rogon in Pakka Cave, Kenyalang's spirit had been unaware of the great storm which had raged across Kinabalu throughout the afternoon. The torrential rains had stopped but massive clouds still obliterated the full length of the summit as darkness clothed the mountain. Kenyalang had often been told since childhood that body tattoos provided a natural radiance for spirits to see on journeys through the spirit world. He was now surprised to find this childhood superstition true, his spirit body being surrounded by a natural aura. The starkly irregular outline of the summit with its broad *daratas*, its deep ravine, and its dramatic upthrusts of granite were familiar to him, but as the outline could not be seen through cloud he went straight to the point where he imagined the first School of Illusion to be, being finally guided to his destination by the swelling hypnotic rhythm of the *anklong*.

The *anklong* was known to Kenyalang from his previous visits. It was a complex bamboo instrument with a succession of rising and falling bamboo hammers, improvising an endless hypnotic melody, producing trances. Being without physical bodies, spirits have no need to renew their physical energy with sleep. Instead, through uniting together in group trance, they recreate their psychic power. As Kenyalang's spirit needed recharging,

he joined the group, unobtrusively staying with them throughout the night. At first, his mind was relaxed by the music, and calm, but soon it became filled with images; one of haunting spiritual beauty reflecting power and divinity; the other of a radiant girl in peacock blue with tears in her eyes pleading for his return. He knew neither but both disturbed him and both evidently needed him: the girl in blue for what could not be less than passionate physical love; the other, powerfully reminiscent of Varuna on the mountain top, appealed to his spirit. Their images continued to trouble him for some time and then slowly faded.

At dawn the following morning, without a cloud on the mountain to mar the view, Kenyalang gazed outwards in all directions across ridge upon ridge of jungle, across islands rising out of lakes of pure white *kapok* glistening in the sun. The scene so uplifted his spirit that he made a mental note to ask the *Vajracarya*, the Master of Ceremonies, if the daily perception of beauty were a factor in contributing to the increase of psychic energy. This was his last day on the mountain – he had promised to return to Teraja by the full moon or Temegoh and the others would be concerned about him; and he sensed the events which lay before him would make this day perhaps the most memorable in his life. With the joy of expectation he glided above a carpet of mountain flowers, glancing at the carved figure of Kinarahengan with his spear, past sparkling waterfalls, past the Pakka Cave and the deep cleft of the Panataran Gully, across the glass-enclosed laboratories of the eastern *darata*, finally returning to the giant Monastery of Nulu Takawas on the peak, before descending to the entrance of the first of ten illusory schools on the illusory lake on the western *darata*. The schools were massive, circular smooth and white, revolving all the time. At first their behaviour had puzzled Kenyalang. "How could anyone remain upright inside?" had been his first thought, but in his earlier visits he had learned that the schools had been contrived in this way as a constant reminder to students that, whatever illusions they were taught to create, they still remained illusions and nothing more. A spirit could not be

affected by natural forces: its movements were free. To think of a 'right way up' was merely to continue unwittingly the habits of Earth-thinking.

As Kenyalang entered his first revolving classroom, this very point was being driven home by a teacher wearing a long yellow robe and a conical yellow hat. His students, of all shapes and species, were scattered around the walls and ceiling in total confusion yet each had a view of the teacher. Among them he saw Ugau and smiled to him.

"Each one of us is part of the Eternal mind," the yellow hat said, "and we live and move as spirits through psychic power. Switch off that power and we no longer exist. Those of us who have come from the world below have certain habits of mind which in life have provided us with motivating power, often psychic power. These habits are not necessarily bad. Those which have given us stimulation to work, to think, to discover, and have contributed to the morale of our society – those we preserve. The habit of thinking in pictures is not bad either. Plants, animals and human think in this way. We have always thought in this way while on Earth, but of course there is no need to do so in Sabayan where all the ground rules of existence have totally changed. Indeed, there is no longer any *ground*: we float freely in space. Here nothing exists, so we don't need to think in pictures any more, yet our minds have been so conditioned by aeons of habit, that we continue to find it convenient to think visually. As you know, abstract thinking is far more difficult, and in the early days when we tried to do without word pictures it led to a great deal of frustration and loss of energy.

"So to this end, we encourage and train all of you in the manufacture of pictures of your surroundings – 'illusions' we call them – only so long as you realise they are illusions and nothing more. They are there to help your mind to identify others and to communicate with them easily. They are there because emotional attachment to ideas and objects does in some mysterious way build up your creative force, even if the objects are illusory; yet to become too attached to illusions will lead to mental pain,



## A DREAM OF KINABALU

suffering and loss of psychic energy. So remember always to keep a balance in your mind, and sometimes move from place to place in an upside down posture just so you don't forget."

It was an extraordinary discourse but fully understandable to Kenyalang who had heard it before. He did not remember seeing spirits travelling upside down, perhaps because they used other ways to remind themselves, but in the classrooms a stage of chaotic topsyturveydom was normal, indeed compulsory. However, he thought, it must all be very confusing to Ugau.

Passing onwards to the next school he was delighted to see the Spirits dancing *Magunatip*. This dance was for humans and animals only, the plants finding the speed too much for them; indeed, they were taught other methods for learning concentration. Just to show he had not lost his knack, Kenyalang joined in. To the rapid beat of a drum and gong, four bamboos placed in the shape of a cross - two crossing two - were manipulated by four orangutans who nimbly kept rhythm by banging the bamboo first downwards against a wooden base, and then horizontally to clash against each other. The dancers had to nip in and out smartly, keeping exactly to the rhythm or their ankles would receive a nasty knock. As spirits, of course, they would not feel it, but others would notice, and there would be general laughter at their expense. Kenyalang saw one girl who was particularly adept and asked her to accompany him as the rhythm increased. Faster and faster they jumped until finally the orangutans went berserk and both collapsed amid laughter by all the spirits.

As Kenyalang made the appropriate gesture to lift her off the ground - such help, of course, being unnecessary to a spirit - he had the uncanny feeling that her face was similar, if not identical, to the vision of the girl in blue. She smiled her thanks and was gone.

Passing through the schools one by one, Kenyalang saw the painting classes where accuracy in perception and colours was taught. These were followed by modelling classes where spirits could choose their own subjects, often reflecting the illusion they had created up around themselves. Plants and flowers were concentrating on producing other plants and flowers. Animals

preferred to make animals, and humans more interesting humans.

The *Vajracarya* in a tall red hat and red robe, making his rounds, entered at this point, recognised Kenyalang and welcomed him. He did not seem at all surprised to see him but launched forth with an explanation immediately as if he knew why Kenyalang had come and was expecting him. "The creative process puts each spirit in direct touch with the Eternal Mind," he said, "the most effective way of accumulating psychic power. That is a bonus in itself." He pointed to a fern which was modelling another fern. "This spirit was a girl in her former life who for many reasons was desperately unhappy. Instead of continuing to suffer as a human, she decided to share in the mild pleasures which ferns enjoy in each other's company. By being together, of course, in groups, they develop psychic strength. Her aim is to create a new fern, a plant even more effective than she has so far seen on Kinabalu. Now she is going through the first stages of creation: soon she will pass on to the laboratories on the eastern *darata* where her achievement of an ideal fern may become possible."

"Why should she try so hard to create an ideal fern when at the end of it all she knows it is merely an illusion?" asked Kenyalang. The *Vajracarya* in reply turned to the fern and put the question to her in direct visual language.

"Because I want to be reborn as a fern," she replied. "There is only one problem: the stalk is attacked by ants. At present I'm creating a thicker stalk without lessening the fern's beauty. When I get to the eastern *darata* I shall find a way to make the fern exude a liquid so potent that it will cause the ants to deform and disintegrate. In that way, when I'm reborn I shall be fully protected."

"Isn't that rather hard on the ants?" asked Kenyalang.

"Not at all," replied the fern. "They can go elsewhere to get their food."

"How did the idea come to you?" asked Kenyalang.

"In one of the meditation classes," she said. "I just relaxed and the idea came into my head."

"So what will you do when the fern fights back?" said Kenyalang to an ant modelling a superior ant, when the situation had been explained to him.

"Exactly as she says," he replied. "My problem, however, is different. I slipped into the pitcher of a plant and drowned. You must have seen them all over the place. They say there are 65 species of pitchers on Kinabalu alone. Think of that. Terrible they are, flaunting their beauty, just waiting for an ant like me to walk in. It's the sugary sweet smell that gets me. The lid of one was open, so I walked along the lip and fell in. The juice was delicious inside – stickly, you might say – but when I tried to climb out I couldn't. The rim round the mouth was too slippery and steep so I slipped back and drowned."

"So what do you plan to do about it?" asked Kenyalang.

"I don't know," said the ant. "I'm off to meditation classes tomorrow to find out."

"And if you can adapt, say, by developing feet that cling to the most slippery surface, what will happen to the pitchers when they can no longer trap ants in their food supply?"

"Ah, that's their problem. They'll obviously produce another variety. But isn't that part of the fun. Life is just a game where the rules are changing and the characters are changing, but the game goes on!"

The ant unknowingly was echoing Rogon's farewell laughter: "The game, the game!"

"It's time you saw the advanced meditation school," said the *Vajracarya*, steering Kenyalang through further classrooms filled with students of every conceivable species all busily creating their own models. At last they arrived at a roofed amphitheatre. There was only the sound of the expulsion of air as hundreds of students breathed in and breathed out in a uniform rhythm. There was no scenery, no distraction whatever.

"They've all been through the early stages of meditation, concentrating their minds on objects and upon the images of deities," said the *Vajracarya*. They've had weeks of concentrat-

ing on nothing but the *mandala*. Now their inner minds are ready to open. When that happens their minds reflect the Eternal Mind."

"You mean that pictures come into their minds from outside?" asked Kenyalang. "That is what happens to me."

"Not exactly," said the *vajracarya*. "Dream pictures come from emotional blockages trying to find release. Such pictures are usually mixed up."

"But mine are very clear," said Kenyalang, "and I see them when I am awake."

"Those are visions," said the monk. "They are pictures of reality seen out of Time. They, too, come from the Eternal Mind."

"So what else can they see?" asked Kenyalang, becoming more and more curious.

"As many have been wrestling before meditation with the problems of re-creation, the flow of pictures show them clearly how to make the prototypes of what they wish to become. A few spirits are less concerned with re-creating themselves physically. They seek only to create beauty in painting pictures, in composing music, or in writing poetry."

"So the music is all composed for them by the Eternal Mind?"

"Yes" said the old monk, "and the pictures and the poetry."

"So beauty is good?" asked Kenyalang, remembering his moments reflection at dawn when the whole landscape stretched out in wonder before him.

"You could say that, if you like," replied the monk. "Either to see beauty daily, or to create beauty yourself, directly contributes to your psychic power."

Kenyalang was momentarily satisfied. He had learned something new. The *Vajracarya* could see that the questions had run their course, so he made his apologies, directed Kenyalang to the laboratories on the eastern *darata*, and unobtrusively withdrew.

Thus Kenyalang found himself gliding eastwards, pondering all that he had seen and heard. As he reached the waterfall, he stopped. From the distance it was a long silver streak down the side of the mountain. Close to, it was an eternal flow of light reflected in a myriad droplets of water. He paused and watched, thinking that the flow of the waterfall was just like the flow of the Eternal Mind – eternal spray!

The fitfulness of the light and the soft roar induced in Kenyalang a mood of introspection. His problem, he knew, was that he could not see the tiny world of Teraja and Mendaram as a broad landscape: he saw it only in parts, rather as sunbeams illuminate small segments of a plateau through passing clouds. He would like to think of the big questions which would provide him with a total solution; instead, he found himself asking questions directly related to his own personal experience. These were the small areas on which the sunbeams had played. What he had learned in Sabayan were a number of small facts which seemed to be related, but they still did not amount to a landscape.

For instance, this obsession among spirits with psychic energy. Such power was generated in group trance with *anklong*, yet other important factors contributed to it – courage, beauty, concentration of thought and the act of creation. It came mysteriously from the Eternal Mind. It was best preserved in tradition and custom, and could easily be dissipated, if not lost, when ancient practises were discontinued. A people's morale was the direct product of psychic energy. His personal insights into future events were called visions and these had been vouchsafed to him by the Eternal Mind but why him, he did not know. What had all this got to do, he wondered, with his personal assignment to reduce the power of the Nagas? He had received a promise of help from Rogon and they had worked out contingency plans together, but why should the Master of Demons agree so readily to help him?

As he remained poised by the waterfall in contemplation, his flow of thought was interrupted by the familiar electric cry of

a racket-tailed drongho. It was Tumok swooping down towards him.

"I thought you had gone home to your family," said Kenyalang.

"This is my home - Kinabalu - remember?" replied Tumok.

"Too many visions seem to make me forgetful," said Kenyalang. "It is good to see you. How did you know I was here?"

"A trogon told me," said Tumok. "You know the bird with the scarlet head and the light grey breast. It's always growling to itself. It sits on the topmost branches of the forest trees and sees everything."

"And how did he know?" pursued Kenyalang.

"One of the barbets told him. Don't ask me which one because on Kinabalu they all spend their time at dawn and dusk singing from the treetops. Well, not singing - humming. If one barbet knows you are here, they all know."

"I can believe that," said Kenyalang "but tell me something I've always wanted to know: why do barbets sing with their mouth shut? All they do is puff out their throats and with each note the tail dips."

Tumok burst out laughing. "You notice everything Kenyalang."

"And another thing, Tumok. How many different kinds of birds are there on this mountain?" said Kenyalang, remembering he would soon be calling at the laboratories where new birds were made.

"Ooh!" hesitated Tumok. "There are all the hawks and the eagles, the herons, egrets and bitterns; the falcons; the quail, partridges and pheasants; all colours of pigeons and doves; and the cuckoos; and the owls and the nightjars and the swifts. How many more do you want?"

"Carry on," said Kenyalang, smiling.

"The kingfishers, the bee-eaters, the rollers, the hornbills, the barbets, the woodpeckers, the broadbills, the pittas, the swallows; the wagtails and pipits; the flycatcher shrikes, the

greybirds, the trillers, and the minivets. I'm getting out of breath. Surely, that's enough!"

"No, some more please!" Kenyalang was being mischievous and Tumok knew it.

"Alright, if you want them – the swallow shrikes, the ioras, the leaf birds and bluebirds; the bulbuls; the robins, the forktails, the chats, and the thrushes; the babblers of all kinds and the warblers; all sorts of flycatchers; the whistlers, the nuthatches and flower-peckers; the sunbirds and spiderhunters. Look, Kenyalang, I've had enough. I'm going."

"That's not bad, Tumok, but you've forgotten the dronghos! And the white eyes and the starlings and munias; and the orioles and the jays and the magpies and the crows." Kenyalang could hardly stop himself laughing. "No! wait," he said, as she opened her wings to fly. "Please go back to Teraja and tell them I am returning tonight. Tell Temegoh especially. Tonight is the full moon. Bye-bye Tumok, I'll see you tomorrow."

Tumok, with a disdainful flick of his racket tail, vanished into the blue. Kenyalang, still laughing, made straight for the eastern *darata*.

Instantly below him there was a vast sea of glass reflecting the burning sun. The entire flat surface of the *darata* had been enclosed but there appeared to be no entrance. He made a complete circuit of the greenhouses, peering through glass walls at a myriad plants inside of every shape and hue. The neat arrangement of different species bore no resemblance to the natural environment of the jungle below. Kenyalang found the orderliness uncanny. Alighting by a large fern, he stood momentarily wondering what to do, forgetting that as a spirit he could float through a wall without hindrance. Then a voice next to him said gently: "If you wish to go in you may enter through the glass, but only your head, please." It was the fern, speaking in that quaint musical ultrasonic language which seemed to echo in the back of his head.

As both his head and body were illusory anyway, Kenyalang found the need for separation difficult to under-

stand. "You must forgive me saying so," said the fern even more gently, "but humans do not always notice the plants under their feet. They do not mean to hurt us I am sure but they seem to wander about in a state of unknowing. Just your head please, if you don't mind."

Kenyalang was sensitive enough to realise the fern was doing her best to avoid making criticism. Indeed, he was so entranced by the unaccustomed sound of her speech that he hardly noticed the implications contained in her meaning. It reminded him of ancient music once heard and long since forgotten.

"Who is in charge of the laboratories?" Kenyalang began, looking hopefully for some distinguished human to appear.

"No one," said the fern. "Some thousands of years ago we were organised by Coom. That was in the beginning. Since then we have learned to experiment and grow."

Kenyalang was becoming puzzled. "I mean, who tells you what to do?"

"What do you mean by do?" asked the fern. "We don't *do* anything."

Kenyalang wondered if the fern was being obtuse and said with some irritation: "Well, how did it all begin?"

"I told you," said the fern. "It was started by Coom. Let me explain a little more. On the *darata* we have examples of every kind of plant and flower in Angadvipa. In the jungles below, we have experimental colonies for trees, birds, animals and humans. As you have learned in the Schools, some spirits visit our laboratories to improve their prototypes for readiness for rebirth on earth, their spells of concentration, modelling and meditation being completed. Many, however, quite happily choose to return to earth in their old form. Some switch to a new form which attracts them. For instance, many humans who have been miserable in their former lives envy the calm and beauty of the life of a plant, so they become ferns or flowers or orchids. How they return and in what form is decided on Nulu Takawas, not here. On the *darata*, we are useful only to those spirits who feel the need for some structural or chemical change to the form in which they existed previously. In their last life on earth



perhaps something went wrong. They want to put it right. Perhaps they suffered from too little light, or moisture or nutrient, so we suggest they settle on a different site, but if they need to introduce some new protective mechanism in the species, then we all have to think. Now, you asked me, "who tells us what to do?" and I said 'No one.' That is true. We merely talk over our own experience with them. As our laboratories contain every known species on Kinabalu, we know everything there is to be known about plants. Fortunately, plants have excellent memories and we can recall things that happened to us hundreds or thousands of years ago. Also we have developed microscopic insight into the clouds of our own being. Perhaps that is the advantage of staying in one place and remaining absolutely still. If we cannot help an enquiring spirit, then nobody else can."

Having talked at such length, the fern suspected that Kenyalang must be tired of listening, being unused to ultrasonic language, and offered to show him around the laboratories. As they entered the massive glass house, gliding through the wall, Kenyalang became aware of curious harmonies moving through the back of his head of a kind that he had never heard before. They had the sweetness and gentleness of his own instrument, the sape, but were infinitely more complex. He listened enthralled.

"Where does the music come from?" asked Kenyalang.

"From Coom," said the fern. "The plants have their own orchestras. Today it's the turn of the orchids."

Kenyalang wanted to ask a dozen questions but he thought he should remain quiet for a little and look around. He was particularly interested in orchids because he had been astonished in the lowland jungles by the extraordinary variety of ways in which orchids of all kinds had adapted to their surroundings. Now, before him were ranged every known orchid in Angadvipa and the glory and the delicacy of their colouring was overwhelming. And then he did something he had never done before, suddenly realising it was within his power: He spoke to an orchid!

"I've seen the bees and the wasps and all kinds of insects

enjoying the scent and nectar of your flowers in the day time, but what happens in the darkness at night?"

There was an ultrasonic ripple of laughter from the orchid who replied in tones of such tranquility that the sounds reminded him of the pale green light of dawn from the top of Bukit Teraja.

"That is when we dance with the moths," the orchid replied. "Have you ever seen the moths dancing?"

"Yes" said Kenyalang in surprise. "I suppose I have, especially in the moonlight."

"Well," the orchid continued in its exquisite pale green speech, "then you can understand how much they appreciate our music. Of all the insects, the moths know how tenuously to respond to the intoxications of Coom."

Kenyalang wasn't quite sure what that meant.

"Is it a love dance?" he said simply.

Again there came a ripple of girlish laughter.

"We call it the Cakra dance – the dance of the sacred circle. The moths not only have a beautiful awareness of our language, but as they circle us with their wings and flutter softly inside our flowers, they give us ecstasy beyond our dreams. It is the ecstasy of Coom."

Baffled by the repeated use of the word Coom, Kenyalang said: "You mean it is the ecstasy of creation?" There was another ripple of laughter.

"You do like to play with words," she said.

The fern by this time was beginning to feel uncomfortable and suggested moving on. Soon they came to a section entirely devoted to ferns, displaying a wonderful variety of fronds. "We have 450 different species on Kinabalu," said the fern proudly. "more than in the whole of Africa." Kenyalang did not know what Africa was but he thought it must be big.

"Why are the fronds so big, and why so many leaflets?" he asked.

On this matter the fern was particularly knowledgeable. "The fronds are big and strong because over the centuries we have experimented tirelessly to protect ourselves against

insects, and we have largely succeeded. The leaflets are called *pinai*. The *pinai* collect the light as energy and respond to the most delicate sounds. Memories are stored in the space surrounding the network of *pinai* veins. Sorting facts to make decisions is much easier for us than for you because we talk together as fast as we think, and we think at high speed because the facts are easily accessible."

One by one Kenyalang was shown glasshouses for every variety of herbaceous plant, pitcher plant, parasitic flowering plant, blackberry and raspberry, heather, drapete, trig oak, drymis, magnoliaceae, rosaceae, weinmannia, ardisia, rapanea, hollies, mountain schima, and theaceae, nearly all of which he knew by their Teraja names.

"Why do you give them such high-sounding titles?" he asked.

"It's all according to fashion," replied the fern. "There was a time when we used Indian, Maya and Chinese names. Then we switched to Greek in the 3rd century BC. Recently we've tended to adopt Latin. Nowadays Rome is at its height. It really doesn't matter what we call them as long other plants know what we mean."

The two had travelled in full circle and came to the orchids once again where Kenyalang stopped to listen to the music. It reminded him of the scintillating streams cascading down Bukit Teraja: gazing at their sparkling waters he would so easily lapse into trance. His eyes became blurred by the sensual splendour of colours and as the music flowed over him he saw in his mind a tree-top pathway extending through the Serawangan swamps west of his home. Varuna, was racing through the trees with him, leading a thousand Rakssassas and demons. Here too there were orchids, but they were playing faster music, and their colours were changing from pink and mauve to deep red. Kenyalang looked at one orchid and saw the face of Temegoh. In another clearly depicted was the sad face of Tillotama. And here was Varuna again, crying to him desperately and falling. The vision faded.

Kenyalang saw the fern had been momentarily embarrassed. Normally he tried not to see visions except alone or in the company of Temegoh, but these two faces of the lovely Tillotama and the haunting appeal to Varuna seemed to emerge and invade his brain without control.

"I am exhausting you with too much information," said the fern.

"No!" replied Kenyalang. "One more question, please. How did you get this rich black earth transported to the top of the mountain. All the rest of the summit is bare rock. Where did it come from?"

"The hornbills brought it," said the fern. "It's quite easy for them: they fly in formation. Four hornbills can carry a back-basket by holding on with their casques to the four corners. Where from? you ask. Why, Kinabalu itself. The soil is excellent down in the valley. Nowadays the hornbills have to fly a bit further afield as far as Mendaram. There the Nagas have dug up vast areas for reservoirs dumping the rich black soil in great heaps. We merely have to carry it away."

How the glasshouses were heated and ventilated, how disagreements among plants were resolved, or how the plants defended themselves against the ravages of demons - these were all technical questions which would have to wait until another occasion. Now Kenyalang knew that he must call on Kinarahengan and Nulu Takawas and experience for the first time in aerial dance the turbulent ecstasies of the *kinnari*.

## Temegoh's Despair

Temegoh left the Teraja longhouse when the burial rites for Ugau were over to convey an urgent message to Kenyalang in the Leopard's Cave. He was deeply concerned by Kajup's decision to launch a raid on the strong Naga outpost at Merimbun. Not content with two massive reservoirs in the Serawangan tree swamps and Luagan Lalak, the Nagas had worked feverishly on yet a third reservoir at Merimbun, using whatever labour they could from the tribes in that area. Now, freshly elated with success, Kajup proposed to lay ambushes on the guards at Merimbun and release the tribal slaves.

Merimbun was a full day's journey distant. Long saunters through the jungle were no hardship to Terajas. They moved always at the same steady pace, without rest, and knew exactly what lay within their power. However, the objection in Temegoh's mind was the problem of transporting the wounded back again over hilly country. He was certain the Terajas would suffer casualties because Kajup planned to leave without first consulting the auguries. In Kenyalang's absences, there was no one who could foretell events with accuracy. Some guessed at omens created by the flight of birds; indeed every Teraja accepted these as warnings, but there was no one with Kenyalang's skill at precognition; nor did anyone in the

longhouse know how to interpret precisely the signs on a pig's liver. While Kajup himself felt confident of the outcome of any foray, Temegoh did not, and that is why he hastened on the third day to inform Kenyalang of Kajup's plan. It was also highly unwise to be away from the longhouse should it be attacked in revenge for the recent deaths of four Nagas!

Temegoh was surprised on approaching the cave not to be stopped by the leopard. It was possible in daytime that the leopard was asleep. If he were awake, he would certainly hear Temegoh splashing through the river. However, no leopard appeared, and the cave proved empty. In some alarm, Temegoh quickly made a study of footprints in the bat guano and saw they were Nagas'. Kenyalang's footprints on entering the cave had been washed away by rain, and there was no sign of his footprints leaving. This discovery was even more disturbing, the clear implication being that Kenyalang had been abducted while in trance and taken to the Naga stronghold at Mendaram. Swiftly he sped along the path following the deep imprints made by the stretcher bearers and within a few minutes came upon the decomposed carcass of the leopard. White ants and flies had quickly disposed of the flesh; and the bones and teeth had been gnawed by porcupines.

From its jaws protruded a Naga spear and from the place where the chest had been lay a Naga dagger. Signs of battle were everywhere around, the undergrowth being trampled on each side of the path, blood stains, not completely washed away by rain, showed that three men had been killed, their bodies having since been carried away. The fight with the leopard must have occurred before Kenyalang's abduction because the footprints of the stretcher bearers continued onwards along the path to Mendaram, as heavily imprinted as before. Kenyalang therefore he concluded, must be safe. But for how long? Temegoh wondered.

Hastening forward, he approached the vicinity of the Palace with the swift stealth that is only possible to a Teraja. It was mid-day when most people were resting after a meal. There were few shadows, the sun being directly overhead, Temegoh's

exposure would have been certain had he not used an almost feline skill for swift movement followed by lying still. Without any inside knowledge of the Palace, Temegoh was guided by the single piece of information obtained from Selinka, Culodaro's Teraja Masseur that her room was somewhere at the back. Sounds of gambling came from the guard house – and the guard on duty by the servants quarters was bored with tedium and far from alert. Most rooms had no doors, only curtains. Still moving swiftly, peering through narrow gaps, Temegoh inspected room after room until at last he found the masseuse stretched out on her bed asleep. She was the same Selinka he had known years before in the longhouse, now fuller in the breasts and buttocks, and strongly built – a great wrestler in youth with the boys and, as a woman, she would be difficult to quell. Should he approach her softly in whispers and hope she would co-operate on waking? Hearing Teraja speech should put her mind at ease. Or should he cover her mouth gently but firmly with one hand to stop her giving the alarm, at the same time keeping her pinioned to the bed with his thighs while he explained why he had come? Just one cry and the guard would rush straight to the room. Hardly had the thoughts formed in his mind than he acted with the swift instinct characteristic of a Teraja, crouching beside her and whispering repeatedly. "Selinka, Kenyalang is in danger. Wake up."

She opened her eyes, failed at first to recognise him, and was about to scream when he forced his palm against her mouth, pressing her firmly to the bed, and saying urgently. "Selinka, tell me quickly, where is Kenyalang?"

Before she could grasp his meaning, she bit his hand and threw him violently away, leapt from the mat and shouted "Guard!" Temegoh hurled himself at her with all his strength, ripped off her sarong as he struck, and they rolled over grappling with each other on the floor. "Shut up, you silly barbet!" he cried. "I need your help!" It was too late. The guard became alert, ran down the corridor towards the commotion and, as he entered, Temegoh freed himself and swung round to meet his new adversary. A spear was hurled at his chest but missed as

Temegoh, like lightning, flung himself at the soldier's legs, pinned him to the ground, and strangled him on the instant.

Selinka stood by astonished.

"Don't stand like a petrified pelanduk," he cried. "Tell me how I can save Kenyalang?" The speed of events was too much for her. She broke down crying. "Quickly Selinka, Where is he? What are they going to do with him?"

Temegoh helped her on with her sarong and calmed her and soon learned all that he wanted to know. Kenyalang's body was imprisoned in the Sacred Pool of Varuna guarded by serpents. Tomorrow night, after the *maithuna* ceremonies, he would be put on trial on the summit of Cakra mountain under the full moon.

"Hide his body," said Temegoh, peremptorily and vanished.

As he entered the jungle surrounding the pool, Temegoh trod with such stealth that not even a snake could feel the slightest reverberation in the ground. He knew perfectly well that snakes have no ears and cannot hear, relying entirely for communication on ultrasonic sound transmitted and received by a tiny, almost invisible organ on the roof of the mouth which also examined for smell molecules extracted from the air by the snake's tongue. He had no wish to be smelt or have his presence felt, and was fully aware that his rescue mission was far more dangerous than any simple ambush of Nagas. This was a moment which called for acute hearing and alertness for which he had been trained by Kenyalang. It took him an eternity to move a few yards, thus his extreme caution was well rewarded when he heard the soft movement of a man in front of him, gently parting a palm frond to gain a better view of something on the pool. Endlessly he kept patience. He could not see the intruder but his eyes quickly picked up the narrow footprint of a Naga soldier, Naga feet being so much slimmer than the feet of a jungle Teraja. As he watched, he saw a cobra glide within a short distance of the Naga, pause for a moment in the vertical position to extend its hood and keep the intruder under observation. As the soldier moved forward, the snake moved unseen behind him.



Temegoh knew nothing of the dissensions within the Naga camp and could not imagine why a Naga soldier should be spying on Varuna, nor why one of Varuna's serpents should in turn be watching the spy, but he assumed the man had been sent by Upagatri, the Security Chief, to report on the first sign of recovery by Kenyalang. Since the intruder had only changed his position slightly during a long period of waiting, Temegoh guessed that he could see Kenyalang from where he stood. The snake had probably been told not to attack the intruder but report back to Varuna on his movements. The problem now was how to dispose of the soldier and snake swiftly without giving warning of his presence to the guards in the pool? Also how to kill the soldier so that the blame would fall not on himself but on Varuna? The solution came to him when he felt the Naga dagger tucked in against his sword, the dagger which had been found on the body of the decomposed leopard.

Temegoh acting instantly on the thought, filtered soundlessly through the undergrowth so that he came between the intruder and the pool, and could still see the serpent, without himself being observed; then, waiting for the next slightest movement of the Naga, he flung a stone accurately hitting the cobra. The Naga turned to see the stricken snake behind him, and as he did so, Temegoh launched himself on the man's back, stabbing him cleanly with the Naga blade. As the Naga collapsed, dying, Temegoh seized the man's spear and delivered three quick blows to finish off the cobra, leaving the spear in the snake's body and the dagger in the intruder's, each weapon telling its story. Temegoh then covered his footprints with leaves and moved silently closer to the pool. What he saw there made his heart leap with astonishment. Four brilliantly coloured girls of a loveliness that he had never conceived were lifting Kenyalang onto a bamboo raft and were gently pushing him towards a splendidly decorated raft in the centre of the pool. Temegoh watched the whole proceedings in unbelief. Certainly Kenyalang seemed to be in no immediate danger, yet there was surely something Temegoh should do to prevent Kenyalang's trial on the morrow. His instinct was to leap into the pool, wake

Kenyalang out of his trance, and both make their escape together. These girls could put up no resistance, but what about the snakes mentioned by Selinka? His keen eyes searched the pool bank. At first he saw nothing. Once the girls had left, the water was still. High up to his left above the waterfall he could see a building which could only contain the private apartments of Varuna. Nothing moved. Around the pool was sand, a few rocks, and small papyrus with sprays of elongated leaves. He studied these minutely and then saw his first cobra. It was poised watchful and absolutely still. Having seen one, it was not too difficult with concentration to pick out a dozen more: The pool was surrounded.

Temegoh realised that a rescue in the face of such a formidable array of enemies would be impossible, especially if he were unable to waken Kenyalang; and there were times in the past when he was so deeply in trance that no amount of shaking would have any effect on him. He realised that he must formulate some plan and act quickly, but what to do? He decided first to explore the vicinity of the pool, carefully remaining out of view of the serpents. He went first to the shrine under the banyan and stood staring in wonder at the phantasmagoric carving of the huge *makara*. He studied it for a long time to see if it would move, but its eyes continued balefully to return his stare. He looked away for a second as if inviting it to strike and then looked back sharply ready to leap out of harm's way. Then he crept forward and touched it and realised at once from its cool surface that it was made from rock. Eventually he plucked up courage and stepped through its mouth, discovering that it was some kind of ornamental entrance. The path straight ahead led upwards to Varuna's apartment: one on the right led to a series of small rooms, their door curtains flapping gently in the evening breeze. He crept stealthily to the first window and saw one girl, naked in blue, with towel in hand after drying herself seated on the floor while another, naked in green, was applying *kesumba* markings to her breasts. He moved swiftly from one window to another and saw more *dakinis* all in the process of beautifying themselves for some special occasion that evening.

At any other time Temegoh might have lingered: now he sped silently along the path to Varuna's apartment, prepared at any moment to grab a cobra by the neck if he was intercepted. He was fortunate in that all the cobras were watching Tillotama on the raft. Approaching the apartment, his attention was momentarily distracted by the movement of the first of the evening's flying foxes to raid Varuna's garden for durians. *Kluang*, as they are called, are large bats with a wing span sometimes reaching three feet. They have small rat-like faces with pronounced canine teeth which tear at the tough exterior of durians to get at the deliciously intoxicating fruit inside. As he watched, frightened that its presence might give him away, an astonishing idea was born in Temegoh's mind. If his idea were to materialise, it would require him to travel a great distance through swamp jungle at speed. There was little point in spying on Varuna now, but what he must do before departure was to investigate the summit of Cakra mountain where the trial was due to be held. It was a terraced hill, quickly climbed, with a broad, flat summit. He noted the circular pool around a marble dais and looked with wonder on the huge Naga statue which gazed across the plateau. He noticed a natural cave behind the statue, and seeing a lamp burning in the gathering dusk, he crept forward to investigate. Seated inside alone was an old man in a saffron robe writing. The cave beyond him disappeared into darkness. "Could there be a secret passage leading from the cave?" he wondered.

Having noted everything, Temegoh promptly departed leaving as silently as he came but now moving with urgency towards the Serewangan peat swamps, an area which few people would dare to enter. Some twenty miles distant he hoped to find a small group of wandering Punans who two years before had reason to be grateful to Kenyalang. On that occasion he had saved *Samathai*, the shaman of the birds, from a surprise attack by a honey bear. Wiry and quick though he was, *Samathai* had not seen the bear rushing upon him from behind until it was almost too late. Kenyalang saw the bear coming and hurled himself at it butting its stomach with his head, knocking it off

balance, and giving *Samathai* a chance to get out of range. Kenyalang then had shammed dead, lying still on his face. The bear, no longer seeing any menace, shuffled away. Seated round a fire that night two years ago, listening to him playing the jaw's harp Kenyalang had come to admire the wily old man. He learned much of the folk lore of the Punans and why they never killed people with blow pipes nor even hunted heads. They travelled the jungles shooting birds and monkeys and collecting fungi, roots and fruits to eat, always avoiding other more aggressive tribes.

"How can you kill birds?" Kenyalang had asked. "when you are the shaman of the birds?"

"We all die," the shaman had replied. "The dead bird will remain a spirit for a short time in Sabayan and in due course return to earth. All my best messengers are birds I have eaten. What they do object to is to be killed needlessly; but to be killed for food is to them a sacrifice, a sacred privilege, and an exchange. They give their bodies to provide us with energy, and they gain for themselves psychic strength for their life in Sabayan."

The old man went back to his *rudi-ng* the soft resonant notes rising and falling, strangely echoing in the cold darkness. "If you ever need me," he said, "just remember this tune and you will find me." At the time it seemed an odd remark, but everything about *Samathai* was odd from his neat moustache to his spindly legs and the apologetic chuckle he made when he finished speaking. It was through *Samathai* that Kenyalang had learned so much about Sabayan, and it was on *Samathai's* advice that Kenyalang had asked Tumok to be his guardian spirit. *Samathai* was in frequent touch with Rogon and Kinarahengan, and this was the reason why Temegoh now planned to find the old man - if possible to recall Kenyalang from Sabayan immediately. His other reason must remain a phantasy in his mind until the moment that *Samathai* agreed to make it real. But how to find *Samathai* when his tribe was always on the move, and, above all, how to find him in time! To travel such a distance through peat swamp in the dark was a daunting

prospect, certainly one that no Naga would dare to undertake alone, but Temegoh was not without resource. He knew, for instance, that the tall screwangan trees with their massive boles could provide him with unlimited quantities of *damar* – not the black variety which was highly prized, but a grey resin which burned easily, and could be used for lighting his path. He also knew where to find a *perahu* to propel him through the first part of his journey.

Thus Temegoh set forth, happy that the evening was cool, and the water deep. He fixed two flaring *damar* torches to each side of his *perahu*, throwing an arc of light about twice the length of the *perahu* around both sides and ahead. Thousands of tree frogs urged him on in full chorus and giant moths swirled around the torch flames, some recklessly swooping and singeing their wings to fall into the swamp.

Temegoh had no fear of crocodiles; he knew them to be cowardly and would be mesmerised by the flares; in fact he saw many, their ruby red eyes growing larger as they came closer, but all remained absolutely still. Cobras and pythons were more circumspect: they slithered soundlessly from tree roots into the water, some passing within inches of his *perahu*. There were times when the *perahu* got stuck among tree branches and Temegoh had to slash his way through. At times he had to climb over them or even swim to remove obstructions. Twice, the *perahu* glided gently out of reach and Temegoh had to strike out at speed to catch it before it vanished into the gathering mist and darkness.

Soon the mist became so thick he could no longer find his way. Glimpses of starlight between treetops became more rare and in chagrin he knew he must stop and wait for the morning sun, otherwise he could become badly lost and might never emerge from the swamp. The mist made him shiver with cold and, to keep his blood circulating, he busied himself with fashioning more *damar* torches, chopping resin from tree boles and stacking the lumps in the *perahu*. By morning he would be hungry so he used the flare to attract fish and impaled them with

a crudely fashioned spear. He dared not pause to think about his predicament because he was fully aware that he still had a long way to go, and even beyond the swamp lay another ten miles of trackless jungle to be cut through. Far away he could hear the sharp cry of an argus pheasant, bringing back thoughts of the longhouse at Teraja and adding to his sense of loneliness.

Temegoh began to wish that he had thought of some other stratagem, something perhaps heroic that he could have done on his own without seeking the aid of *Samathai*. Instead – and the realisation came to him with horror – he seemed to be running away from the danger! Should he then turn back? It was even now not too late. He could be there fighting alone on Cakra mountain to the death if need be. With such thoughts mounting in his brain, Temegoh began to feel despair. Even if he got out of the swamp and penetrated onward through the jungle, how was he going to find *Samathai*? The Punians were always on the move: they might be a hundred miles away! And what if he did find *Samathai*? Perhaps *Samathai* would laugh at his proposition and his whole journey would be wasted? It was a measure of Temegoh's enduring strength of will that he banished these ugly thoughts from his mind and waited in patience for the dawn.

When dawn came, it was impossible to judge direction, the mist diffusing the light, forcing Temegoh to paddle on until he could find a trailing liana. Having found one he carefully tied the *perahu* to a tree root with rattan, and grasping the liana hand over hand, he walked up the thick bowl of a Serewangan, reaching the first horizontal branch at a height of about a hundred feet. The tree was still swathed in mist so he continued upwards towards the white cauliflower crown. After another hundred and twenty feet he knew he was near the summit being surrounded by orchids, and finally broke through the upper layer of leaves to see white kapok cloud stretching on all sides below him floating as far as the horizon. The sun's disc had still not cleared the distant forests but already he began to feel warmer and the brilliant light against a pale green sky gave him a fresh illusion of hope.

Noting carefully the sun's position in relation to his tree, Temegoh descended, untied the *perahu* and began the methodical task, once having decided on his direction, of slashing tree-roots every few yards so they could be seen to form a straight line. It was a slow process. Otherwise he would have to wait some hours before the mists finally cleared.

It was nearly mid-day before Temegoh reached the far end of the swamp. He felt desperately tired, yet the journey before him was likely to prove even more arduous than the one just completed. He rested on dry ground in the shade of an *enteli laki* tree whose soft slurring leaves lulled him into mental doze. He had no time to make a fire, so he swallowed the fish raw, and realising that he would fall asleep unless he kept going, he started off in the direction of the small collection of windbreaks where he had last seen *Samathai*. His quick eyes soon discovered a mushroom growing on a tree which he skinned and ate with relish. Some broad-leaved *keladi* were growing at the edge of a natural clearing so he deftly helped himself to the roots.

Finding no obvious path meant that Temegoh had not only to slash all the way, but could not hope to find foot prints. For a short distance he followed a leopard trail knowing the leopard would be asleep; and frequently he saw the tell-tale rootings of wild boar. The birds in the heat of day were silent; indeed so were the *wah-wah* gibbons that he expected to find on higher ground. A tree laden with ripe *tampoi* fruits provided an unexpected bonus of food but suggested at the same time that neither monkeys nor Punans had recently passed that way. By late afternoon Temegoh arrived at the hill-top clearing where he had last met *Samathai* but, as he had feared, there was no sign of *Samathai* or his tribe. He sat on the open ground feeling exhausted and wretched. There were no Punan footprints leading from the derelict windbreaks: all had been washed away by rain long ago. He had come to the end of his journey and the end of his hopes. There was nothing he could now do to save Kenyalang from death.

In a characteristic attitude of surrender, he lay on his back and gazed up at the shafts of sunlight filtering through the

*mambong* leaves overhead. This was technically the moment when Singalang Burong in the form of a Brahminy kite should come swooping down to his aid, or perhaps a flight of hornbills would pass dropping some tell-tale clue which would lead him to *Samathai*. But nothing happened. There was no breeze. The only bird in sight was a cheeky *murai*, or magpie robin, black on the head, neck and breast, pure white below the breast, a white bar on the wings and a black and white tail, and it seemed to be trying to cheer him with its song from the other side of the clearing. Temegoh remembered in his youth how he had called these birds from a distance, whistling to them, cajoling them to come nearer; and to his delight, if he tried often enough, not only would one respond but usually half a dozen. Now he was too depressed to play such games and resented the robin's gaiety. He closed his eyes and listened because there was nothing else he could do; and then vividly he saw a brief vision of *Samathai* with his twinkling manner and small moustache who was speaking to him with the words used at their last meeting: "If you ever need me, just remember this tune and you will find me." Temegoh's heart leapt with joy. He still did not know what *Samathai* meant or how such a simple tune could lead him to the encampment of the old shaman, but he quickly looked round for a *lengkap* palm, extracted a rib, and fashioned a simple *rudi-ng* and, while his fingers were busy, his mind searched wildly for some clue which would make sense of the old man's words. And then it dawned on him; how the *mamang* or spirit healer would normally summon a good spirit at a healing ceremony to banish the spirit of sickness, by calling for the good spirit with its own signature tune! Of course, the tune played by *Samathai* must have been the shaman's signature tune!

Having thought the matter through so far, Temegoh's growing excitement experienced a sudden relapse when he realised that *Samathai* was human and no spirit, and therefore could not move instantaneously to his side. However loudly he played. This made him start wondering all over again, but as no solution came to his mind, he gently started thrumming the *rudi-ng*, feeling his way towards recalling the tune the old man had



played. Then at last he felt he had got it right and played it through once more, this time with more assurance. When he had finished, nothing spectacular happened. Even the *murai* had stopped singing. There were no cicadas; the jungle was silent. The *murai* however was watching him, its head cocked. Then it flew over towards him, stood on a fallen branch nearby, and started to whistle, not its usual song, but a more imperative, succession of notes, almost as if it were challenging him!

At first, Temegoh thought the *murai* was showing off; *Murai* often do; they are that sort of bird; but no, it was clearly instructing him. How odd, thought Temegoh, and then in a flash he discovered what was happening. Why had it not occurred to him before? *Samathai* was of course none other than the shaman of the birds and every bird would know his signature tune. If Temegoh played that special tune to a bird, it could only mean one thing – that Temegoh wanted to be taken to see the shaman! Then he realised how stupid he had been.

Immediately he stood up and walked towards the *murai*. The bird moved away always flying a little ahead and waiting for him. It was quite clear to Temegoh that the *murai* had assumed the role of guide and, in relief, his heart filled again with hope: there was still a remote chance of saving Kenyalang! It was almost dark by the time they reached *Samathai's ladang*. Again it was on a hill. Fires had been lit. A slight breeze blew sparks towards Temegoh and with the sparks came the familiar rhythmic throb of *Samathai's rudi-ng*. Temegoh knew he had reached his longed-for objective at last but was he too late? He smiled his gratitude at the *murai* and took a long cool drink of water from a waiting bamboo. Only now would he discover whether his capricious journey had been justified. He looked up towards the first stars and watched the cold moon rise in full splendour above the dark outline of jungle.

## Dance of the Bird Woman

**K**enyalang's spirit felt by now he knew much more about Sabayan and the world of spirits than any newcomer from the world below. He wondered if the experience of cavorting around the sky with a bird woman was really necessary. After all, his main purpose was to see Kinarahengan and visit Nulu Takawas, not submit himself to a Sabayan entry examination to discover the extent of his powers of concentration. The memory of his last meeting with the charming *kinnari* was not reassuring. Although visually delightful, she had a most unsettling way of speaking; her mind took all sorts of short-cuts that left him mentally breathless.

After departing from the eastern *darata*, Kenyalang arrived instantly before the rock-carving of Kinarahengan expecting to wait awhile for the *kinnari* to appear. He sat enjoying the harmonies of the singing bamboos when suddenly her voice behind him showed again that she was mentally one step ahead.

"You may call me SUPRABHA," she said. "I know you would like me to have legs instead of the tail of a bird, but I can't change my form just to please everybody. Just remember that I am an illusion as you are, so don't get any ideas!"

With that pert provocation, she leapt into space shouting: "Catch me!" Taken totally by surprise, it was fully a second before Kenyalang realised that Suprabha was speeding away

from him into the distance. The instruction was clear enough so after her he went, the facility of instantaneous arrival allowing him to catch up with her with the speed of thought. From that moment she swooped and soared, changing momentum with every new movement and even, at times, changing speed in mid-flight going in the same direction. At one moment he was beside her looking down into the Panataran gully, the next he was hurtling through cumulo-nimbus cloud wondering if she would come out the other side at the same speed that she went in. Of course, the *kinnari* could have remained in hiding, making the whole exercise impossible but that was not her purpose. She always came out within view, enticing him on, swooping away, climbing, and sometimes coming straight towards him at high speed so that he had to leap out of her way. If only he knew what she was up to. This was no kind of dance: it was a display of unpredictable madness. Suddenly she came to a stop beside him. "Good reflexes," she said. "Now for the next lesson," and off she hurtled again.

Suprabha soared high above Kinabalu's topmost peak and then glided down to the level of the forest in a series of graceful aerial manoeuvres following some preconceived design. Kenyalang noticed how certain downward curves were repeatedly followed upward spirals. As the pace was slower he had no difficulty in keeping level and had time to reflect on the flight rhythm which, though complex, had a strong characteristic surge. The effect was strangely hypnotic, and Kenyalang wondered if someone already in trance could be lulled into an even deeper trance.

The first 'exercise' as Suprabha had called it had demanded concentration and speed of response. His mind had to be focused tenaciously on Suprabha's every minute change of speed and direction. Now, he noticed, Suprabha had taken him more slowly over an ever-changing landscape, above smooth escarpments, across acres of leptospermum and rhododendron, above a sea of magnolias, and then moving more swiftly over the rain forest, down rivers, and spiralling dizzily upwards again to glide down in divergent curves in that powerful rhythm which,

repeated again and again, seemed to be taking control of his mind.

When he sensed what was happening to him, Kenyalang wanted to resist, to refuse to be subjugated, to end this aerial dance, but then he remembered that to visit the great monastery at Nulu Tekawas was conditional on the outcome of his performance with the *kinnari*. What Suprabha's purpose was he could not tell but he was expected to co-operate and so he allowed the dance to take control of him. Soon its complexity and deepening rhythms became part of his nature. He swooped and soared and glided without thinking until he noticed for the fifth time they had glided low above jungle trees festooned with orchids reaching for the sun, and each time the perfume had increasingly intoxicated him. Once again in his mind there formed a vision of Tillotama, more urgent, more appealing than he had seen before; and then a strange thing happened to him. As if some new resurgence of strength had filled his body, he soared entirely of his own volition, re-enacting the aerial designs taught him by Suprabha, but adding spontaneous movements of his own and, to his surprise, he found that he himself was now creating the rhythm and flow of the dance and Suprabha, smiling with the face of Tillotama, was following with an abandon that made his heart sing.

The orchid forest below called to Kenyalang irresistibly. Downwards he swooped in a wide curve above the white leptospermums and orange dactyidium, pausing for moments of delayed and exquisite pleasure, and then downwards again across the rhododendrons each red flower singing to him in cadences matching his own deepening rhythm, and then finally in almost delirious descent, he glided towards the orchid forest hearing the tenuous orchid harmonies rising to meet him in a crescendo, all the music, all the wonder, crystallised in the longing eyes of Tillotama. Slowly, slowly, he glided. Slowly, slowly the forest branches swayed beneath as Kenyalang tried to preserve these delicious moments of surrender to the all-encompassing music in Tillotama's eyes.

The next moment, by natural reflex, Kenyalang found himself soaring again, not swiftly this time, nor in a dizzy spiral, but like an eagle climbing towards its eerie on the mountain top. As he approached the rock-carving of Kinarahengan, Suprabha came close and said: "I will now leave you, Kenyalang. Do whatever they tell you, and have no fear." Thus she departed.

By the singing bamboos, Kinarahengan emerged from the interior of the rock. He looked into the face of Kenyalang and saw that he was still under the *kinnari's* spell. Neither spoke. After a long pause, Kinarahengan said: "We chose you well, Kenyalang. Rest here awhile and listen to my storm bamboos. Then go forward to Nulu Takawas and your destiny." Before Kenyalang could reply Kinarahengan had vanished.

During the aerial dance with Suprabha, Kenyalang had not noticed the passage of time. The sun had climbed to its zenith and it was now mid-afternoon. How the extraordinary performance induced by the *kinnari* might contribute to his further enlightenment in the great Monastery, Kenyalang did not know. He was beginning to feel it was time he returned to Teraja, and wondered, if by staying until evening, he could possibly learn anything further which would benefit him. Suprabha had a most disconcerting way with her. If it were not for her curious words of encouragement, he would have been tempted to leave at once. Now Kinarahengan had explicitly advised him to go forward to the Monastery, so it seemed he must again do what he was told. But he was weary, and he sat watching the shadows of clouds floating across the jungle below and wondered again how all his experiences in Sabayan would help him solve the deeply vexing problem of the Nagas. The wind blew and with it came those sweet and fitful melodies, sometimes swelling to paeans of organ wonder. "Perhaps I too am a storm bamboo," thought Kenyalang. "Perhaps I am responding to a strong wind blowing through me. Perhaps Kinarahengan and Coom are the wind." Isn't that what Kinarahengan meant when he said: "We chose you well." Looking critically back on his visit to Sabayan, Kenyalang suddenly became aware it had all been too easy. Singalang Burong, Rogon, the Wreathed Hornbill, the monks

in the schools of illusion, and even the fern at the laboratory on the eastern *darata* seemed to expect his arrival, yet on each occasion he had literally swooped unheralded out of the sky. To some extent forewarned, Kenyalang now flew straight to Nulu Takawas to unravel the last secrets of Sabayan – the secret of life renewal on earth. Everything else had, in a sense, been a preparation for this. The man he most of all wanted to see was Coom, the mythical founder of the western schools of illusion and the laboratories on the eastern plateau. Had he indeed selected Kenyalang? and what was Kenyalang's mission supposed to be?

Admission to the Monastery was by gong – the largest Kenyalang had ever seen, at least twice his own height with a massive knob in the middle struck with a powerful ironwood stick mounted with compressed scops owl feathers. The deep sound it made was so soft it was like the mere echo of a murmur. The guardian at the entrance, a giant reddish brown orang utan beckoned Kenyalang through into a large hall, the walls covered with detailed drawings of each and every part of Angadvipa. The roof disappeared into shadow being so high the summit could not be seen. Around the hall were plants of all kinds and Kenyalang was sufficiently familiar now with ultrasonic speech to pick up their whispers.

"Another savage," said a *nepenthes* to its neighbour. "I can't think why Coom bothers with them. All they do is kill each other."

"You are too sanguine," said the other. "Coom has a touching faith in humans. He had said that one day he will bring them up to the level of plants but it might take a few thousand years."

"Look at his revolting toes," said a feminine voice. "Look at his long ears," said another. Indeed, Kenyalang found himself scrutinised by all present and heartily wished that Coom would quickly appear. But Coom did not appear. The huge orang utan took Kenyalang gently by the hand and shuffled him through one hall after another, each progressively growing larger.

In each, small groups were assembled - all of them about to be reborn - animals, birds, plants, trees, insects and human. Each species kept to itself to receive instruction in its own linguistic mode either using ultrasonic speech or direct visual thought communication. Each individual appeared in the illusory shape adopted during early training at the Schools of illusion. Instruction was simple, matter-of-fact, hypnotic suggestion. Kenyalang paused at a group of humans wearing masks who had obviously graduated through the Schools together. The Instructor was a monk who appeared to know his group well: "Remember then," he said: "Your mind and body are one. If the body is unwell, the mind suffers. If the mind is sick, the body shows symptoms of illness. Keep them both well."

To Kenyalang the statement was self-evident and he was pleased to pick up a question from a spirit in a blue mask of abstract design. "In theory what you say is unexceptionable," the spirit said, "but the world is full of pressures, even dangers. Everybody knows what you say is true, yet many fall sick in mind and body. What are we to do?"

The monk accepted the interruption as a useful stepping stone to his next point: "Identify the pressures and the dangers," he replied. "Know what they are. They may be drugs, alcohol, noise, overwork, lack of sleep, excessive worry or even too much emotion. Identify them and then avoid them."

Passing on to the next human group, Kenyalang was delighted to see the pretty girl who had danced *Magunatip* with him. He was glad she didn't wear a mask. She smiled on recognising him and turned back to the monk addressing the unborn. "Just as you clean your teeth every morning," he said, "so you should clean out your mind. Guilt feelings, worries concerning inadequacy, frustrations, or feelings of animosity or hate - all these should be brought to the surface of your mind and spoken out loud each morning. Only then will they vanish. Talk your dreams over with your family at breakfast. Dreams are like a bird in a room which is trying to fly out. When you speak out your dreams, you open a window to let the bird fly away."

Kenyalang liked the monk's use of word pictures and was reluctant to move on but the *orang utan* evidently felt he had stayed long enough. He must have noticed the exchange of looks between Kenyalang and the girl and possibly felt this was no time for Kenyalang to be forming a new attachment. He might at least wait until the girl was born!

To Kenyalang's astonishment the next group were the writers, poets and musicians he had met in the School of Meditation on the western *darata*. Their training had been extensive and in depth, yet it was interesting to hear their instructor recalling in simple language what they should do: "Once you have cleaned out your mind and swept away all the blockages of remembered emotion, then go to your bed and relax. Keep to the order of relaxation you have been given starting with your face and your lips and working down through every group of muscles to your toes. When you are totally relaxed and your mind is empty, you are then, and only then, ready to receive the thought flow of Coom.

To begin with, as you have learned, the flow is spasmodic. Thoughts will come one at a time out of the Void like seeds planted by the Wind. To open your mind fully to Coom, you must instantly respond to each thought by writing it down. Then return to your bed, relax completely, and one by one more thoughts will come."

Kenyalang found the question put by one writer whose face was smothered with a black beard somewhat naive. "How can we tell if the thought comes from Coom?" the bearded writer asked.

Kenyalang wanted to say: "When the thoughts of Coom come to you, you will know at once," but he was too innately polite to interrupt and waited for the monk's reply.

"An easy way to tell," said the monk, "is to see if the thought is directly relevant to your purpose. You have learned in the Schools to assemble all the facts before Coom at night-time. For a while you wrestle with these facts in your own mind, then you let go. You relax completely and adopt the prescribed breathing pattern to help sleep come soon. During sleep, the



facts will be sorted, possibly re-arranged, and when you wake the next morning, with eyes closed, you await the inspiration of Coom. Don't try to think of anything. If stray thoughts come into your mind which are irrelevant, you will know they have not come from Coom. Never mind, relax again, relax completely, and when thoughts come and you write them down, that glow will fill your mind until it becomes too hot. It is as if your mind is filled with sun. You cannot bear it and you must stop. Then stop, rest, get up and have your breakfast. Forget Coom, and try again the next day."

Kenyalang was, of course, slightly puzzled by the references to writing. Terajas used signs on bamboo in the jungle to convey vital information to each other. It had never occurred to him that one would wish to preserve thoughts on special leaves for oneself. Anything he wished to remember would remain clearly in his memory, so why write it down?

Almost as if he were reading Kenyalang's mind, the monk then asked the question: "Why is it important to write down every single idea?"

The bearded one, still eager to make an impression, came back with the reply: "Because if you don't you will forget it."

"You are correct," said the monk. "Ideas come and go borne on the wind. They vanish as easily as they come, but there is yet another reason. If you fail to write it down at once, your mind will worry over a lost idea. The act of worry impedes the free flow of Coom. You will keep striving to recall it. More emotion, more worry, less Coom."

How well they had thought everything out, mused Kenyalang. He must enquire about this writing thing. With his excellent memory he could see no present use for it, but if the monk thought so, perhaps it had some value.

The orang utan had become restive and clearly indicated with his head they should continue towards the shrine of Coom. Kenyalang would have liked to hear the briefings for insects and plants, but he knew it was not long before sundown and he remembered his promise to return by full moon to Teraja. After passing through a hall of birds, among them a few friendly black

helmeted hornbills, they arrived in the presence of Coom. Kenyalang was expecting to see an aged monk with a white beard or, at least, a man of great wisdom. What rose before him was an assemblage of plants and trees so familiar to him in the lowland forests. Magnificent as always stood a *raja kayu* rising a full three hundred feet to dominate the background. To each side were *pokok kapor*, or camphor trees with their lovely crowns and in the centre rose a single great fern (cyathea contaminans) its multiple *pinai* vibrating to a strong breeze. Lianas fell in festoons from the upper branches of the *raja kayu* where orchids filtered the sunlight which shone down upon the Kinabalu summit flowers in the foreground. Kenyalang was particularly happy to see a place given to clumps of small white leptospermum. The entire grouping of plants and trees appeared natural, yet there was an artistry about its arrangement which Kenyalang found pleasing. He stood with a crowd of others waiting for Coom to appear. Having brought Kenyalang to the shrine, the orang utan shuffled back to his post at the Monastery entrance.

It did not take long for Kenyalang's trained eye to see that the jungle cameo before him had a life of its own. Birds flew and called high up in the trees, butterflies in all their beauty and variety fluttered among the flowers. Ants and insects were busy among the plants. An ant-eater with its series of yellowish brown scales hung upside down on a tree branch almost out of view. It was after the most careful study of this group theophany that Kenyalang noticed the eyes of a King Cobra. Its body was concealed and its eyes were still. Only the occasional flick of a tongue betrayed the cobra's presence. The thought stole into Kenyalang's mind that perhaps the King Cobra was Coom, or even the great fern which had an elegant dignity and a commanding mien of a God.

Then the Voice spoke. To Kenyalang the dialect was Teraja. To others, later, Kenyalang learned that each tribesman, plant, bird or animal understood the Voice in its own language. It was a mellow deep voice which could have come from the great *raja kayu*, from the splendid fern, or from the cobra,

but the voice was not human. It could have been from the breeze itself.

"I am not a God, but the voice from within each one of you," began Coom.

"You will soon be going back to Earth, as you have done many times before. Some of you are well prepared for your visit. Some, from choice, are returning in a different form. When you get back you will have complete control of your lives. What you do with them depends on your inclination and will. In Sabayan, our teachers in the Schools have studied your inclinations and shown you how you can realise your aims. You may fail as you did before but if you keep trying you will bring about change."

"There is a widespread belief on Earth that the only happiness can be found in heaven, in Sabayan. As you have discovered, this is not true. Here you are insubstantial spirits without bodies attempting to recreate with illusions the appearances which were real on Earth. Our whole purpose in Sabayan has been to help you to improve your minds and bodies and help you to lead a more perceptive and harmonious life on Earth. Sabayan is only a place of waiting, of re-thinking, re-shaping and remoulding. It is not your destination. Your destination is Earth. Forget heaven. Forget Sabayan. Go back and do better than you did last time." The Voice ceased.

It was a simple message, but the effect on Kenyalang was to make him realise that he had no one else to depend on but himself. If changes were to be made, he was the one who would have to make them. Coom might give him ideas but Kenyalang himself must carry them through.

"Forget Sabayan," Coom had said. "Kenyalang could never do that - he had learned so much. How could he forget Singalang Burong and the Wreathed Hornbill of Panataran Rogon and his demons, and the *Kinnari* who taught him how to dance to the rhythm of the Universe?" But he saw the point. From now on, he must be utterly self-reliant. In this mood Kenyalang glided up the gentle slope towards the launching peak of Nulu Takawas where the spirits were reborn. Many monks, clad in saffron robes were arranged in a wide crescent

around a gallery overlooking a precipice and all around the world stretched out with its beauty of hills, and jungle, and lakes and the shadows of clouds floating above them. The monks sang a deep threnody, marvellously echoing from the clouds billowing round them, and above the surge of a hundred voices, Kenyalang caught the fitful sounds of a storm bamboo as it caught the wind racing across the summit of Kinabalu. "Forget Sabayan," Coom had said. How could I ever forget this moment of departure, thought Kenyalang. He stepped towards the Dais of Rebirth on which millions had stood in their time, waited for the signal of the *rebana besar*, the massive drums of resurgent hope, and the single flute soaring into the blue, and then he leapt towards the Earth he loved in a mood of ecstasy he had never before known.

## Kenyalang's Return

**K**enyalang flew straight to the Leopard's Cave and discovered by obvious signs that his body had been removed by Naga soldiers: their footprints were clearly visible in the sand. At the entrance he noticed seeds of the 'tree strawberry' which grow on scree and breaks in the forest on Kinabalu at 6,000 ft. Only one person could have left them there as a sign she had been to the cave to look for Temegoh - Tumok, his guardian spirit who liked these watery, red insipid fruits from her own jungles. Though perturbed by the absence of his own body, Kenyalang smiled inwardly at Tumok's bright intelligence and humour. Instantly he flew to Mendaram and paused above the thatched Naga houses to watch the climax to the preparations for the *maithuna* ceremonies to be held on the Cakra summit under a full moon. Already, Kenyalang noticed, the moon was visible, huge in a blue sky at least an hour before sundown. A procession was forming to carry quantities of bamboo nodes to the summit containing the nine different kinds of wine traditionally used in the *maithuna* - fermented 'toddy' from the coconut palm; the popular *tuak* or rice wine made from hill padi; honey wine made from honey collected at great risk from the bees nests at the top of tall *Tapang* trees; *kayu ara* wine from the berries so much favoured by the *mias* or red-haired orang utan; snake wine made from pythons; mango wine; and

two rather substantial wines made from the roots of *ubi kayu* or tapioca mixed with rhinoceros horn, and *Keladi* wine mixed with the scales of the *tenggiling* ant-eater, these two being tasteless but thought to be powerful aphrodisiacs leading to heightened performance. What Kenyalang observed was commotion: he had no inkling of the contents of the bamboos.

His curiosity aroused, Kenyalang flew straight to the Cakra summit and remained poised above wondering what was being planned. That he was to play some part as a prisoner he did not doubt. He saw again the giant statue of a Cobra and before it a sacrificial altar on which faggots had been stacked in preparation for a fire. The uncomfortable thought entered his mind that he was to be the victim. Ornamental thrones and seats had been arranged in two arcs on both sides of the Cobra, giving their would-be occupants a clear view of the sacrifice and of the marble surface on the centre raised slightly above a surrounding pool, extending at a lower level completely encircling the pool. Kenyalang saw on the outer rim twelve low tables equidistant and facing the centre. On each were placed two goblets for drink, banana palm leaf cloths, flowers and orchids charmingly arranged, and a pile of fruit-papaya, mango and passion fruits. Twelve *damar* flares lit the summit, their flames beginning to flicker in the late breeze. On the downwind side, where the breeze left the summit to flow above the jungle, had been placed three enormous cooking bowls each on a charcoal base, the charcoal alight and the bowls' contents faintly simmering. Again, Kenyalang was not to know but the traditional *maithuna* fare normally served to the twelve *dakinis* and their Naga consorts comprised nine different kinds of meat cooked in spices – two kinds of deer, the much-prized meat of barking deer and the less attractive tiny mouse-deer; wild boar of which there was always a plentiful supply; the favoured monitor lizard and delicate meat of ant-eaters; meat of *wah-wah* gibbons whose sad call seems to reflect a knowledge of their pending fate; the *kubong merah* or flying squirrel whose meat is tough; crocodile meat; and *kluang* or flying foxes, a more common fare, but enjoyable. Served with chilli, coriander, nutmeg, lime, turmeric, different

varieties of ginger, pepper and limes, the effect on the eater should be to produce a feeling of extraordinary well being.

Before leaving the summit, Kenyalang observed the main route along which the procession of bamboo containers was slowly ascending, but his eye was caught by another pathway, scarcely defined, which led down to a pool almost concealed by camphor trees, *neram* and *kayu ara* and durians. As he coursed above it, he noted every tree fern, keladi and fungus below and even the monkey cups and *bunga buot* flowers beside the path. To this pool Kenyalang now came, still in his spiritual form, still moving from one place to another simultaneously, and there below, seated in trance, he saw his own body. In view of all the preparations he had seen on Cakra mountain, Kenyalang's immediate reaction was to re-enter his body at once and escape before anyone knew of his return. As he drew closer to the raft, he recognised in Tillotama the face he had often seen in Sabayan, always in brief visions, never before in real life. Her body was indeed more voluptuous than he had imagined. Seated in repose, as if meditating, she was more delicate, and exquisite in shape and presence than any girl he had ever known. Her nakedness and peacock blue skin were unusual certainly among his own tribe but he had seen *dakini* before in Sabayan and felt no astonishment. What did intrigue, and possibly alarm him, was that she was sitting there awaiting his return. Remembering that Tillotama, however lovely, was in fact his enemy and the enemy of his people, he quickly resolved on his course of action, entered his body, took a deep breath, and plunged into the pool. No sooner had he done so than Tillotama ultrasonically alerted all the serpents surrounding the pool, who promptly slid into the water forming a cordon around Kenyalang making, with powerful strokes, for the shore. In seconds Kenyalang found himself confronted by a serpent poised above him, then turning saw another and another. He could not escape whichever way he swam, so he did the only thing he could – he dived below them, knowing that land snakes swim only on the surface. His ruse was successful. He reached the sand and stones on the bank only to be confronted by an even more terrifying prospect – a King

Cobra standing well over six feet high, swaying gently in preparation to strike. Kenyalang since childhood had learned to befriend snakes and did not consider them harmful, even cobras whose best function in the environs of the longhouse was to eat rats. But a King Cobra needed careful watching and handling. Never for a moment did he remain still but always countered the cobra's probing sway. Then suddenly he heard a command from near the waterfall to his left; "Go back to the raft, Kenyalang, quickly or you will be killed." Just for a moment Kenyalang looked towards Varuna, the speaker. In that moment the King Cobra struck. Kenyalang felt a searing pain in his right shoulder, but so swift had been his reaction that he had caught the Cobra by the throat and held on. However, the damage had been done.

Kenyalang soon became dizzy as the poison circulated and collapsed, dropping the Cobra which slithered away. Varuna at once summoned her *Dakini*, took a small curved knife from the concealment of her long hair, and cut on the side of the wound nearest the heart, sucked out the venom and spat it away. In seconds a *Dakini* had brought to her a green *geliga* stone, which applied to the wound, was immediately effective in preventing any further circulation of the poison. Varuna then ordered the unconscious Kenyalang to her apartment. She still felt deep hatred for this savage within her, despite his obvious physical attraction. She knew from long experience that Kenyalang could not regain consciousness before the start of the *maithuna* ceremonies. When he did eventually open his eyes, it would be assumed that he had just emerged from trance. Varuna carefully cleaned and dried him before lying him full length on her bed. His *chawat* was wet and this too had to be replaced with a strip of cloth. It was for this reason that Varuna had sent the *dakini* away, partly to avoid embarrassment to the girl, but principally out of compelling curiosity. We must remember that by strict custom no Nagini brought up in childhood by serpents could be permitted close contact with a man except to bring about his death. She was well aware that it was the practice of Kings all the way from India to Persia and the Middle East to make pre-



sents of Nagini to enemy kings whom they wished to poison. The belief was that even intercourse with a Nagini would lead to a man's death. Certainly if he were bitten by her, he would die just as if he had been bitten by a snake.

In the case of Kenyalang, he was a prisoner destined for trial, thus Culodaro had insisted that no harm should come to him. Varuna must therefore deliver him up unhurt, but already the two occasions in which she had found herself in close contact with this young savage, had created within her a depth of emotional involvement entirely new to her experience. She could not give a name to feelings born deep in her unconscious, but she was becoming convinced, especially after her vision produced by contact with Kenyalang's *pengaruh*, that their destinies had become closely intertwined.

Varuna thus sought to isolate and examine the strange emotions which had caused her so much distress ever since the vision ended. Fear was obviously strongly present, and this deeply puzzled her because like most Indian Gods she had the power to assume terrible forms and create indescribable terror in others. It was true that in this incarnation she had never put this power into practice, yet she had never doubted her ability to do so. The fear then must derive from her human feminine condition, but this fear was in no way connected with Kenyalang: it was the memory of her vision, the fear of a thousand wings in the darkness. Surprisingly, she discovered, with Kenyalang she felt safe. Perhaps that was because on both occasions Kenyalang had been unconscious and was powerless to cause her injury. What will happen, she wondered, when he wakes up? Probing even deeper into her thoughts, Varuna wondered if she had in some curious way become a prisoner of Kenyalang's unconscious state. She reflected that, she had complete power over him. Had she not seen him chastised at her command? Yet this body which lay before her had a strength and beauty – yes, even an innocence – which deeply appealed to her, even while she hated this savage for the murders he had committed.

For a moment, Varuna attributed Kenyalang's physical appeal to her own enforced deprivation of sex. As a Nagini her sacred task in the sacred circle known as the Cakra was to energise others through her divinely inspired dancing to achieve a peak of ecstasy, to share with her, however briefly, that sense of partaking in the divine. This gift of divine transference was only possible so long as she herself remained inviolate. Were it ever thought that she had sought fulfilment with a man, then the whole magic mystique of the *maithuna* ceremonies would be destroyed and perhaps her own divine powers would also vanish! Thus she wondered, now that she was confronted by this savage, if her thwarted desire for sex were not attempting to break through. If so, it was vital that she understood her own nature. She must put herself to the ultimate test: reveal Kenyalang's full potential and observe meticulously what effect it had upon her.

The removal of Kenyalang's *chawat* was no act of casual curiosity: it was a theophanous impulse of possibly dramatic, even dangerous, implications, – dangerous for her future as a Goddess! As she had feared, the revelation of his sex had its subtle and urgent effects on her body, but what was totally unexpected was the effect produced by seeing this young man in full proportion and shape, his smooth uninterrupted outline in all its wonder lying there helpless before her. To her dismay she felt herself melting with tenderness. As he lay uncovered before her, Varuna did the only thing possible: she softly placed her cheek against the source of his creative power and prayed to Lord Siva. Her prayer was a simple request for help and guidance, followed by an open acceptance of whatever inspiration came to her. She could feel the pulsations of Kenyalang's blood as if they merged with her own. And then clearly there formed in her mind a vision of the sacred Cakra, of herself at the centre performing a sinuous dance of slow ecstasy with exact awareness of the gently unfolding power to create that her inspired rhythms would confer on her devotees. Her *dakinis* had been trained to administer the special varieties of meat and wine with subtle restraint, avoiding the least surfeit with an artistry

designed to accomplish a delayed and exquisite fulfilment. In her vision, she saw the voluptuous Tillotama ministering to the exaltation of Kenyalang. Tillotama was the most accomplished of all her *Dakinis*, exquisitely delicate to the touch, responsive to each evanescent mood, and dedicated to the physical joy and spiritual ascent of her partner in the Cakra. With Kenyalang, Tillotama's gifts flowed into his veins, yet always, Varuna noticed in her vision, his eyes returned to her own enticing movements as Varuna weaved a spell upon his soul. As the *maithuna* ended in her vision, the moon disappeared in a rush of dark shapes which overwhelmed her.

Varuna awoke with shock from her reverie, readjusted Kenyalang's *chawat*, called for two *dakini*, and saw him carried away on a stretcher to the raft of Tillotama. She imposed on herself a controlled unwavering calm, but as she looked in her shining mirror, her tears began to flow. Lord Siva had clearly indicated by his vision where her duty lay, yet this girl who was both human and Goddess incarnate, wondered to what extent she was really divine. Her fears of darkening wings reminded her vividly of her own mortality; yet, as a Goddess all she had done in the past was to speak with the commanding tones of Maha Visnu, and when she danced, she knew that her lissome body was responding to the overwhelming dynamism of Lord Siva. In the one case, Lord Visnu; in the other, Lord Siva: but where was the authentic personality of Varuna? Was she always to be an instrument of the Gods or did she have a life of her own?

Varuna had wondered about the wisdom of allowing Kenyalang, a sworn enemy, to partake of the Cakra ceremonies, but now the answer had come in her vision. Whatever Culodaro, Upagatri or Dona thought, no one would dare to interrupt the flow of the sacred *maithuna* once begun, or instant death would follow. This protection accorded the Cakra was derived from ancient custom. How they would react afterwards was another matter: in this affair, Varuna was only answerable to Lord Siva.

## In the Sacred Circle

**T**o be within a sacred circle, to think and act in spiritual communion with others, brings contentment to the soul. To add to this beatitude, the creative element of physical union in trance, with partners who are not merely dedicated but symbolise a Goddess of beauty and dynamism actually controlling the flow of inspiration to her devotees with the divine movements of her own naked body, is to attain a degree of ecstatic fulfilment beyond normal experience. Such a sacred circle combines within its hallowed ambience all the feelings of awe, devotion and wonder of which humans are capable, but on this night of the full moon on the summit of Cakra temple-mountain was to be enacted a drama upon whose outcome depended the very existence of the Naga strongholds scattered through Angadvipa. Kenyalang, – who epitomised to all the 'wild peoples' of the jungle plain the very essence of hornbill power, of gifted insight and courage to build invisible walls to protect them from demon outrage – was to be recalled from the depths of self-induced trance by Varuna and then tried in majesty before King Culodaro under guard of the all-powerful Thunderbolts of Indra.

The procession of Dakini carrying the unconscious Kenyalang towards the summit contrasted their brilliance of colours with the solemnity of their mission. Nagas and their

families standing in groups under flaring torches might on any other night have shouted imprecations at this savage killer of their finest soldiers, but tonight they knew that he could not hear, and they also believed that he was going to his death. The Dakini procession in peacock blue, red and green emerged from the trees into full moonlight watched by Culodaro and his Court seated in a semi-circle beneath the image of the great Naga. A hundred flares encircled the summit attracting a thousand moths with tissue paper wings. Tree frogs blurted their monotonous calls to the night air filled with the curling smoke of incense mingling with spicy aromas of food; and cicadas, unnoticed, droned in the background like a *tampura* waiting for the drama to begin.

Gently Kenyalang's body was lowered to the ground beside Tillotama directly in front of Culodaro yet on the far side of the Cakra facing the Naga image. Beside her on a low sculptured table just above floor level were the nine different sanctified wines and meats required for the performance of the *maithuna*. As the Dakinis left, they *waiied* first to Tillotama, then to Culodaro and the Naga image, and each moved gracefully towards her partner waiting at her own table. Instantly the drums began to murmur softly, and out of the drone of cicadas emerged the real drone of a *tampura*. All eyes were on Kenyalang and the Thunderbolts of Indra who stood magnificently arrayed behind and within a few feet of Tillotama's table. Drona had ordered them, once Kenyalang regained consciousness and showed the least sign of creating a disturbance, to pounce upon him, the strict taboo of non-interference within the sacred circle, being over-ruled if violence occurred within the Cakra. Drona knew that Kenyalang must awaken from trance: Varuna's 'divine' authority depended on it.

The *tampura* made Culodaro restless: he waited impatiently for Varuna to appear. He had slept badly and suffered acutely from pains in his back. Selinka stood behind his throne ready to comfort him in distress and supply any food or drink he called for. He looked pale and irritable, long since having lost interest in the *maithuna*, stimulating physical pleasures to which

he was no longer able to respond. His sole concern was for the future of his people and, at the forthcoming trial he was determined to unravel and expose the Teraja mystique to justify its total extinction and bend the tribes of Angadvipa to his will. If it meant the death of Kenyalang that did not greatly concern him, but Kenyalang's guilt must be established by proper procedure of law. If Kenyalang stood condemned, then all Kenyalang's people would be condemned in history, and the right of the Nagas to reshape the landscape of Angadvipa to build massive reservoirs could never again be questioned. It had not occurred to Culodaro that Kenyalang could put up any kind of defence, nor that he was less than guilty. What now deeply irked him was to find the prisoner still in trance. What sort of trial would it be if the prisoner remained fast asleep?

While Culodaro suffered these anxious thoughts, Upagatri and Drona were whispering together obviously engaged in conspiracy. Varuna, watching from the concealment of her summit cave where she prepared for the night's performance, sensed they were planning treachery and wondered if they would dare disrupt the Cakra. Her only defence lay in her serpents, each lying concealed beneath the twelve ritually prepared tables. In past ceremonies she had never once had to call on their aid and hoped it would not be necessary now. As a solitary flying fox winged overhead to feed on the *kayu ara* trees, Varuna felt a shadowy fear in her mind and shivered.

A single *serunai* began to play as a sign for the food and drink to be passed round. As the devotees waited with drinks in hand, there was a moment's pause in the music while a white-robed priest intoned a Naga prayer, not from the Vedas but from the gleanings of Naga tradition preserved from the ancient days when a Naga Kingdom flourished in Taxila 2,000 years before. It was this priest who had command of the magic *areca nut* flower symbolising the source of the divine *Semen*. Just one touch of the flower instantly conferred trance upon the devotee, who, by implication, was immediately imbued and thus empowered to transfer his divine gift to his partner in the Cakra. But that was to come. Now the feast was just beginning.

One great advantage enjoyed by Varuna in the tender years of her divinity was that she had always done whatever Lord Siva had required her to do. She might have questioned his commands in her mind but had never disobeyed. In the past, therefore, she had not worried about the consequences of her actions; after all, these were the responsibility of Lord Siva. With the coming of Kenyalang an imperceptible change took place in her attitude. It was not one that she herself could rationalise but for the first time she experienced doubt. Strong feelings were growing within her which called for independent expression; indeed she was beginning to be aware that she had a mind of her own. As she waited for the flute to signal her entry, Varuna could not hide from herself fears of what might happen during the trial, and how she herself might react if Kenyalang were condemned to death. Between then and now there existed only her dance and, in her strangely excited state, she resolved to dance as she had never danced before. Kenyalang would soon awaken on hearing staccato drumming, the effects of poisoning having totally disappeared with the application of the *geliga*. She knew she would be dancing for Lord Siva but she would also be projecting all her spirit towards Kenyalang.

There followed a period of subdued *tampura*, a drone which preserved tension without increasing it, and then a burst of drumming followed by a soaring flute. Varuna stepped naked into the moonlight straight to the marble dais at the centre of the pool. She had no need to augment her presence with clothing or jewellery; she was divine; and as such she was worshipped. Her first appearance never failed to astonish her devotees. Her body contained more than mere grace and fluency: her movements in the moonlight were like the slow undulations of silver shadows, her flowing hair like the wind. Nothing about Varuna was predictable so that each *maithuna* ceremony became a unique experience calling upon her devotees to respond to each subtle nuance of the dance with new inflections of emotion. The Dakinis, being intimately attuned to Varuna's body language, understood the need for gentle initiation for their partners – when to offer wine, when to eat and when to kiss – never to any

preconceived plan but in spontaneous reaction to each mood generated by Varuna. They were like the strings of a Veena producing sounds which coalesced with the thoughts of the Goddess, and their consorts shared the mysterious feeling that their own creative energies and wills were part of the *raga* being played. Thus the ceremony had begun, the mood established, and theophanies encompassed all. Varuna retired from the dais and Kenyalang slept.

Culodaro, Upagatri and Drona all showed increasing agitation as Kenyalang showed no sign of emerging from trance. The Thunderbolts became restive and were ordered to keep still. Solitary flying foxes continued to wing overhead in the moonlight. The cicadas tuned to a higher pitch with increased volume as if to compete with the *tampura* and drums. And then, Varuna's return was unexpectedly sudden. The drums beat an urgent tattoo, the flute climbed into the night sky, and Varuna danced straight towards Kenyalang. Miraculously, it seemed, Kenyalang awoke. With the swift response of an animal he was about to leap to his feet when he saw the Thunderbolts armed with spears standing before him on the circle edge. He rapidly glanced round seeking some way of escape, saw Tillotama at his side, Varuna as he had seen her in visions and, on the instant he felt strong arms grasping him to prevent him dashing away from his enemies.

Anticipating Kenyalang's flight, a Thunderbolt had stepped within the sacred circle to restrain Kenyalang. In a flash, a cobra darted straight for the soldier's exposed calf and bit him. The soldier shouted with pain. Drona and Upagatri stood up, still holding their seats for a better view, and were horrified at the uproar which followed. All the Thunderbolts sought to grapple with Kenyalang. Like lightning, the serpents from each table glided swiftly towards the attack. Suddenly a powerful commanding voice rent the air: "Go back!" It was the voice of a God, a voice of thunder that came from beyond this world. It was the voice of Maha Visnu, spoken through the mouth of Varuna. Those who heard that cry would never forget it. Its overmastering authority congealed the blood with terror.



like a tiger's roar at very close range. The Thunderbolts stood for a moment petrified, and then retreated in confusion, the serpents slid back to concealment beneath their tables. Kenyalang gazed at Varuna in astonishment until Tillotama gently cajoled him to sit down by her side. Then again the flute began, soft and low, the *tampura* returned, the drums tactfully began to re-establish their rhythm to a slower tempo, and Varuna danced.

Kenyalang realised there was little else he could do but co-operate with Tillotama. For the second time he owed his life to Varuna. To attempt to escape now would not meet with mere restraint but instant impalement on a Naga spear. The Teraja tradition was to accept hospitality and never to refuse *tuak* when offered by a girl in the longhouse. Since this was expected of him now, he saw no reason to refuse. By sure instinct, it was *Tuak* that Tillotama first offered him, the familiar drink gradually putting him at ease. The meat of monitor lizard and ant-eater were delicacies that he relished and the pleasure of taking food when hungry after the long absence from his body was one to savour. Tillotama made no attempt to overwhelm Kenyalang. If her natural charm, combined with drink and food, failed to do so then nothing else could: she merely attended to his needs. She knew a Teraja can drink almost any amount of *tuak* without feeling ill effects. To give Kenyalang excess would lead them nowhere. Smilingly she offered him honey wine which he sipped with pleasure, recalling those occasions in his youth when he had climbed the tallest *Tapang* trees only to be tormented by bees. In theory, bees would chase the falling sparks from his *damar* torch; in practise many had vented their spite on him. Such feats were accepted in those days as part of a youth's training in courage.

As Kenyalang began to relax, the flute soared again above the drums, a *veena*, contributing for the first time, hinted at a new theme, and Varuna appeared. The first memorable occasion he had seen Varuna in the flesh was when the King Cobra had struck. He had retained consciousness long enough to be aware of Varuna's perfumed body close to his own as she sucked the

poison from his wound. His vision of her passed through his mind in swift succession – firstly, the Naga soldiers' funeral, followed by other by vision which came during his journey through Sabayan. In each vision her face and eyes had expressed a curious uncertainty – a mixture of divine assurance and feminine bewilderment. Now her eyes betrayed a fierce ecstasy edged with anxiety. She was a Goddess without doubt but so tender and so vulnerable.

Kenyalang found himself drawn to Varuna inexplicably, even knowing that she was at the core of the mystique which gave the Nagas their power to destroy the Terajas and all the tribes of Angadvipa. While succumbing slowly to Tillotama's physical enchantments, Kenyalang's eyes were fixed on the dancing of Varuna. His body shivered with pleasure at the sustained and exquisite assault on his skin, but it was by the slow undulations of Varuna's controlled divinity that his mind was constrained. He knew as he warmed to the fire of Varuna's spirit that he was undergoing a powerful seduction. It was not the warmth of wine which softened the edges of perception – quite the contrary: it was the warmth of Varuna's spirit which uplifted his own to see her inspired movements with a diamond clarity of vision.

Again, at exact moment of heightened tension, Varuna stopped, *wailed* and the music died, and as she left the dais, the wooing partners within the Cakra sought again that sweet relief of kisses and wine and deliciously spiced food from their compliant dakinis. The girls in green and blue and red knew from past *maithunas* they had attained the first stages of rapture and from now onwards there would be an ever-sweetening ever-increasing momentum towards a joyous climax. Kenyalang, too, felt the need for intensified pleasure. The nearness of the Thunderbolts of Indra was forgotten in the flowing breasts, the perfume, hair and searching eyes and finger tips of the skilful Tillotama. Was Kenyalang entering a new kind of trance? Dimly in the far reaches of his mind he heard again the ultrasonic music of the orchids of Sabayan. For a moment it rose above the Veena and above the drums and then it flowed far

away. It was the music the orchids had learned from Coom. Was this extraordinary seduction on the temple-mountain part of Coom's plan? The thought vanished with the music, the presence of Tillotama now absorbing all his feeling, and all his body, while the swaying magical movements of Varuna gripped his soul.

Tillotama sensed this was the moment to offer Kenyalang a new potion – that subtle mixture of tapioca wine laced with powdered rhinoceros horn and *keladi* wine touched with the merest suggestion of the powdered scales of a *tengiling* ant-eater. That it was dull in taste mattered little to Kenyalang who had already begun to ascend with Tillotama the medium ranges of those blended harmonies of physical pleasure leading ultimately to the pinnacle of ecstasy. Until this moment, the music had served as slowly awakening accompaniment to the dances of Varuna, stirring the senses of her devoteess within the Cakra. Now, the drumming re-started with a more urgent rhythm and Varuna stepped swiftly to the dais in her ancient incarnation of Agni, the God of Fire. She was still naked, her body smeared brilliant red with *kesumba* juice to resemble upward curling flames, and as she danced to the greater intensity of the drums, her exalted mood spread like a fire among the partners sharing the symphysis of the *maithuna*. They knew they were about to experience the miracle of her divinity. They would be transported far back to the beginning of Time, to the very beginning of creation. All their newly endowed strength would be plunged within this leaping, sensuous eternal fire. The drums thundered to a climax and the Nagas, made sublime by the unconstrained power and passion of Varuna's dance, stood facing the high priest, their muscles tense, awaiting the signal to rush forward to claim the benison of trance. It came with the silence following the final crash of drums. With one mind the devotees moved swiftly towards the divine arca nut flower, agitated by the high priest as the holy phallus to impregnate the world.

As each devotee touched the flower it was as if he were born anew. He returned to his partner walking in splendour endowed with a vigour in trance to match the whirling divinity

that was Varuna. For a moment all gazed in awe at this body of flame which spun at the heart of the Universe and then instinctively, at an exact moment in that rapturous flow, each devotee fulfilled with his partner the sacred act which united him with Varuna's divinity. For Kenyalang too, it was as if he were ranging the peaks of Kinabalu with the swiftly, ascending *kinnari* watching the whole world turning below him. Again he heard the storm bamboos of Kinarahengan, sweet and swelling harmonies filling the clouds. He stood once again on the Dais of Rebirth listening to the great drums of the *rebana besar* and the single flute soaring into the blue, but this time the monks' deep threnody stirred him to leap with all his creative power into the *uma* of Tillotama and into the very soul of the Naga Goddess, Varuna. The great drums reached a crescendo and died. The *maithuna* ceremonies were over. As Varuna departed from the marble dais, Kenyalang felt rough hands seize his arms, spears pricked his back, and with angry shouts of command, he was forced into the immediate presence of Culodaro. His trial was about to begin.

## The Wisdom of Samathai

**S**amathai, the Punan shaman of the birds, was a useful ally to Temegoh, not only because he had direct access to Rogon and the God of Sabayan but because the Punans, being shy and nomadic, were neutral in the battles between the tribes. The Punans had no enemies. They kept to their own jungle paths and left other tribes alone. They did respond, however, to calls for special help. They served as guides to the Nagas and the Rakssassas along the Baram River. Their knowledge of jungle herbs was unique. The Punans were the only tribe which did not capture heads; neither did they use blowpipes for killing humans. The sharp spear fixed to the end of each blowpipe was used for impaling wild pig. Every tribe, made use of the Punans at some time or other. None had cause to fear them and, although they made no attempt to impress with displays of courage or heroism, they commanded respect. Samathai, had about him an aura, partly engendered by his own remarkable skills as a shaman, but attributable also, no doubt, to the reputation for pacific wisdom of his tribe.

When Temegoh told Samathai of Kenyalang's danger, Samathai responded with such help as only he could give. However, the danger to Kenyalang was only one aspect of a far wider problem. Over the past few years, Samathai had seen the power of the Nagas grow throughout the north of Angadvipa; and, in

extending their power, they had subdued one tribe after another and put them to work as slaves to build their reservoirs. Their first great achievement had been at Ruangan Lalak close to Rampayoh. This had been followed by a canal called Terusan Pagalayan starting about two miles down river of Kuala Belait and cutting due west to join up with the Baram River. The canal itself was only two miles long but it had meant clearing enormous serawangan trees some of them with a girth of thirty six feet. Many Rakssassas had died in the two years it had taken to complete this canal, creating among all the tribes on the Baram a lasting and ineradicable hatred of the Nagas. Yet another canal to the north was already under construction. Their greatest projects, still incomplete, were two reservoirs in a bend of the Baram River on the Sungai Penawar. These had originally been small lakes inhabited by sacred white crocodiles worshipped by the Rakssassas.

In the process of winning Rakssassa co-operation, the Nagas had originally paid respect to the white crocodiles and pointed out how similiar Rakssassa beliefs were to the Naga mystique of worshipping Naga serpents. At first, the Nagas had promised to make the lakes even more magnificent as a fitting home for the crocodiles, greatly deepening them and extending their banks over a far wider area. Innocently, the Rakssassas had fallen in with their plans and given considerable help with their constructoin. However, the crocodiles themselves were disturbed by the presence of large number of workers, and were upset by the destruction of their favourite resting places beneath the tree roots on the banks; so much so that they moved away eastwards and for months at a time were not seen, only occasionally returning to Penawar at night time.

The Rakssassas vainly held all kinds of pacification ceremonies to recall them, but when these produced no results, they began seriously to question the whole Naga enterprise and withdrew their co-operation, saying they would only continue when the white crocodiles returned. Eventually, the white crocodiles did come back to stay delighting the Rakssassas to such a degree that they held a white crocodile dance festival which lasted fully

a month-much to the chagrin of their Naga overseers. When the dancing ended, the Rakssassas made up their minds to leave the crocodiles in peace and refused to work on the reservoirs.

One night the Rakssassas heard an anguished mooring from the lake. All the sacred crocodiles were slaughtered by the Nagas, evidence of the massacre being immediately destroyed in a fire which burned through the hours of darkness. By next morning not a single white crocodile was to be seen. The immediate effect on the Rakssassas was to cause them to wreak swift and terrible vengeance on every Naga in sight. However, the Nagas were well armed and well-protected behind bamboo panjies and pointed staves and the battle which saw many Nagas killed, ended with their forces in ultimate control but demoralised to a point where they could only feel reasonably safe inside their own compound.

Samathai, whose Punans travelled the full length of the Baram, received reports of seething resentment at the Rakssassa longhouses of Sungei Lubang to the north which had provided workers for the canal, at Sungei Lubok Pau, the site of the new canal, at Sungei Sadong to the south where a Naga outpost, recently established, had come under attack for interfering with a Rakssassa sacrifice of a child to the River Spirit to prevent widespread flooding. The Nagas had insisted that the Naga deity, the great Serpent, was in control of all the waters including the rivers, and to sacrifice a child would only anger him.

Similar reports came to Samathai from the Belait River from Bukit Puan and further to the north east at Merimbun where one of their most successful reservoir projects was already well advanced. It seemed in all cases as if the Nagas were inspired by a single unrelenting purpose - to overcome all opposition to build their reservoirs for irrigating rice fields; and in the achievement of this aim, to subjugate the Rakssassas and other tribes living within the region. Traditions were flouted, ceremonies cut short, women violated, and the men, at first persuaded to work, were later whipped if they refused to cooperate.

The time had come, in Samathai's mind, when Naga dominance must end; and in this thought he was fortified by a recent trance message from Rogon in Sabayan who promised to send his demons to the aid of the Terajas and Rakssassas and all other tribes on the Belait Plain. The problem to Samathai was how to accomplish the destruction of Naga power without, at the time, sacrificing their valuable skills at engineering, far superior to anything ever witnessed before in the long history of Angadvipa. The Rakssassas themselves operated miniature bamboo forges from which they fashioned iron parangs and fish hooks, but their skill was as nothing compared to the vast earth works undertaken by the Nagas.

The Nagas must, if possible, remain in Angadvipa and be absorbed: their practical knowledge was too valuable to lose; but as a people they must be restrained and contained and, to this end, Samathai saw that his first priority was to save the life of Kenyalang to fulfil the role of leader of all the tribes. The name of Kenyalang and the Terajas had become a legend as much on the Baram as on the Belait, the Mendaram and the Rampayoh. How Kenyalang would unite the tribes and conquer the Nagas was beyond even the wisdom of Samathai. It would be a miracle indeed if he could bring them together even for a few days, their tradition of head hunting and fighting among themselves was so deeply ingrained that any form of co-ordinated action would need almost supernatural motivation. Nevertheless, it must be attempted. Unless it were, the Nagas would subjugate the whole island.



## The Trial of Kenyalang

Culodaro, watching the swift arrest of Kenyalang as the *maithuna* ended, was embarrassed by his nakedness and ordered one of the Thunderbolts to go back and collect his *cawat*. Kenyalang, with obvious relief, fitted it around him and then, with greater assurance, stood upright to face Culodaro and whatever lay in store. Although guarded on three sides by Thunderbolts, he knew his own capacity to move like lightning and, even while Culodaro was speaking at the opening of the trial, Kenyalang was calculating his chances of leaping to free himself from his guards and racing to make his escape. However, he quickly realised that Drona had not under-estimated him and he would have to wait for an opportunity later on.

Culodaro knew well that Kenyalang could be indicted and burned at the stake on the strength of his record alone: the prisoner had killed twenty one Nagas. This was widely known, indeed, as the facts of one ambush after another were recalled by the prosecutor, Kenyalang made no denial; neither did he show guilt. He seemed to regard the capture of twenty one Naga heads as a modest achievement. However, what Culodaro wished to gain from these proceedings was not necessarily Kenyalang's death – that would be easy – but some understanding of Teraja's motivation, hoping that a way could be found, by

sparing Kenyalang's life, to win the co-operation of the tribes in providing essential labour to build canals and reservoirs.

Kenyalang listened in silence as each announced killing brought a jeer from the onlookers. Once all the facts had been established and Kenyalang's guilt proved, Culodaro himself took over the interrogation using the prosecutor as an interpreter. He pointed to all the women and children who stood in a semi-circle on the summit fringe and said quietly to Kenyalang: "These are the wives and children of the Naga soldiers you have slain. Explain to them why you killed their husbands and their fathers?"

As the question was being translated, Kenyalang was obviously deeply moved and he remained silent.

"Have you nothing to say?" asked Culodaro.

With a great effort Kenyalang replied: "How can I say to them that I am sorry. It will not bring their loved ones back. What I did was necessary for our survival."

"When have you been in danger of Naga attack?" asked Culodaro.

"Your very presence here on our traditional homeland is not merely an attack but a conquest. You are steadily seeking and winning control of Angadvipa. That we shall not allow and we will fight to stop you."

"You did not answer my question," said Culodaro. "I will ask you again. When have you been in danger of Naga attack?"

"If you mean by 'attack' an actual assault on a longhouse using weapons, it is true we do not fear you. Such an attack, you know well, would be extremely unwise. Our longhouses are well defended. But an assault on our land – such attacks are going on everywhere. You are stealing our land and stealing our waters. You are even stealing our wives. That is why we fight you."

"Let us deal with these points one by one so that we can better understand each other," said Culodaro patiently. As he spoke he was interrupted by a cry of anger from the soldiers and a swelling chorus from the watching wives. "Kill him," they shouted. "Burn him now. Why are you waiting?"

Culodaro turned on the soldiers angrily. "Drona, I expect better discipline. Keep these men quiet." And to the women he said compassionately: "I understand how deep are your feelings. A king must act wisely, not in a sudden burst of emotion. Please bear with me for a little while." And then again to Kenyalang he said "You must know as well as I do that land and water need each other like a flower and a bee. Otherwise nothing will fertilise, nothing will grow. The Nagas are not stealing your land or water; we are using both to produce rice - enough rice, we hope, for all the peoples of Angadvipa."

"That is what you have always told us," said Kenyalang. "But look at your rice-fields along the Baram. They are all sick with the red disease. How much rice have you got from them in the past three years? Nothing. You forced the Rakssassas to work on your canals. What did they gain from all your promises? Many lost their lives. You have cut down countless trees. Never once did you ask our permission. And when have you consulted the spirits of the trees? Are you so ignorant that you think they are not alive. Never have you explained to them your need. If you had good reasons, they would understand. You Nagas have before you one clear objective - no matter whether if it is right or wrong - and you will go ahead ruthlessly to accomplish it. And you expect us to timidly stand by and allow you to ruin our homeland. You are mad. You are all mad!

There was a shocked reaction, not only from Drona, Upagatri, the Naga soldiers, the watching engineers, and the widows of those soldiers who had killed, but an immediate response from the prosecutor who would not tolerate Kenyalang to speak further. He turned sharply to Culodaro and said: "I think you have heard enough, my Lord. There can be only one sentence for these terrible crimes - death by burning!"

"You are in too great a hurry," said Culodaro. "I have not finished." There is some truth in what this young man says." Culodaro stepped down from his throne and came closer to Kenyalang, talking quietly, almost like a father. "You describe the Nagas as ruthless and mad. How would you describe a human being who deliberately chopped off heads?"

There were cheers and angry shouts from the women who were growing impatient. Utama stood in the cave-mouth watching. Varuna, too deeply interested in Kenyalang's fate to retire to the cave to remove the *kesumba* juice flames on her body, moved nearer to hear Culodaro's words and what Kenyalang would say. Everything, for her, depended on his answer. There was only the sound of cicadas and the distant hoot of an owl as everyone waited for his reply, but Kenyalang did not reply.

"Your life is at stake, Kenyalang, and the lives of your people."

There was a pause as Kenyalang looked round the throng on the summit. He looked up towards a black cloud silvered by the moon and threatening to hide it, and then looked beyond the moon towards Sabayan, seeing in his mind the drawn, heroic face of Singalang Burong, the Teraja God of war. The first drops of rain brought him suddenly back to Culodaro's question.

"I am not here to apologise for my people," he said, "just as you have no intention of apologising for yours. You Nagas have always believed your actions are right. We - 'mlecchas', as you call us - have always acted according to our sacred hornbill traditions of courage. It so happens that this land of Angadvipa - this land of hornbills - is our home, and you are the unwelcome guests. The least you can do is to understand our customs. It is we who are right. You have never understood - because you have never enquired before today - why we Terajas cut off Naga heads. It is very simple. We believe that by cutting off heads we can build a transparent wall around our longhouse to protect us from demons of all kinds, a wall that reaches up to meet the sky and the stars. That is why we cut off your heads."

The women became more vociferous and there seemed to be no holding them. The soldiers pressed forward in fury as if to smite Kenyalang there and then. Again Culodaro ordered quietness, but even he must have wondered how much longer he could hold back the mounting anger that flowed around him.

"Continue," he said, once silence had been restored.

## A DREAM OF KINABALU

"The wall of which I speak can be called by different names. Some call it self-respect. Other's call it a community's morale. This I have finally learned on my visit to Sabayan. Any community attempting to survive in a hostile world must cherish its morale; otherwise that community will die. In the case of the Nagas, your Goddess Varuna achieves it for you with the *maithuna* ceremony. In the past, and today, the tribes throughout the Belait plain have achieved it by hunting heads. That is our custom. That explains why I have killed twenty one Nagas. But now I assure you this will change. If I am allowed to return to my people....."

There was a howl of rage from the women and soldiers. "A trick, a trick!" they shouted and hurled themselves upon Kenyalang. Culodaro was forgotten, swept aside by the frenzy of the mob. He fell, crashed his head, and lay in a daze.

"Stand back, everyone!" shouted Drona, and quickly gave a command to a soldier at his side. Instantly two groups of soldiers went into action knowing exactly what they had to do. Four Nagas dragged the struggling Kenyalang towards the faggots and set them ablaze. Four others brought in a dead soldier on a litter with a Naga blade sticking in his back. For a moment, there was an appalled silence. And then, completing their orders, the same soldiers went straight towards Varuna and grabbed her arms, holding her firmly while Drona spoke:

"This dead Naga you see before you was sent to Varuna's pool last night to report on the condition of Kenyalang. He was attacked by one of Varuna's serpents, and then struck down from behind by Varuna, using a Naga's blade. For murdering one of our own soldiers there can be only one punishment." With a flourish of one arm towards the flames, Drona shouted "Burn them both - now!"

In the split second before the maddened crowd rushed forward, Varuna, standing defiantly, quickly glanced towards Kenyalang and the leaping flames and then upwards towards the burgeoning clouds and called out above the clamour: "Vritre - unleash the storm!"

The crowd, at first astonished, and then made ecstatic by the thought of a double burning, ran towards the fire screaming. Kenyalang, horrified by all he saw, seemed to stand in a daze, until suddenly he heard an electric cry from above. Silhouetted clearly against the disappearing moon, he saw the outline of Tumok above him with her metallic blue feathers, and above Tumok, seemingly diving out of the swirling clouds appeared a thousand pairs of giant wings guided by the bright malevolent eyes of *kluang*. Tumok's warning gave Kenyalang the split second he needed to wrench himself free from his guards and race towards Varuna. As the *kluang* struck in a fury of bat wings, of claws and teeth tearing at flesh and eyes, and as screams of agony rent the summit of Cakra mountain, so the storm broke, lightning repeatedly rending the sky, thunder crashing with bursts of terrifying anger, and in quick succession came the deluge.

By the light of flames, Kenyalang saw Varuna crash to the ground overwhelmed by the wings of flying foxes. He quickly ripped them from her long hair protecting her back, grabbed them from her long hair protecting her back, grabbed them from her face and body, gathered up her unconscious form in his arms, and in the tumult of the storm and the blinding rain carried her carefully down from the summit along the narrow path towards the sacred pool below. So terrifying had been the onslaught, that each soldier must have been concerned for his own private agony, giving no thought to the vanishing prisoners.

Kenyalang stopped only once to collect some *Bunga Buot* flowers, vital for the recovery of Varuna, and then took her straight to her private room, laying her gently on her bed. Tenderly, he washed away the blood from her wounds on her face and breasts and thighs, and slowly rubbed in the powerful balm of the *Bunga Buot*. As he did so, Varuna's serpent sister, Karuna, remained poised, watching.

## Both Human and Divine

**K**enyalang's first concern was to help Varuna recover, then to escape and put as much distance between themselves and Mendaram as possible. Fortunately, the *Bunga Buot* proved remarkably effective and Varuna opened her eyes. At first she was shocked and frightened by Kenyalang's presence in her own room and reacted angrily, ordering him to go. However, an ultrasonic message from her sister, soon made her recall that she owed her rescue to Kenyalang who could, while she was unconscious, have violated her if he wished, but in fact had only been concerned with making her well.

When Kenyalang suggested they leave quickly for fear of a Naga attack, Varuna replied with scarcely concealed amusement. "No," she said gently, "they will not come here now, or Vritri will be down upon them and gobble them up!" With that thought she rippled with laughter, but the laughter caused her pain.

"No," she said. "Look at yourself. You've got blood all over you. You have cleaned me up very well. Let me do the same for you."

One by one she attended to his wounds, applying her own unguents to make sure they would not fester. The experience of touching a man was quite new to her and she did so with the

utmost delicacy and restraint. At times she became playful, and wondered how, so recently, she could have suffered the most intense hatred for this man who had cut twenty-one Naga heads. She was so gentle that Kenyalang might have said a dozen times: "Please let me do it. You cannot hurt me." But the fact was that Kenyalang was himself totally absorbed by her movements, by her exquisite shape and lovely skin, and watched her constantly in a state of wonder. The thought kept occurring to him: "How much she is like a snake!" But it was not meant as an unkindly simile. Kenyalang, in the Teraja jungles, had grown to develop a respect, even admiration, for snakes, not only for their graceful, sinuous movements, but for their poise which symbolised the height of concentrated awareness in a body which could remain absolutely still. Varuna's waist movements appeared serpentine because her waist was so incredibly narrow and yet her breasts and buttocks were full, each compelling the eye separately, but all three merging into a flowing unity. And as her body moved, so moved her eyes and her head. Varuna's eyes were elongated and small and would often keep quite still. She did not stare but neither did she blink. She remained serious much of the time, just occasionally becoming mischievous and merry.

Thus these two continued to explore each other with their eyes as if to speak would break a sacred thread between them. Varuna made him lie on her bed as she cleaned the claw marks which had torn the skin on his buttocks. As she gently spread unguents across his hips and his thighs, she once again felt a deep longing within her, finding herself swallowing secretly to contain the intensity of her feeling. Indeed, she felt so disturbed that she suggested they had a period of rest, giving him cushions to lie in the corner while she tried to re-arrange her tangled hair.

After the drama and fast action on the mountain top, Kenyalang found this interlude of recuperation more than agreeable, but his mind and body were still attuned to the urgent need for survival, not only for himself but for his tribe. Unable to contain himself in silence, he said to Varuna: "What went wrong? Why did the *kluang* attack you?"



## A DREAM OF KINABALU

Varuna looked embarrassed and puzzled. She had called forth the storm, but the *kluang* attack was an unexpected bonus. And then she remembered her prevision of darkening wings and her earlier fears. She would rather not have spoken about it, but she owed Kenyalang her life and realised his question was not unreasonable. However, before, answering, she paused and thought carefully:

"Because I am a Goddess," she said modestly, "does not mean that I am in full control of events. Not even the Gods control our destinies. I am merely the instrument of Lord Siva and of Vritri, the great Snake God who rules the clouds and the rains and the rivers and the waters. We were in danger and I knew that Vritri would come to our help with the storm, but the flying foxes – that was a complete surprise!"

"It was certainly unusual," said Kenyalang. "*Kluang* are normally harmless creatures: they never attack except to defend their young. But if you have the power to command storms, why have you not destroyed the Terajas long ago?"

Again Varuna was embarrassed by Kenyalang's blunt speech. She reflected it had the virtue of honesty and sincerity but it could have been said more delicately.

"I am not Maha Visnu," she said, "although he does sometimes speak through me. I have no spear, no bow and arrow. I do not lead the Nagas into war. My role is to uplift my people into the realms of the spirit so that if they are attacked by demons or even humans they have the will to conquer them. You described my role yourself on Cakra mountain – to raise morale, nothing more."

There was silence for awhile between them as Varuna continued to comb her hair. Kenyalang walked across to a ravenastrom on the wall. It was rounded and exquisitely made with three strings. "May I?" he asked politely.

"Of course," she said. "It is named after King Ravana of Lanka. He was a keen musician."

"The same one who invented the game of chess?" asked Kenyalang remembering Rogon's lively metaphors on Kinabalu.

"Yes," she said, delighted. "How did you know that?"

Kenyalang smiled modestly. "I was told once," he said and began to play.

Varuna listened, astonished by the simple melody and his gentle touch. Kenyalang usually played his own sapè by the riverside in which he captured the evanescent flow of the river, the ripple of water, the dance of dragon flies and the rustle of trees. It was there now in his music and Varuna lay back enchanted. As her thoughts flowed at random with the music, she recalled vividly the scene at her shrine and of her Dakini flaying his naked flesh with whips. She tried to banish the memory, but this scene was immediately followed by the Dakini with cobra. Impulsively, with great tenderness, she stepped quickly forward and touched his cheeks with her tongue. "I am so, sorry," she said and began to cry. At once she returned to her couch confused and embarrassed. Kenyalang put down the ravenastrom and sought to comfort her, kneeling beside her and stroking her hair. But soon she began to cry more than ever with rending sobs that came from her very soul.

"You are right to think evil of me," she said. "I know that one day I will destroy you, but I cannot help myself," and with this confession, blurted out word by word, she became utterly unconsolable.

Kenyalang was both astonished and deeply moved. He gently gathered her into his arms and spoke softly, caressing her shoulder and kissing away the tears from her cheek by the gentlest touch of his nose. Teraja affection was conveyed by smelling, by soft pressings of the beloved's face, exploring cheeks and eyes and chin. To Varuna who had never so much as been touched by a man before, this display of natural affection, these gentle imprints which sent currents of ecstasy through her body, both excited and alarmed her. All her instincts taught her to respond to the wonder of this man, but her mind sternly shouted "No, you cannot!". Instantly, she wrenched herself free.

"No," she said simply, "I must not. There is something I have to tell you." Her sobbing ceased and she suddenly became

calm. "Here, let me comb your hair," she said after a pause. "You have been lucky. Why didn't the *kluang* get tangled up with you?"

"Its the smell of the *langir* wood," he said. "When you remove the bark and beat the wood a white sap comes out which cleans your hair and makes it fresh. You must try it some time."

With his back to her, Varuna slowly combed the long, thick strands of Kenyalang's hair and, for awhile, there was silence between them. When she felt ready to speak, Varuna said: "There is a lot I don't understand about you Kenyalang, but I understand even less about myself. We both know that our destinies are entwined. Why this is so, I do not yet know; but before we travel further together I must tell you what I believe about myself even if I cannot be sure. I do this to save you pain and possible death. One day I may have to destroy you but that would never be my wish."

Varuna felt her calmness vanishing as she spoke, pressing down harder with the comb and remaining silent for what seemed a long time. Eventually, with renewed effort she said slowly: "I am a *nagini*, Kenyalang. I was brought up as a serpent with serpents in India and later here in Mendaram. I think and feel like a serpent; yet, as you see, I am human and a woman; and in my body in all things I feel like a woman. A moment ago you must have sensed that I would dearly wish to be loved like a woman. But I am something else too, Kenyalang, which is more important than being a serpent or a woman I am a Goddess. As a serpent I can be wise, but when I bite, poison flows from my gums into the wound. I am also told that if I am intimate with a man, he will be poisoned by fluids from my body. This means that I cannot love without destroying my love. As a Goddess, our tradition is that men may worship me and share with me my divinity in the *maithuna* but no man is permitted to love me or marry me. If I were to break this rule, the Gods would be angry and I would be punished and lose my divinity."

Again there was silence for a long time as Varuna continued to comb Kenyalang's hair, and Kenyalang examined in his mind each statement as if he were looking at a black stone

picked up in the river. Eventually, he broke the silence with the simple question: "You believe all this, Varuna, but is it true?"

Varuna was slightly taken aback by the question. She had never doubted her beliefs. She *felt* like a serpent. She *felt* like a woman. And she *felt* like a Goddess. Did not Maha Visnu speak with her tongue? Did not Lord Siva infuse her with his dynamism when she danced? Did not Lord Siva bestow upon her vision to tell her what to do? Varuna was genuinely puzzled and replied: "What is there for me to doubt?" she said. "I am only telling you what I know."

Here Kenyalang found himself treading gently. He had been guilty of being heavy-footed once: he was not going to blunder again. He turned round and thanked her for making his hair smooth and said to her: "You have a beautiful touch. No one has ever done my hair like that before," and smiled.

"You did not answer me," she said. "What is there to doubt?"

Kenyalang, still smiling, said to her: "You are the loveliest of all women. You are a serpent and a Goddess. I am not afraid of Rogon and all his demons, so why should I be afraid of your bite? I know you can cure me as you did when I was bitten by the King Cobra. Here is my arm." He lifted up his left arm towards her mouth and said: "Now bite me and see what happens!"

Kenyalang's direct and simple solution to all her worries was so unexpected that for a moment Varuna was shocked. Her eyes widened and she remained stock still, astonished. Varuna's serpent sister watched them both in wonder, aware of the drama, and curious to see what her sister would do. Varuna quickly recovered her poise with a ripple of laughter; and said: "Don't be ridiculous, Kenyalang. How could I possibly bite you." She picked up the bowl of fruits and offered him one: "I'll bite a mango instead!" and soon they were both laughing, and the earlier intimacy was restored between them, but now they were like brother and sister instead of lovers.

In playful mood, Kenyalang took the ravenastrom again and handed it to Varuna. "Play me a serpent lullaby?" he said, smiling, and lay back on the cushions. Varuna took the instru-

ment, and began softly to play, Kenyalang listening with his eyes closed. If his own music could be described as gentle, the sounds which came from Varuna's touch had a curiously unearthly quality, reminding him partly of the drone he had heard during the *maithuna* ceremony tugging repeatedly at his soul, and partly of the exquisite ultrasonic melodies played by the orchids on the eastern *darata*. It was the music of trance played with the subtlety and splendour which could only come from divine inspiration. Before the music carried him away, Kenyalang looked across at Varuna, her eyes still and smiling as if dreaming, and he was content that they should both enter trance together.

## Hiatus in Mendaram

**K**enyalang awoke before dawn. Varuna had realised that he must return to his tribe just as she knew that her future with her own people depended on her own appearance and behaviour at the banyan shrine that morning. She persuaded him to eat a mango before departure and showed him a secret path into the jungle leading from the sacred pool, advising him to return by the same route when next he came. They embraced, knowing they would meet soon, and Kenyalang disappeared into the darkness. The full moon, a residual tock-tock bird tocking its message to the silent, watching trees, and Tumok saw him go.

Varuna prepared herself for the dawn ceremony by wearing a simple flowing white silk robe and a Naga coronet. Her dakinis were instructed to appear in dark red, each wearing diaphanous silk, and to keep absolutely still throughout the service. As Varuna stepped to low drumming through the Makara entrance to stage, she looked past the circle of oil lamps to find only a few devotees gathered waiting. At a hand-sign, the drumming increased in volume until it could be heard throughout Mendaram. In groups of twos and threes, the worshippers came, looking down for the most part, and shame-faced. Varuna recognised those who had shared in the scene on the Cakra summit the night before. Skin on their faces and bodies was torn. Many

had obviously not slept. As more devotees arrived, Varuna signalled for the nageswaram to sound its piercing note to command all malingerers to attend without delay. Soon the entire sacred precincts of the banyan was full of worshippers. With a final burst from the nageswaram, the drums suddenly fell silent and everyone looked expectantly towards Varuna.

Varuna stood in the centre of the stage in silence. She had not planned what to say, counting on Lord Siva to supply the words for her; or perhaps expecting Maha Visnu to admonish them, but no divine prompting came. Her silence was prolonged. She wondered if she had lost favour with Lord Siva through her momentary surrender to Kenyalang. Eventually she was forced to speak and approached quietly as a woman.

"When last night you saw the Naga dagger in that soldier's back, you believed Drona and would have burned me. Why? What madness came upon you? You knew very well that Drona's Thunderbolts never come to this shrine. They serve only Indra and revile our serpent lore. You know that Drona himself wants to rule over Angadvipa and overthrow Culodaro, your King. Last night you saw your beloved King humiliated and trampled underfoot: never was Drona's purpose made more clear. So ask yourselves two questions in the cool air of morning where there are no cicadas to confuse you, no flames, no food or wine or music. "Do you now really believe I killed that soldier without a shred of evidence to prove it?" There was a guilty silence. "Please look at me," she said appealingly. "That dagger was not mine. You know that. That was a soldier's dagger. Like all the women here I carry a small dagger in my hair to defend myself - look!" She took a small curved blade from her hair, shaped in the Menangkabau style, ideal for ripping an assailant's stomach in a single upward thrust.

"Answer me clearly now. Do you really believe that I did it? Yes or no?" One voice rang out clearly followed by another and another. "No - no, no!" Then everyone shouted together "No!"

"And now my second question," she said following up her advantage quickly. "Who stands alone between Drona and his

ambition to be King?" Back came the cry in ringing tones: "Varuna!"

"So now you have proved with your own voices I am not alone. Drona has exposed his own ambition and you and I and the whole of Mendaram will stop him. By your ringing cries you have shown me that you regret the events of last night so we will say no more. I have only to thank Vritri for the storm which saved us from worse folly." Facing the statue of the Naga Serpent on Cakra mountain Varuna prayed:

"O Thou who binds the waters, who has the power to extinguish all Life and plunge the Universe back into chaos. O Thou who was born from the soma poured on the sacrificial fire. O Thou who devoured the Gods Agni and Soma so that all other Gods were afraid. O Thou who became the enemy of Indra. Now is the time you have come to our aid by striking down Drona, the tool of Indra in Angadvipa. Thy great storm on the summit of Cakra mountain, climaxing the *maithuna* ceremonies performed in thy honour, demonstrated thy divine anger at the wickedness of Drona and the Thunderbolts of Indra. Restore to us, if thou wilt, our worthy King, Culodaro so that once again, through his wisdom, we can find a way to bring peace and plenty to the lands of Angadvipa."

It was a short prayer calculated to place the storm in historic perspective so that forever after the Nagas would associate the storm with Vritri's anger at Drona. When it was finished she spoke quietly to the worshippers and said: "I would now like each one of you to pass in front of me as you leave."

A high flute then began to play and one by one the devotees paused before Varuna and looked deep into her serpent eyes. It was a searching moment of renewal in which guilt was removed and confidence in Varuna completely restored.

Following the morning service Varuna discovered how matters stood at the Palace after the turmoil of the previous night. One of her Dakinis gathered the information from the servants quarters in the Palace and hastened back with it to Varuna's apartment. Culodaro was confined to bed, mainly suffering shock and a jolt to his personal esteem. Having been pushed



onto the ground before the assault by flying foxes, he had not himself been a target. Indeed, lying in a daze, he had not been aware of anything that happened. The entire thrust of the flying fox attack was aimed at Drona and the Thunderbolts of Indra whose bare upper torsors reflected the moonlight before the moon was obliterated by cloud. Drona himself had been savaged in the face and body and had been picked up unconscious, badly bleeding some two hours later after the storm had passed. Whether he would survive no one could tell. Many of his soldiers were also seriously mauled. Two had died. For the rest, their injuries were so extensive, it was thought it would be at least three weeks before they could recover. Armed with this news, Varuna, accompanied by Tillotama in a palanquin, went straight to the Palace bringing with her a collection of Culodaro's favourite orchids. It was vital, she thought, that Culodaro should know exactly what happened last night and take immediate action to arrest Drona. Announced by a servant, Varuna went straight to Culodaro's private room. The chastened King lay back on his cushions, still plainly unwell, but having suffered no damage to his skin. There was a slight swelling on his head, caused when he had fallen. He was obviously delighted to see Varuna.

"What stories I have heard," said Culodaro. "It is wonderful to see you alive. That idiot, Drona, is not such an idiot after all. He seems to have had the whole thing planned. How are you, my dear?"

Varuna had only two scratches to show on her face. The damage to her body skin was concealed by her white sari. She made light of her injuries but showed her great relief at the King's recovery and then told him the whole story, leaving out the interlude with Kenyalang in her apartment, but concluding with the heartening reception she had received at the shrine only a few minutes before.

Culodaro saw, when her account ended, that he must act decisively. The people expected him to do so. Drona had clearly urged the people forward not only to burn Kenyalang but Varuna as well. In doing so he had summarily ended Kenyalang's

trial and destroyed any hopes that Culodaro had of finding an accommodation with the 'mleccha' tribes. Drona's usefulness in Angadvipa had ended. Another trial might help to establish Culodaro's authority as King, but it would only divide the Nagas further, and now, if ever, was the time for unity and calm in dealing with the tribes. Culodaro promised he would give the order for Drona's arrest and banishment – not to India where Drona could summon help and return, but to islands further east where he could give no trouble. "As for Kenyalang," said Culodaro, "that was an inspired move of yours, Varuna, to include him in the *maithuna* ceremonies. Drona, of course, was livid, but from what Kenyalang said in an answer to my last question, there is some hope we can work through the Teraja boy to win the co-operation of the tribes. Let us think about it for awhile and talk another time."

Culodaro had made his decision about Drona. He was tired, so Varuna tactfully made her excuses, arranged the orchids by his bedside, and left, returning with Tillotama to the sacred pool, feeling that her future contained many surprises but, after the fiasco on the mountain top, events seemed to be moving confidently in her direction. A small fear, however, in the back of her mind could not be entirely extinguished. While Drona remained at Mendaram, there was always a danger that he would escape arrest and stage a coup. Culodaro was much too easy-going. This meant that Varuna must take no chances. A careful watch had to be kept on Drona throughout his period of recovery. Once he had regained his strength, he could strike at any time. Who then could be less obtrusive in watching Drona, she thought, than one of her own serpents? And so it was arranged.

After resting in the afternoon, Varuna reached for her ravenastrom and played quietly to herself, thinking of Kenyalang. Since he had shared in the ecstasy of the *maithuna* on Cakra mountain, Kenyalang might seek to persuade her to introduce the same kind of religious ritual to his own Tribe. Such a ceremony would have to be adapted, of course, to include the Teraja hornbill traditions, and she had no doubt that

for one or two performances it could be highly successful in stimulating tribal morale, but how long could it last? In Mendaram, she was able to renew the devotion of her worshippers daily. Among the Terajas, however, how could a monthly *maithuna* by itself sustain their morale? And what about all the other tribes? The more she thought about it, the more complex the problems became. The great drawback of the Naga tradition of worship was that it depended on the permanent presence of a Goddess. It was true young nagini were being trained in south India and could eventually be brought to Angadvipa, but that would not solve Kenyalang's immediate problems. In her deep quandary, she decided to seek advice from Utama who had been virtually a father to her ever since she had arrived at Mendaram. Utama was wise and would know the answers. In fact she resolved, during Drona's incarceration, to encourage Kenyalang to visit Utama as much as possible. If anyone could give sound advice in this kind of situation it was Utama.

No sooner had the thought occurred to her, than she returned the ravenastrom to the wall, put on a simple sari, and entered the secret passage leading to the cave on Cakra mountain used by Utama for meditation. Finding Utama deeply absorbed in his thoughts, she did not interrupt him, but intended to sit silently in a corner as she had done so often before, waiting for his mind to surface.

Utama had noticed Varuna's quiet footstep from the interior of the cave and rose to greet her. He was delighted by the turn of events and gave her a specially broad smile, being happy that her life had been spared in what seemed to be a miraculous way.

"What can I do, little one?" he said. His greeting never changed. He still thought of her as a little girl. Varuna confided in Utama her most secret thoughts, knowing that his spirit was far removed from the conflicts and emotions which burdened ordinary mortals, yet he could reach out and understand. He advised, when asked to do so, but never became personally involved either with her life or with the politics of Mendaram. He never took sides. To him the 'mlecchas' were every bit as

human, with human failings, as the Nagas. In Utama's mind, they were certainly not inferior. He found their custom of taking heads extraordinary but even this he tried to understand.

When Varuna told Utama of her growing love for Kenyalang and of her fears that she might cause his death, Utama remained silent. He could neither confirm nor deny her fears: the problem was outside his experience. However, when she asked Utama to meet Kenyalang and discuss the future with him, Utama willingly agreed. After hearing Kenyalang's speech at the Trial, he thought that some kind of rapprochement was possible, but only if Kenyalang was empowered to speak for the Terajas. Kajup was still the Teraja leader and it was inconceivable that he would give up the ancient custom of chopping heads. In fact, with Kajup in command, the future could not be foreseen. Utama gently explained these facts to Varuna and warned her not to set too much store by Kenyalang's recent enlightenment. As for her growing love for Kenyalang, Utama refused to make any comment that would either oppose it or condone it. "I have often told you, Varuna," he said, "even when you were a child, that you should enjoy this life if you are permitted by circumstance to do so, but do not become too deeply attached to food or wealth or even love. Be moderate in your expectations and you will avoid suffering."

Varuna, of course, had heard it all before. In the past, Utama's simple homilies had sounded like birdsong – the natural background to her life – so natural that she had never really examined his words but now that she was faced with a real and powerful attachment, those words became clothed with meaning. She thanked Utama and in serious mood left the cave to return to her apartment. There again she quietly played her ravenastrom and fell to thinking. "How much suffering was to come?" she wondered. "And what forms would it take?"

## Crisis in the Longhouse

**K**enyalang returned to Teraja to find confusion. En route, through the jungle, he had stopped on a river sandbank to cook a tree fungus and talk with Tumok. His guardian spirit was invariably cheerful and full of news. She quickly brought Kenyalang up to date on the casualties suffered by the Nagas during the storm; indeed he was much relieved to know that Drona would be out of action for some time, and that Culodaro still remained in control at Mendaram. Like Varuna, he wondered how long for.

He learned that Temegoh had navigated the swamps on the Belait Plain to win the aid of Samathai who had unleashed the kluang attack, and that Temegoh was at that moment hastening back to Teraja, still unaware if the attack had been successful, and unaware too of Kenyalang's fate.

"You left the warning a little late," chided Kenyalang with a smile.

"Not too late for you, Kenyalang," replied Tumok. "I know the speed of your reactions by now. You always move faster on impulse and take everyone by surprise. By the way, what did you do with the Goddess? I had no idea..." and Tumok chortled with repeated electric cries.

"You're there to look after me, Tumok, not to make fun of me," Kenyalang said with mock sternness. "She's a remarkable

woman. You keep an eye on her too. Here, finish off this fungus: it'll make your tail grow!" Kenyalang got up laughing, and within another two hours had reached the longhouse.

The first person to greet him was Temegoh's mother in tears. She told him a long, involved story about the *timbang*, how well it had started and how soon it had deteriorated into drunken shouting and fighting. Nothing quite as bad as this had ever happened in the longhouse before. Kajup and his warriors had grown more sullen and unbearable as the week progressed. Kajup had been determined to crown his ambush success with a further victory over the Naga outpost at Merimbun, planning to overwhelm the Naga engineers supervising the construction of the reservoir and kill the Naga guards watching over the workers. Three times Kajup and his 'gang' had left the longhouse only to be forced back each time by unfavourable omens. The first time a barking deer had been heard on their right side - an omen that it would be madness to ignore. The second time they heard *kutok*, the alarm cry of Pangkas, the maroon woodpecker which, of course, meant extreme danger. And the third time they were forced back by *senahong*, the alarm cry of Papua, 'the blood bird' or Diard's Trogon which no one dare ignore.

Kajup had been angry with his warriors and tried to goad them forward, but none would obey; so when he returned to the longhouse he beat up his wife just to release his pent-up feelings. He put the blame on Kenyalang for going off 'mooning to Sabayan'. Had Kenyalang been present, the auguries could have been consulted and the right moment chosen for the foray. The other warriors had taken refuge in *tuak* and there had been more quarelling among them. Temegoh's mother and his brothers and sisters had all been shouted at and badly treated. They felt so miserable and pleaded with Kenyalang to do something to save them. Kenyalang tried to comfort the woman and told her that Temegoh, her son, would be back very soon.

While waiting for Temegoh's return, Kenyalang visited other families in the longhouse. As *Tuai Burong* it was expected that he should do so. They were happy to see him and each family recounted its own tale of woe. Kenyalang then consulted

his uncle, Melaka, a stickler for procedure and tradition, but not a man to take action requiring courage and decision. Melaka moaned and wheedled and attempted in each case to justify why nothing had been done. He promised pathetically to be more decisive in the future. Kenyalang realised that he was wasting time talking to him and cut their discussion short by demanding that Melaka instantly call a meeting of the elders to take place that very evening after sundown.

Soon after mid-day, Temegoh arrived. He was looking weary, having made use of the full moon by travelling all night. Kenyalang thanked him for an imaginative and masterful stratagem which had not only saved his own and Varuna's life, but had put Drona and his Thunderbolts of Indra out of action for at least a half moon. He enquired after Samathai and cross-examined Temegoh on the growing conflict between the Nagas and the Rakssassas in their various outposts on the Baram. He was deeply interested in Samathai's proposal to unite the Rakssassas by striking first at the Baram Nagas and then sweeping across the swamp lands to overwhelm Mendaram. Such a massive operation full of hazards might not be necessary if he could only reach an accommodation before-hand with Culodaro with the help of Varuna. The plan had a number of drawbacks which sprang instantly to mind - the impossibility of uniting the Rakssassas for very long; the distance and hazards of the journey; the difficulties of inter-tribal communication; the unwillingness of Kajup to co-operate; and the most basic objection of all: an acute shortage of perahus or canoes, to convey such a large force to Mendaram.

"In the last resort, we might have to attempt it," he said. "I will give it some thought. What we want is a magic carpet across the swamp." Kenyalang sent Temegoh off to sleep and asked him to be present at the meeting of elders at sundown.

Kenyalang approached the evening confrontation with a sense of challenge. At this meeting he would enjoy two outstanding advantages over Kajup: he was infinitely better informed, both spiritually from his recent researches in Sabayan, and materially, by his first-hand knowledge of the

Naga stronghold at Mendaram; and, secondly, he had right on his side and he believed most of the elders would support him for this reason. The confrontation, however, when it came, proved not only violent but set in train events of far more dangerous implications than he had imagined when he first asked Melaka, his uncle to arrange the meeting.

It started with an onslaught by Kajup who thought, by seizing the initiative, he would immediately gain the support of the elders by condemning Kenyalang for his irresponsible absence from the longhouse at a time when the Nagas might have launched an attack to revenge their defeat in the recent ambush. Kajup stressed that he alone was concerned with planning the war against the Nagas, yet when he came to launch his attack on Merimbun, there was no *Tuai Burong* available to interpret the auguries. As a consequence, three times his *Teraja* force had to turn back. "What is the use of this dreamer if he can never be here when we need him?" asked Kajup with a sneer, his question being accompanied by the hoots of laughter and jeers of his supporters.

Even before the shouting had died, Kajup returned to the attack. "Why?" declaimed Kajup. "Why wasn't Kenyalang here to see Ugau off to the next world; and why wasn't he with us for the *timang*? Does he think he can ignore our time-honoured customs? Does he think he can give up all responsibilities towards the longhouse just to go off and sunk in a leopard's cave?"

This jibe was going too far and most of those present knew it. However, the elders had been surprised at Kenyalang's departure, especially at a time when he should have been rejoicing. He would have to produce very good reasons to counter Kajup's charge that he had deliberately ignored *Teraja* customs since the *Tuai Burong* should be the very person to uphold them. And, as for deserting the longhouse at a time of danger, this was very serious charge indeed.

Kenyalang was suddenly made to realise that he had been foolhardy to leave without giving good reasons for his departure beforehand. It is not enough to know that what you are doing is



right; others must be properly informed. However, he had called this meeting for his own ends and he had no intention of apologising to Kajup, so he took the only course open to him - to say that he had behaved under a sense of divine compulsion. Certainly his journey through Sabayan and his meetings with Kinarahengan, Rogon, and the monks and ferns of the daratas had, in retrospect, an almost dream-like quality, an appearance of having been accomplished perhaps under the guidance of some unknown hand. By the time Kenyalang had told his story, this is exactly what most of the elders believed also. His vivid power to recall scenes and personalities held them in thrall, and when eventually he came to his interview with Singalang Burong, he was listened to with growing excitement.

Instinctively, Kenyalang had left this episode until last because it concerned the delicate subject of head-hunting. Indeed, it was only after he had won the full sympathy of his listeners that he felt the ground was sufficiently prepared for him to dare introduce the subject. He did so by describing the fading of Singalang Burong's attendants, and even the partial disappearance of the elders themselves, entirely due, he said, to the lack of group exercise in building up psychic energy.

Kenyalang confessed that he had thought deeply about the tradition of head-hunting to which he had been dedicated since his early youth. Looking around him to the shadowy corners of the longhouse where the women and children were assembled, he spoke slowly with great emphasis. "I am now convinced," he said, "that head-hunting is no longer increasing our morale but destroying it. What is the use of us glorifying the capture of others' heads if we cannot even keep our own heads. You too will soon be going to Sabayan. Do you want Singalang Burong to be ashamed of you as he was ashamed of his own elders?"

Hardly had the words left his lips than Kajup retorted: "Listen to the coward. How can we keep our own heads when he goes mooning off to Sabayan every time the longhouse is in danger?"

There was immediate hubbub. The elders desperately tried to keep Kajup's followers in check but the invective became

more virulent and obscene until Kenyalang leapt to his feet and cut through the commotion with a single piercing cry. "Stop" Having regained silence he began softly and persuasively: "There is only one way we can keep not only our own heads, the heads of our elders, and the heads of all those we love – to reach an understanding with the Nagas." There were shrieks of protest so Kenyalang lifted his voice to quiet them. "I do not mean by abject surrender. We will fight them and kill them to the bitter end if we have to. No. Much, much more has happened. It would take me a long time to tell you, but hear this: yesterday I spoke to Culodaro, the Naga King. He is an honest man surrounded by evil men, but I am convinced, while his power lasts, that we can deal directly and honestly with him. I am certain we can keep our heritage and our heads, but it will mean one thing – head-hunting will have to cease!"

Uproar followed. Kajup leapt at Kenyalang's throat and the two wrestled together, the elders vainly striving to part them. Temegoh hurled himself at Kajup's legs and bit him hard in the calf, causing Kajup to release his grip with a yell. As he did so, Melaka struck the gong at his side with extraordinary presence of mind as if to make up for all past errors and shouted "*Selam Beradang!*". The magic words produced instant silence. The fighting stopped. "Selam" repeated Melaka quietly. "Kajup and Kenyalang are both determined to lead our tribe into opposite directions. We cannot have fighting among ourselves. Whichever way we go we must remain united. There is only one method to discover who is right and that is by diving."

The custom of 'diving' or 'selam' was a legal device used by the tribes to solve impossible dilemmas, usually employed in the trial of criminals. Where the judges or elders were unable to convict on evidence they were compelled to seek supernatural advice. Of two people accused of a felony, the one who was innocent would receive supernatural aid. Both would dive into a pool and remain submerged so long as they could hold their breath. Watched by the whole tribe at dawn, it was assumed the guilty one would feel so much shame that his morale would suffer. He would be unable to hold his breath, and be forced to

the surface. This would most certainly happen when he knew that Singalang Burong or the hornbills of Panataran were giving support to his innocent opponent.

However, if both parties agreed, diving could be undertaken by proxy, each choosing his own champion with well-endowed lungs to dive for him. Sometimes both divers became unconscious from too lengthy submersion, and there had been cases when death followed. *Selam Baradang* therefore was an extreme solution but Melaka had rightly divined that the conflict between Kajup and Kenyalang, brewing for many years, had now reached a climax. The fate of the Teraja tribe was in the balance and a quick solution was vital. There could only be one leader of the Terajas and the decision of the *Selam* was sacrosanct and would be accepted by all.

Neither Kajup nor Kenyalang had expected their enmity would lead to this. To Kajup the decision to *selam* was not unwelcome. He had survived and won no less than three *selam* contests – all against younger men. It was true that he was now getting older and might not have the same lung capacity as formerly; on the other hand, his opponent was totally inexperienced, never having *selamed* before. Kenyalang might be a fine swimmer and was quick to catch fish by hand under water, but the stamina required for long submersion called for exceptional endurance. Kajup felt confident he could win.

Kenyalang's feelings, however, were of a different order. The hornbill rule of courage demanded he should enter the contest himself even though it seemed certain he would lose if physical endurance alone were the deciding factor. But his determination to compete had nothing to do with abstract rules. His whole upbringing, indeed, his very nature had led him inexorably to this kind of confrontation. He recalled being terrified in his boyhood of the demons in the leopard's cave, but he had remained steadfast and had learned how to outface them and ignore their terrors. Who indeed could be more terrifying than Rogon himself, but Rogon had failed with his demoniac bombardment to intimidate him in the Pakka Cave: so why should Kajup succeed? Yet, despite these memories, Kenyalang

realised he would need much more than courage to succeed in the *selam*.

As the comparative skills of the contestants were weighed by excited groups in the longhouse, Melaka once again sounded the gong for silence and announced that the *selam baradang* would begin at dawn when the half moon stood above the pool of Wong Tabadek. This would allow the contestants and their supporters a fortnight to prepare themselves for the struggle.

"Time to defeat the Nagas at Merimbun," shouted Kajup to the cheers of his warriors.

"If the auguries are right," said Kenyalang quietly. "I do not wish you harm, Kajup, and will consult the pig's liver if you want me to do so."

"We will attack Merimbun whatever the auguries" shouted Kajup defiantly and stalked out of the longhouse.

## The Power of Mindfulness

**A**fter the commotion in the longhouse, Kenyalang was strongly drawn towards the leopard's cave to meditate in quietness. Events of the past week had followed in quick succession: it was essential to view them in meaningful perspective. Darkness had fallen and Kenyalang entered a little sadly to think that his old friend would not be there to greet him. He walked across to his usual corner for meditation, sat cross-legged and allowed his mind to become empty. The process of meditation was not something he understood: it was second nature. He could not have explained how it came about. Had he been questioned on the subject, he might have replied that a mind washed clean of all blemishes and worries and fears would be in the most receptive state to respond to Coom, whoever Coom might be.

He sat there in the starlight for sometime but nothing happened. He felt restful and at peace and consoled himself with the thought that by resting he was probably accumulating a small amount of psychic energy, but of that he could not be sure. Here was no *anklong* and no group concentration to obtain one-pointedness of mind.

Kenyalang had closed his eyes and feared that he might lapse into sleep when he heard an unfamiliar sound at the cave entrance followed instantly by the electric cry of Tumok from a tree top everlooking the cave. If Kenyalang's hearing was

attuned to ultrasonic music and could detect the slightest movements of a tarsier in the topmost branches of a *tapang* tree, it would be easy enough for him to sense danger from the approach of Naga warriors even without Tumok's warning. What annoyed him was that he had been foolish enough to come to the one place where the Nagas would expect him to be. His mind had been so full of Kajup and the problems of the future of his tribe that no thought of danger had entered his head. Instinctively he leapt from his corner to one side of the cave entrance where he would be concealed from soldiers rushing in. As expected, flares appeared at the cave mouth and a hail of spears fell on the very spot where he had been seated moments ago. Soldiers rushed in to search the cave. Kenyalang darted through the entrance, pushed one soldier over the cliff side, and speedily started climbing upwards, knowing the Nagas would assume he had fled down towards the river. In the darkness it was simple to escape through jungle knowing the Nagas would be unwilling to follow. To return to the Longhouse would be unwise: almost certainly other Naga warriors would be waiting in ambush, so Kenyalang made straight for Varuna, entering her apartment by the secret passage she had shown him on his last visit.

Varuna had been expecting him and had food prepared. They came to each other easily, without questions, and embraced with a deep sense of mutual calm. Varuna would say nothing to him until he had eaten. Instinctively, she knew that Kenyalang was at the heart of momentous events and he would talk about them in his own time. They drank the juice of passion fruit and ate curried rice with slivers of monitor lizard – an unusual delicacy – smiling as they enjoyed its flavour. Karuna, as usual, watched from a slight distance and commented ultrasonically on Kenyalang's appetite.

"So what has happened?" asked Kenyalang when they had finished.

Varuna seemed unwilling to talk and persuaded Kenyalang to relax with her against the cushions. "There will be enough time for action," she said. "Let us have peace now." It was as if

## A DREAM OF KINABALU

Varuna could see ahead to events fraught with terror and constant movement and she wanted him to treasure these moments shared in quietness. However, such was the chemistry of their physical natures that quietness of mind could not for long remain. Both Varuna and Kenyalang were sensitive to each other's slightest touch, and both had reason to explore the wonder of each other's contours but their eyes had to express what their hands could not, and Varuna tactfully extricated them from their dilemma by referring to Utama. "I have spoken to Utama," she said, "and he is willing to discuss the future with you, but remember he has no power."

Varuna was delighted by the warmth of his reaction and promised to take him up to Utama's cave on the summit of Cakra mountain that very evening. "In the meantime," she said, "I have bad news. Drona was badly mauled by the *kluang* and will take a little while to recover, but he is furious. His mind is aflame with the desire for power. This morning he ordered the assassination of Culodaro. A Thunderbolt burst into the King's bedroom, tripped over the carpet, and woke Culodaro from his afternoon siesta. The Assassin's dagger slid across the floor. He panicked, left the dagger behind, and jumped out of the window."

"That is good," responded Kenyalang. "The dagger is evidence. Culodaro can now kill Drona."

"No," replied Varuna, "not so! Culodaro believes in justice. To order execution without trial would make him a tyrant. As the King, he has always believed in right procedure. Drona must stand trial."

"How soon?" asked Kenyalang, realising fully the danger of permitting Drona to live, even under guard.

"By the next half moon when Drona has fully recovered," she replied.

"That will be too late," said Kenyalang. "Too much can happen. I will kill him now."

"No!" said Varuna quietly but firmly. "Culodaro rules as King. He must decide, whether his decision is wise or not. If Culodaro is murdered, then we face a new situation. Then you kill Drona. Come, let us see Utama."

Kenyalang needed no persuasion. This was a meeting he had been looking forward to. He knew very little about Utama except that he was wise and kind, and that he was the only Sinhalese to survive shipwreck when the Nagas first landed. The name Buddhism meant nothing to him.

The tunnel to the summit was dark, so dark that Kenyalang was surprised at Varuna setting forth without a *damar* flare. She led the way with uncanny certainty, never once hesitating. He followed the sound of her footsteps and occasionally her voice. Kenyalang had rather prided himself on his own ability, after years of experience, to travel through jungle in darkness. Now, to find a girl who had spent most of her life confined to her apartment, her shrine, and to the environs of her sacred pool showing such innate skill at reconnoitering in complete blackness was for Kenyalang a humbling revelation. How did she do it? This was one of the pleasures of knowing Varuna: she was full of surprises. He looked forward each day to discovering some new facet of her extraordinary personality.

Towards the end of the tunnel could be seen a glow from an oil lamp which reflected from the rock walls and, as they drew closer to the opening Kenyalang saw dozens of bamboo nodes neatly stacked horizontally on racks containing *ola* leaf manuscripts. This was the first time he had actually seen one and felt a tingling warmth at the prospect of being introduced into a strange new world of ideas. As they entered the cave, Varuna *waied*, placing both hands palms together before her face in greeting, as Utama smiled a welcome and modestly *waied* in return. Kenyalang attempted the same gesture out of respect and was pleased to see the old monk return his naive greeting.

"I wish we could have met long ago," said Utama. "Together we might have prevented so much misunderstanding." As he moved the *ola* leaf he had been reading to one side, Utama noticed Kenyalang's searching glance of curiosity. "Forgive me," he said. "I should have explained to you what this is. In Lanka where I come from, there are many monasteries and these contain libraries filled with *ola* leaves on which are written the sayings of our great teacher, Sakyamuni Siddharta



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Gautama, the Buddha, who lived a very long time ago. Not only do they contain his sayings but commentaries on his sayings.

I was privileged to bring just a few of these with me which we recovered from the wreck of one of our ships when we first landed. My main problem now is to preserve them and keep them dry. If the damp doesn't get at them, then white ants will.

Kenyalang was puzzled. "Why do they write down things," he asked. "Cannot your people remember them?" The puzzlement was quite genuine, the tradition among Terajas being to remember everything of importance to the tribe, not only its history and great fighters, its battles and its calamities, but also the names of every tree, bird, plant, flower, animal and insect in the jungle. Every Teraja made a point of learning everything, and much of the Lemambang's time was spent in recounting the ancient history of the tribe for its young people to commit to memory.

"I think perhaps we have been spoilt," replied Utama. "In Lanka there are many wise men called scholars who amass so much knowledge that it cannot be remembered, so it is all preserved in writing. After awhile, they grew accustomed to consulting manuscripts and so their memories, through lack of use, deteriorated."

Still puzzled, Kenyalang said: "Which is better: memory or manuscripts?"

Utama thought a moment and then replied: "Memory is better for quick recall of ideas when they are clearly understood. Manuscripts are better when ideas are not fully understood and they have to be referred to again and again. Both memory and manuscripts are useless unless they provide insight."

"By insight you mean a clear picture in the mind?" asked Kenyalang.

"That and a little more," replied the monk. "You go sometimes to the leopard's cave to meditate, so you will understand me. You gain insight only when your mind is perfectly calm. Then you can see things as they really are and not as they appear to be."

Kenyalang could understand his words but not his sense and asked him to explain further. "Our word for 'insight,'" said

Utama, "is *vipassana* – which means 'seeing things in an extraordinary way.' It comes from the word *passati* to see' and the prefix 'vi' denoting 'special' or 'particular.' *Vipassana*, therefore means 'seeing beyond what is ordinary,' clear vision. It is not surface seeing, not seeing mere appearances, but seeing things in their proper perspective, that is in terms of three characteristics: impermanence or change; suffering or unsatisfactoriness; and non-self or ego-lessness."

"That is like trying to catch a fish under water," said Kenyalang. "I can see visions but I do not have to dive under water to see them."

"If your mind is calm and your visions are true, then you have insight," replied Utama simply, realising that to analyse further might only confuse him.

Kenyalang was evidently encouraged by this reply and proceeded obliquely to find a substitute for head-hunting. Knowing a little of the ways of Kenyalang's mind, Varuna made an excuse and with a modest *wai* retired to her apartment.

Eventually, the tribal reason for head-hunting was discussed: – to erect an invisible wall to reach the sun and the sky to keep out demons.

"Before you can replace such a belief," said Utama, "you must understand why it is so appealing. You may be able to convince your people that there is no such wall, but for various reasons they will still want to carry on head-hunting. So, firstly, let us think about the wall.

What your tribes have created is a state of mind, a strong feeling of confidence which comes from the display of enemy heads. In a hostile world of wild animals, of danger from rapids, of sickness, of attack by other tribes, and the threat of invading Nagas, they must have some tangible, visible evidence that the tribe is winning against the forces ranged against them. What could be more effective, more dramatically effective, than a row of bleeding heads?"

"Unfortunately, the drama is of short duration. It has the power to influence for awhile but, after a single setback, its effect is dissipated and dies. And if a calamity occurs – perhaps

your leader is killed - the morale of the whole tribe sinks to an even lower level than before, so it is necessary to capture even more heads. I am sure you have all these aspects of the problem in mind when you raised the question of substitution."

"What you are really asking for is a state of confidence which can become permanent without the need for cutting heads."

Kenyalang was delighted that Utama understood the problem so well and enjoyed listening to his simple and clear analysis.

"That is exactly what we want," said Kenyalang with enthusiasm.

"I am sorry to say that is what everybody wants and nobody can have," continued Utama. "Nothing in this world is permanent - the flowers, trees, human beings, animals, the sky, the stars, the sun - nothing; least of all a state of mind. Outside Angadvipa, there have been many kings and rulers who have faced this very problem - how to give their people a feeling of continuing confidence. They want to achieve a stable society, and they want to protect themselves, for, without the people's confidence they would not last long as rulers. So your problem, Kenyalang, is not a new one, and the problem will be the same many years from now."

"But the Nagas - they are so proud - surely they have overwhelming confidence? At least that is what we feel at Bukit Teraja."

"The Nagas appear to create confidence by using their skill and resources. Indeed, they appear to do it very efficiently," said Utama, "but....."

"But how can they gain confidence from worshipping snakes?" interrupted Kenyalang incredulously.

"That is simple to explain," said Utama. "The Nagas live in a strange country full of hostile tribes. Forgive me putting it like this. To survive in Angadvipa they must grow rice; they do not know how to get food from the jungle. To ensure there is plenty of rice they build huge reservoirs to store water to irrigate their padi fields. Now, here is the point: That water must in the first place come from the clouds, and the clouds are controlled by the

Naga serpents – such is their tradition. Indeed, the Naga serpents control not only the clouds, but the rivers, the reservoirs, and the sea. They control water everywhere. To be sure of an unending supply of rain, the Nagas perform ceremonies like the *Maithuna* which not only propitiates the Nagas serpents in the heavens, but bring the people into harmony with the elemental forces of Nature which created this world out of Chaos. It is all very sophisticated and works very well – until the rain stops! And then they lose confidence very quickly.”

“It is because the Nagas fear periods of drought that they build more reservoirs than they really need, so they keep on building. They have a passion for building. In Lanka, where I came from, they built the first reservoirs with the aid of the Yakkas. Here, in Angadvipa, they have only partially completed four and a canal to join the Belait and Baram rivers. Most of the time, their morale is high, but this state of mind is not permanent and can never be; and, of course, it is undermined weekly by the head-hunting ambushes of the tribes. So that Nagas, as well as the Terajas, are both chasing an illusion – there can never be a permanent state of confidence.”

“Then what am I to do?” ask Kenyalang simply, baffled by Utama’s unanswerable logic.

Here Utama paused and offered Kenyalang a drink of water. They had been talking for a long time, and Utama knew that Kenyalang was now ready to receive the Buddha’s teaching but it had to be presented in a way which was directly relevant to Kenyalang’s problems.

During the remainder of that evening and over the next few days, Kenyalang listened to Utama instruct him gently in the Buddha’s eightfold path – right understanding, right thoughts, right speech, right action, right concentration. He was interested to find that his own efforts of meditation, effective though they were, could only be regarded as elementary compared with the carefully worked out disciplines of the Buddha. For his part, Utama was astonished by Kenyalang’s natural gifts of insight and precognition which appeared to be far in advance of anything which he had himself achieved.

Kenyalang was happy to learn that Buddhist right mindfulness sharpens the power of observation and assists right thinking and right understanding. And, in his turn, Utama was forced to acknowledge that Kenyalang's powers of observation were far more acute than he had discovered in any individual before. Indeed, at times, Utama began to wonder if Kenyalang's natural gifts, developed consciously throughout his youth, had not achieved degrees of attainment far beyond those to which any normal monk could hope to aspire in his lifetime.

It was when they discussed life after death that Utama became seriously worried. He had to confess this was an area of experience of which the Buddha claimed no special knowledge; indeed, in his life-time, he had discouraged his followers from wasting mental effort in speculating about a condition of non-existence whose terms were not verifiable. Kenyalang modestly revealed a detailed knowledge of life in Sabayan which to Utama was little short of incredible. Yet, in every respect, his account was consistent and was told with such colourful incident and sense of verisimilitude that Utama was compelled to withhold critical judgment, even if he found, for instance, that ferns on the *daratas* controlled, through their own experiments, the gradual unfolding of the evolution of species, seemed to be one example of an activity with ramifications far beyond the understanding of a simple Teraja.

Eventually, they came back to Kenyalang's basic problems and they agreed that Terajas should be taught to become self-reliant, to follow the Buddha's eightfold path, and to receive further training in meditation to strengthen their own minds to banish the fears which from time to time assailed them.

"From your own experience," said Utama, "you have found the best way to tackle demons is to be courageous and stand up to them. When you do this you come to no harm. What you have done is to banish fear from your mind. And since you have spoken of Rogon and his demons as if they are real personalities in spirit form, why don't you persuade them to help you. Their nature seems to be to destroy. Teach them how to be constructive. If what you have told me about psychic energy

and the spirits are true, surely every constructive deed will increase their psychic energy and speed up the day when they can be accepted for training by the schools."

Even Utama found himself beginning to talk Kenyalang's language. He wondered what the Buddha would say and felt somewhat guilty that he had allowed himself to stray into a field beyond that of the Buddha's teaching.

To Kenyalang the thought of harnessing the power of the demons to his cause was a momentous one which he took back to Varuna with excitement, but when he returned through the tunnel for the last time, he found a deeply troubled Goddess awaiting him. "My *Dakini* say that the Palace has been attacked and Culodaro killed. Any moment now Drona's Thunderbolts will come to kill me."

## The Flight from Mendaram

Hardly had Varuna's words been spoken than Kenyalang heard the electric cry of Tumok from the direction of the *Dakini's* quarters. He warned Varuna to alert the serpents, leapt down the waterfall, and raced across in time to hear the first screams of the *Dakinis* as the Thunderbolts burst in. Without his sword, Kenyalang was forced to use his knife, and swiftly despatched three Nagas before they knew what hit them. He saw that more Nagas were swarming in, realised that his single opposition was hopeless, left the *Dakinis* to their fate, and raced back to escape with Varuna.

The Nagas were delayed in rounding up the *Dakinis* by attacks from the sacred serpents who poisoned six of the Thunderbolts before the serpents themselves were killed. However, the serpent attack allowed enough time for Varuna and Kenyalang to escape through the secret route into the jungle, and for Tillotama on her raft to plunge into the water and remain concealed behind papyrus reeds. When the Thunderbolts burst into Varuna's apartment, Varuna and Kenyalang were already on their way to the Baram. They would have to be careful because Drona would have anticipated an attempt by Varuna to escape and the Thunderbolts would have their patrols out looking for her. Drona, however, had no knowledge that Kenyalang would be with her and he might, therefore, assume

that, on her own, Varuna would quickly get lost in the jungle.

Fortunately, it would soon be dark and, Kenyalang, adopting the same route taken by Temegoh, searched for and found the same *perahu* that Temegoh had used on his journey to seek out *Samathai*. He resolved to get far enough away from Mendaram for Varuna to be safe, and then to return alone under cover of darkness to release the *Dakinis* if they were still alive, and take them with him across the Belait plain.

So submissive had Varuna been during their short periods snatched together over the past few days, that Kenyalang had naturally assumed the initiative that would be expected of a Teraja warrior with a chosen girl from the longhouse. He had begun to treat Varuna as if she were a girl who needed protection and Varuna herself had been rather flattered by this experience, but he was soon to be reminded that he was escaping with a Goddess.

When they stepped warily down the slope by the lakeside towards the *perahu*, they were suddenly surprised by Nagas who hurled their spears at them. Fortunately, Tumok's call of warning a split second before enabled Kenyalang to leap aside and push Varuna in the opposite direction. The spears missed, all but one, which grazed Kenyalang on his left arm, causing the blood to flow. As the Nagas rushed at them to follow up their advantage, Kenyalang was quick to see that, without spears, they had only daggers, and his speed of movement over muddy ground allowed him to attack them all with whirlwind force. One by one they were struck in quick succession. Three Nagas fell, but before he could press home his attack, he heard the powerful voice of Maha Visnu coming from the throat of Varuna. He had been enthralled by that mighty voice on the summit of *Cakra* mountain. Now again, however, he was just as astonished as the remaining Nagas who stood rooted to the spot, terrified of Varuna's overmastering will.

"I will spare you now," she said quietly in her own voice. "Go back to Drona and tell him he shall not remain king for very long. And if any one of you come after me you will die. Now go!" There was a feminine malevolent force in that last



command which was not lost on the Thunderbolts. They picked up their spears and ran.

When the Thunderbolts had gone, they both burst out laughing. Yet, when their amusement subsided both knew that the Nagas would report back to Drona and fresh patrols would be sent out after them. The danger had been heightened by this brief battle because Drona would now know they were relying on the *perahu* and he would send other soldiers to head them off as they crossed the swamp. Yet, darkness would soon be in their favour and Kenyalang was confident they would get through.

After paddling for a few minutes, Kenyalang found a suitable mound of dry earth concealed by *Nipah* palm and they decided to remain in hiding until the first wave of pursuers came past. Fireflies were out in hundreds, providing an enchanting display of lights. Cicadas contributed their high-pitched whine, varying tone and volume in unison, and stridently above their chorus, came repeated calls of tree frogs. To Varuna all these sounds were familiar heard throughout a thousand nights by the sacred pool. Her only fear was crocodiles. Pythons did not worry her. She would communicate with them ultrasonically, but with crocodiles she was less confident.

Kenyalang's plan was to return to the sacred pool as soon as possible and rescue the *Dakinis* if they were still alive. Surviving serpents from the pool would be no problem - they could look after themselves. Overhead a crescent moon came in sight. These soldiers would have been taught during training to keep absolutely quiet and to creep up on their enemies by surprise. However, Kenyalang heard sounds of their paddles some distance away. Instead of relying on moonlight to show them the way ahead, they were foolhardy enough to use flares and could be seen at a great distance. No Teraja would ever dream of hunting with a flare. Any animal or bird would be out of sight long before the *perahu* reached them; and in the same way, any human could take cover.

Kenyalang decided to wait in case another patrol were to follow in due course behind the other. He did not wish to underestimate Drona's determination to kill them both. As they sat

in the cool night air watching the fireflies, Kenyalang said gently to Varuna but respectfully, "How do you manage to talk in that deep voice of yours. It seems to terrify them. I've never seen such a transformation in their behaviour. What is your secret?"

"It's not secret," said Varuna seriously. "At such a moment I am merely the instrument of Maha Visnu, once a commanding general of the Aryan armies before he became a God. He watches over me. When he speaks he speaks; and of course he speaks with the voice of thunder. When I hear that powerful voice coming from my throat, I'm just as surprised as you are!"

"What, do you mean you do not control it?" asked Kenyalang incredulously.

"How can I? said Varuna. "I go into trance, and then come out of trance just as quickly. It is not my doing at all."

"So you cannot speak like Maha Visnu when in danger?" queried Kenyalang.

"No, of course not," replied Varuna. "It is not my voice."

Kenyalang thought on this a moment and saw the pale moon shining on Varuna's long black hair and felt a sudden welling up of compassion for this girl who was undoubtedly a Goddess but seemed to have no way of controlling the powers of her divinity. She was truly the instrument of the Gods. "Do you know, it is very strange," said Kenyalang. "My visions come to me in the same way. I cannot control them either. They come by surprise. Where they come from or how they come, I do not know. Nowadays, I think they come to me from Coom, but who is Coom? We are like children to the Gods. They lead us on towards some great task but what it is," he paused, "even now I cannot be sure."

"You say 'cannot be sure.' Then you have some idea?" came in Varuna quickly. As she said this, she grasped both his shoulders and looked straight into his eyes, but no sooner had she asked than she noticed the blood from his left shoulder flow onto her hand. "Oh, Kenyalang, what am I doing talking while you are bleeding." Gently she licked up the blood from his wound and held her mouth over it, her breasts pressed gently against him. They were warm on his cold body and for a timeless

moment, he felt again all the urgent longing of desire, the very same desire against which Utama had warned him, the desire which must lead to suffering and to death. For Kenyalang it was an exquisite moment never to be repeated. When she removed her mouth, the flow of blood stopped. "You are truly a Goddess," he said simply.

As he spoke, he heard again the sudden cry of Tumok in warning. He grabbed Varuna by the waist and together they rolled down the mound into the muddy water, right to the waiting feet of Naga soldiers. Tumok's warning had come too late. A net was thrown over them and they were dragged into a *perahu* despite Kenyalang's frantic efforts to free himself. The Naga *perahu* pushed off into open water to return to Mendaram. Kenyalang only then realised he had been outwitted by a trick of Drona's. The first patrol had gone past them with flares to reassure them and make them feel that danger had been removed. Meanwhile a second patrol, hearing their voices, had crept up with infinite care to surround them. Foolishly the two of them had been so deeply preoccupied, that Kenyalang had no inkling of the Naga's stealthy approach.

Speaking to Varuna in ultrasonic language, not used since his visit to Sabayan, Kenyalang warned her that any moment he would try to overturn the boat. She must hurl herself over the left side. He would cut the cords of the net under water. Once free, she should continue swimming towards the moon and find a place to hide, then await his calls. He would give the cry of the argus pheasant which, once heard, could never be forgotten.

The Naga soldiers were evidently delighted with their capture. They knew the reward would be great, and the celebrations following their prisoners' death by fire on Cakra mountain would be greater than anything previously known in Angadvipa. As they paddled, they began to sing. They felt like heroes. Kenyalang, from beneath the net, kept a look-out for a stretch of deep water, then suddenly took a powerful lunge to his left, Varuna lunging too, capsizing the boat, and both went down together. Cutting the cords with his dagger was the work of only a moment. While the Nagas floundered and shouted to each

other, and those nearest tried to turn the long boat back onto an even keel. Kenyalang gave Varuna a push to swim off on her own. He remained treading water to deal with any Naga who gave chase. As their presence in the poor light had not been discovered, Kenyalang dived in the direction taken by Varuna, swimming powerfully beneath the water as far as his lungs would carry him. He smiled inwardly at the thought: "This will give me good practice for the *selam beradang* next week."

On surfacing, he saw no sign of Varuna. He glanced back towards the Nagas who were not far enough away not to be seen, although their shouts to each other as they ineptly attempted to right their boat, echoed distantly across the waters. Kenyalang was about to give the cry of the argus pheasant when he heard directly ahead the muted, electric cry of Tumok - muted, Kenyalang realised, in order not to attract the attention of the Nagas. An almost unnecessary precaution, he thought, among the plaintive appeals from tree frogs. So loud were they, that no one but Kenyalang could have distinguished Tumok's special sound of warning. Swimming directly towards Tumok, Kenyalang found Varuna seated on a fallen serewangan log combing her hair.

Both were so relieved to have escaped and so happy to be re-united that Varuna helped Kenyalang up beside her and pressed her lips and nose lovingly against his cheeks and chin. Instinctively and with fervour Kenyalang responded covering her cheeks, neck and breasts with kisses. Varuna was shivering with cold, and he rubbed her back and arms and buttocks to warm her, until Varuna laughingly whispered: "Stop, you will push me off the log!" Instantly Kenyalang was brought back to their present danger. Swift action was now needed. He persuaded Varuna to move further along the log into concealment to await his coming. He would swim back to Mendaram, find another boat, release the *dakinis* and return for Varuna. It was characteristic of him that Kenyalang had no sooner conceived a plan than he moved promptly to carry it through. He dived into the water and swam towards the Nagas. As he approached, he saw them one by one climbing over the side into the boat. There

were ten altogether. They were swearing and dispirited. He noted that the boat was made of *pelayi*, or balsa, and had been specially constructed for Army use. They discussed what to do, but Kenyalang could not understand their language. After a little while they set off for home, seeing little point in scouring the swamp in the dark for two people who could be hiding behind any palm or mangrove. Kenyalang saved his strength by holding on to the rear of the boat which, being so light, skimmed across the water. He was quite safe. All the soldiers were facing forward and could not see him.

When they arrived at the landing point, the boat was tied, and the soldiers climbed up the slope making for their huts, leaving no one behind on guard. Kenyalang realised this very boat would make his escape much easier if he could only release the *dakinis* before the Nagas returned with fresh orders for ambush. He, therefore, moved swiftly through the dark along the secret track towards the sacred pool. On arrival, he saw nothing. The raft was empty. The *Dakinis* quarters were empty. There was no sign of surviving serpents. He walked past the waterfall towards Varuna's apartment and, wisely, before entering, announced himself in ultrasonic language. There was no reply. He spoke repeatedly announcing that Varuna was safe and he had come only to rescue the *Dakinis*. Kenyalang hoped at least that a serpent would appear. To his surprise, he saw Tillotama in dark blue, emerge from a bush of flaming crotons.

"I will show you where they are," she said quietly.

Kenyalang had hardly spoken to Tillotama since their sacred tryst on Cakra mountain. His thoughts had been taken up entirely with Varuna and Utama. Now, as he followed her, the pleasures and dangers of that night were recalled with vivid clarity. She made no attempt, even to hint at their former intimacy. Her only concern now was for the safety of the *dakinis*. All the serpents she told him had been killed with the exception of Karuna, Varuna's serpent sister. Kenyalang urged Tillotama forward with speed, saying it was vital they return swiftly with the *Dakinis* to the Naga boat. Walking through the dark jungle presented no problem, but as they neared the Palace, Tillotama

crept silently towards the gateway where two guards could be seen talking on duty. Kenyalang signalled to her to come back, and when they were level again, he asked: "How else can we get in?"

"There is another guard house round the back," she said, "the *Dakinis* are locked up near the servants' quarters."

Kenyalang took the lead as he was used to the dark. Fortunately, even here the tree frogs were clamant in their cries and the noise of cicadas easily obscured the sound of their footfalls over leaves. Kenyalang instructed Tillotama to wait. He saw an open window leapt onto the sill and jumped soundlessly through. He walked through a dark room and emerged through a beaded curtain on the far side into a corridor. At one end to his right he could see bright lamps and the shadow of guards. Obviously, he thought, Drona's throne room. Should he rush in and kill Drona now? He promptly decided against because he realised he would be quite unable afterwards to take on the entire Naga force single-handed. So he turned left towards the poorly lit servant's rooms. In one he saw Selinka through the curtain, resting. Selinka could do nothing to help him so he went past her. At the end of the corridor he came to a darkened room with bars and from behind he could hear the muffled conversation of girl's voices. He knew these must be *Dakinis*.

The bars were far too strong for Kenyalang to cut through them or round them with his dagger. Instantly he formulated a plan, raced back to Tillotama, brought her to the barred door and told her to advise the *Dakinis* to be ready for immediate escape. They must create a commotion inside their room to attract the guard, one girl calling for help. The ruse was perfectly executed. Two guards rushed to the door, slid the restraining bars out of position, and as they entered the room with spears at the ready, Kenyalang stabbed one guard from behind, and the *Dakinis* swiftly despatched the other. Each *Dakini*, by custom and tradition, carried a small, curved knife in her hair with a circular handle like a ring which fitted over the small finger, while the remaining fingers supported the blunt portion of the knife behind the blade allowing an attacked *Dakini* to

give an upward thrust slitting open an opponent's stomach and chest in one ripping movement. Not one of the *Dakinis* had used these knives before, but each had expected and trained for the day when they must defend themselves. Their work accomplished, the *Dakinis* followed Kenyalang and Tillotama through the Palace window into the darkness before other guards could rush to the spot to investigate.

As Kenyalang and Tillotama hastened to the Naga boat, followed, like moonlit shadows, by eleven more *Dakinis*, he was not unduly worried by what to others might have seemed an awesome responsibility. The *Dakinis* were not only athletic but excellent swimmers having disported in the sacred pool since childhood. They could also defend themselves in the right circumstances. Kenyalang's only fear was that they would meet the first Thunderbolt patrol carrying flares returning. Fortunately, the Naga fighting *perahu* was waiting where the soldiers had left it. Their number was right. The paddles were a little large, perhaps not tapered enough to be spear-shaped, but the rowers soon found a rhythm and skimmed smoothly along. Kenyalang knowing exactly where to find Varuna and making a slight detour to avoid the enemy patrol. Luck, unfortunately, was not with him. He made a simple error often made by the skilful, failing to allow for Naga unfamiliarity with the swamp which he knew so well. It had not occurred to him that the Thunderbolts of Indra might veer considerably from their anticipated course.

Having penetrated the swamp, the Thunderbolts had been enclosed by mist and lost themselves paddling in wide circles. When eventually they emerged into the pale moonlight, they headed back towards Mendaram taking the direction away from the crescent moon. Thus, to Kenyalang's surprise and chagrin, he saw the flares of the Thunderbolt patrol speeding towards them.

The Thunderbolts, of course, were armed with spears; the *Dakinis* had only their small knives. No proper defence was, therefore, possible. Kenyalang had to decide quickly how to reduce the enemy's advantages and increase their own. He

quietly instructed Tillotama exactly what to do and slipped over the side of the perahu into dark water.

The enemy canoe came straight for them, the Thunderbolts threatening to hurl their spears, but to the attackers' astonishment there was no commotion, no fear among the *Dakinis*; they merely sat silent and still, giving no reply. Again the Thunderbolt leader challenged, demanding to know how they escaped and where they were going?

"Don't be too harsh with us," said Tillotama with an enchanting smile. "All we need is men who know how to take care of us. Those guards in the Palace were stupid. But you are real men. Of course we will come with you. We just need a little help – that's all. Please send us over six soldiers to command our boat, then we can put six *dakinis* into yours to keep the balance equal."

This disarming welcome from Tillotama expressed with such genuine relief and pleasure seemed to offer the two things the Thunderbolts wanted most – certainty of capture, and the close physical presence of such lovely women. Nothing could have suited them better. As the transfer was made from boat to boat, each *Dakini* chose a soldier and sat before him, making this chance conquest seem more like an assignation. Being skilled in the *Maithuna* at pleasing their partners, the *Dakinis* were not slow to reveal their charms, thereby encouraging the soldiers to embark on the gradual process of seduction. Discipline could not allow them to go too far; indeed, the shouted order to row was a blunt reminder to make them behave themselves. Rarely, it seemed, could the thunderbolts have set out upon a more rewarding enterprise; rewarding, of course, in the future.

But that future was instantly cut short with the sharp, clear call of the argus pheasant – a triple, complex challenge from the swamp followed by a weird echo. Its effect on the *dakinis* was instantaneous and dramatic. *Dakinis* in both boats lunged in unison to the left, overturning all their contents – men, spears, paddles, the lot – all in one single movement. By this one united action, power had passed from the Thunderbolts who were poor



swimmers and without spears to the *dakinis* who could swim like serpents and kill with the swift deadliness of serpents. The disarmed thunderbolts had no defence against a sharp knife thrust upwards from beneath the water. The battle ended almost as soon as it had begun. There were screams of agony and, after a brief interval, bodies of twelve soldiers – some up-ended, some spreadeagled, but all spurting with blood – were removed, one by one, by huge *Tapah* fish with massive jaws or by cruising crocodiles. Acute danger remained to Kenyalang and the *Dakinis* swimming in the blood-filled water. The sight of the giant cat-fish jaws opening and crunching downwards on the body of a Naga, impelled them with panic to speed towards and up-turn the boat with far greater strength than any knew they possessed. Kenyalang gave a sharp command, they all pushed frantically, and the boat turned marvellously upright.

As each *Dakini* was pulled aboard, each began to bale out water, the boat being half-submerged. Only one *Dakini*, Yamuna, narrowly failed to reach the boat in time. She lifted up one hand to be pulled in when the jaws of a crocodile opened and dragged her under. Instantly Kenyalang fitted knife between teeth and plunged after it. He straddled its back, squeezed its eyeballs, forcing it to release the girl, and then plunged his knife into its only weak spot unprotected by scales – to one side at the back of the neck where normally you would expect its ears to be. Again and again he struck, holding onto its body grimly with his thighs, until it sank. The girl's broken body was promptly snatched by another crocodile, and Kenyalang was forced to the surface in a welter of black blood.

The other *Dakinis* had watched in horror but were relieved to see Kenyalang return safely, even though deeply disappointed that he had not been able to save Yamuna. Mixed with their relief was a sense of their own good fortune in narrowly escaping a similar fate. For a while none dared to speak as they continued baling out, fishing around for oars, and then arranging themselves in order for rowing. Kenyalang saw that all were dishevelled, their red, green and blue dyes smeared with blood and realised they must first clean themselves up in clear water

before presenting themselves before Varuna. He, too, was in a mess. So he quickly found an open stretch of water far enough from the scene of battle to be free of crocodiles and encouraged the *Dakinis* to wash themselves and comb their hair. This familiar routine might help them to recover from their initial shock. He promised them he would find *langir* wood for use as soap as soon as they reached dry land. It would be necessary to remove their dyes completely, making their appearance less disturbing to the tribes on the Baram.

It was not long before they reached the fallen screwangan tree on which Varuna was resting. Naked, and bitterly cold in the night air after her swim, she was only too happy to be cheered and warmed by Tillotama who said nothing to her then of the tragedy.

Kenyalang remained discreetly apart, welcoming her aboard with a smile, then briefly explained to everyone where they were going. He mentioned a lake near the Baram where *Samathai*, the Shaman of the Birds would be waiting. *Samathai* would help to co-ordinate the tribes in making an assault on Drona. Palm leaf shelters would be constructed for them to keep off rain, and there would be no shortage of meat or fruits from the nearby jungle. There was plenty of wild pig around and the *kampayau* fruits were now in season. Kenyalang avoided any mention of how they would return to the Mendaram because until that moment he had not formed any plan. So much depended on the cooperation of *Samathai* and the tribes, and perhaps, even, Rogon's demons! In concluding, he suggested that six of them should row while the others tried to get sleep. As the boat skimmed through the water, Tillotama quietly briefed Varuna on all that had happened since the *Dakinis* were captured by the sacred pool.

They had not travelled very far before Kenyalang's quick eyes noticed some large nipah fruits growing in the shadow of a clump of nipah palms by the waterside. He detached the fruits, cut away their thick exteriors, and passed round the succulent flesh within until all the travellers were content. Those who had been resting now took to the oars; indeed, they were very glad

to do so because, lying still, they had been shivering with cold. With an access of fresh energy from new rowers, the boat sped through the water and, for the first time since the tragedy, the *Dakinis* found some warmth and confidence returning.

As so often happens in swamp and jungle their new-born confidence proved premature: they soon found themselves enclosed in thick mist; no further progress was possible. All stopped rowing and Kenyalang advised them to cuddle up close together and share their body warmth and rest. Unless they did so, long exposure to cold and damp could make them ill. His curious instruction was followed by some giggling and light chatter but the girls realised there was sense in what he told them. From a fold in his *chawat*, Kenyalang took out a tiny jaw's harp and strummed quietly with slight changes of tone, producing a hypnotic rhythm to encourage sleep. Varuna and Tillo-tama massaged each other until they too grew tired and slept.

When all movement had ceased on the boat, Kenyalang paddled it gently towards a mound, tied it to the bank and climbed a serewangan tree. On the first branch, about 100 ft up, he found Tumok and speaking quietly in order not to disturb the *dakinis* below, Kenyalang told him to fly to *Samathai* and ask him to prepare seven wind-breaks and some food. Two *dakinis* would share one windbreak, and there would need to be a separate one for himself.

"Its not like you to remain on your own," taunted Tumok.

"I'm not exactly alone," he responded, "and thank you again for the warning. Last time you left it a bit late. Next time I shall be dead before I hear you."

Tumok fluttered her feathers in mock indignation and flew off. Kenyalang continued climbing. From more than 200 ft at the top of the serewangan, he look across the moonlit canopy of trees towards the Baram. The sheer physical act of climbing vertically had tired his thighs and for a moment he relaxed. It was in that moment that a vision came to him.

Across the flat surface of leaves which stretched far into the distance, he saw a pathway shimmering in the moonlight, and across the pathway in a long single file he saw hundreds of Rakssassas swarming; above their heads, dancing like fireflies, were the phosphorescent faces of demons last seen in Pakka cave high up on Kinabalu. The Rakssassas had a strange light in their eyes like men under a spell. As he watched the procession along this visionary causeway, Kenyalang heard distinctly the sound of violins, the music swelling from treetops round him. He looked to all sides in moonlight, and saw familiar delicate shapes of orchids.

"Of course," he thought, "they are playing the music of Coom."

And then his eyes were drawn back to this treetop causeway and as he saw the swarming Rakssassas and demons floating above them, he realised this extraordinary music would be enveloping its entire length. It could only be the causeway of Coom!

## Conclave on the Baram

News travels swiftly in the jungle. *Samathai*, the Shaman of the Birds, soon heard of the success of his assault by *kluang* and the subsequent escape of Kenyalang, and being a prescient Punan, he knew it would not be many months before Kenyalang would be seeking to mobilise the Baram tribes against Mendaram. He, therefore, visited one by one the headmen of all the tribes in the area and told them soon they would be freed from the overlordship of the proud Nagas; but their combined help would be needed. To prepare them, he fed them with stories of Kenyalang's prowess as a leader, his extraordinary visions, and his unique knowledge of the ways of Sabayan. When, therefore, Kenyalang eventually appeared accompanied by the Goddess of the Nagas and her *Dakinis*, the impact on the tribal imagination was awe inspiring, the Rakssasas fully expecting miracles.

News from Tumok of Kenyalang's impending arrival, caused *Samathai* to make the necessary arrangements for the *Dakini's* comfort and to summon a secret conclave at night of all the headmen on the Baram. They would discourse on a specially constructed raft in the centre of a lake concealed from suspicious Naga eyes by a large fishing *kelong*. Kenyalang and his party were given time and *langir* to remove their dirt and dyes,

the *Dakinis* being given short bark-cloth skirts to wear and *balong* flowers to beautify their hair.

Both Kenyalang and Varuna were grateful to *Samathai* for his speed of action, knowing that in a flurry of preparations the *Dakinis* would have less time to brood upon their recent tragic experience. Kenyalang was especially anxious to agree to a plan quickly, remembering that by the half-moon he was expected at Wong Tebedak for the *Selam Baradang*. Nothing could delay his appearance for this contest which he must win since failure would undermine his entire strategy for what had come to be known in his mind since the previous night as 'the Coom invasion.'

The headmen arrived by *perahu* in pale moonlight, avoiding the use of flares which would only attract Nagas who might glance across the lake from their stronghold overlooking a bend in the river. However, despite the absence of flares, there was sufficient moon to make out the brilliant colourings of the headmen, their splendid war hats of argus pheasant feathers and their black and white hornbill tails. Some were dyed a vivid blue, one a *buah simpoh* yellow, a third bright red; and all wore their long swords proudly knowing these very swords had taken heads of warriors who owed allegiance to their colleagues gathered in the circle.

*Samathai* modestly wore only a *chawat* and carried no weapon; nor was he attired in hat or feathers. His presence alone, small though he was, conveyed both power and wisdom. All, without question, deferred to *Samathai*. Kenyalang wore nothing save his *chawat* and his dagger. For him this was no time for being theatrical. Varuna and her *Dakinis* were, as was to be expected, the last to arrive. Everyone stood and bowed awkwardly to Varuna, being unsure how to behave towards a Goddess. Each *Dakini* *waied* to a different headman and sat down beside him.

Kenyalang voiced a brief prayer to the hornbills of Panataran. Varuna, outlined against the crescent moon, performed a slow graceful dance of dedication almost as brief as

Kenyalang's prayer. She ended by *waiing* to *Samathai*, to Kenyalang and to each of the headmen present.

*Samathai* stood up and began quietly mentioning each headman by name and his tribe before embarking on his discourse. It was a long speech recalling the history of the tribes, their battles against each other, the succession of terrible injuries sustained by each tribe. There were murmurs of assent, of anger, and dark looks thrown from one to another. "I am, therefore, astonished that any of you have come to this meeting; your bitterness runs so deep. But you have come; and I believe it is because in your hearts you are wondering: must the future continue to be as full of hatred as in the past? Does it contain nothing but hatred between the tribes for ever and ever with the Nagas treating us like slaves? Kenyalang here says 'No', Kenyalang has visited the Gods on Sabayan. He will tell you that the dark night of hatred is finished. There is a new life ahead for all of you." As he finished speaking and sat down, a family of hornbills flew low overhead from left to right – an almost magically fortunate omen. Nothing could have been more fortuitous!

Kenyalang had the whole evening before him and an audience responsive to each word. He recounted the full story of his visit to Sabayan. There were cries of consternation and horror when he described vividly the disappearing heads of the elders of Singalang Burong, the greatest war chief known to the Baram Rakssassas.

When Kenyalang had finished his account he paused while the ceremonial jar of *tuak*, or rice wine, was passed round for each headman to drink. This was followed by quids of betel nuts, *sirih* leaves and puffed *sangking* rice. In ones and twos, the headmen moved in the semi darkness to the edge of the raft and relieved themselves in the lake. When all were seated contentedly *Samathai* said:

"We have come together to hear Kenyalang's plan to attack Mendaram. Before he speaks, do you have questions to ask on Sabayan?" There was a murmur as the headmen consulted each other. One headman stood up, taller than all the rest, his height

exaggerated by the long argus pheasant feathers decorating his war hat, by his long nose and his elongated ears, and spoke in a resounding voice so powerful that *Samathai* asked him to speak more quietly. His voice could be heard at the far end of the lake.

"We fear to become like the elders of Singalang Burong," he said. "How can we keep our heads in Sabayan?"

"Do what Singalang Burong instructed his elders to do. Go to the schools and learn how to make psychic energy," said Kenyalang.

"What schools?" said the headman, puzzled. "We have no schools."

"When we are victorious over the Nagas, each tribe will have a school. That will be the task of Temegoh. He will supply teachers. But there is one condition - that head-hunting between tribes will cease."

There was immediate uproar. Everyone tried to talk at once. Some began shouting. *Samathai* leapt to his feet and called for silence. Kenyalang looked around the drawn, tense faces and the tattooed bodies of the warriors before him and said quietly: "Your choice is simple: either you chop other's heads in this life and lose your own heads in the next, or you stop chopping heads now and keep your own heads in Sabayan."

"What about the wall," shouted one, "the wall you cannot see which reaches the sky?"

"Yes," followed a second in quick succession, "the wall which keeps out demons. We must have a wall!"

"Soon I shall tell you how Rogon's demons are going to give you victory at Mendaram. After that victory you will never fear demons again. Your fears will vanish. The wall will vanish; and the need for head-hunting will vanish."

There were repeated cries of "A wall, a wall, we must have a wall!"

Kenyalang calmed them and said: "I have told you the advice of Singalang Burong. If you make psychic energy for yourselves you will fear nothing. You can rely on your own strength. There will be no need for a wall."



"How can we get this psychic energy?" questioned another headman who, from his stature, obviously prided himself on his own physical strength.

"You are right to question me on this very point," said Kenyalang. "It is true that you will have to learn many things, and you will have to learn how to use your minds in new ways. All of these things will lead to a single way which you will be shown. I will call it 'the way of Sabayan'."

"Does this mean our customs must change?" asked another headman with deep concern. "Must we no longer believe in our Gods?"

"All I have said is that head-hunting must end," replied Kenyalang. "Our customs are good and practical. They help our people survive. These we will keep. For instance, we have always shared everything between us. Our forefathers did this and so will we. Of course we will respect our Gods. I have spoken to them. They still live in Sabayan. Some would like to come back to Earth, but they have work to do there. They must be an example to all of us. That is why they remain."

At this point *Samathai* gently interrupted and said: "Kenyalang, we must now come to the main purpose of our meeting – the attack on Mendaram. What do you want us to do?"

"I would like all the tribes on the Baram to attack on the night of the next full moon," said Kenyalang, fully expecting the cries of astonishment that greeted him. "I know it sounds impossible but I will tell you how it can be done. I would like *Samathai's* Punans with the help of Rogon's demons to lay a causeway along the flat tops of the Serewangan trees all the way to Mendaram. You can help them by cutting rattan secretly and storing it in piles in the jungle at the end of this lake. There is a small hill which shall be known as Rogon's Rise. From this hill the causeway will begin. It will be woven of rattan to a width big enough for two Rakssassas at one time to cross. Yet we will cross in single file in the same way that we follow each other along a jungle path."

"Now... when the causeway is ready, on the night of the full moon, we will strike first at the Nagas along the Baram.

Before the moon rises, our Rakssassa water-carriers will deliver their bamboo nodes of water to each Naga household as usual, but one node for each house will contain *datura* root. At the right moment, when the Nagas are asleep, the *datura* will be burned. Slowly the poisonous smoke will rise through the floor boards. The Nagas will breathe it in and stay asleep for a long time. That is when you must take all their weapons and use them for the attack on Mendaram. Then we shall all meet at moonrise on the Rise of Rogon. We shall be sanctified and blessed by passing through the fiery pathway of Varuna and the Storm bamboos of Kinarahengan before we walk upon the Causeway of Coom."

"You make it sound very simple," said one wise old headman, "but how can you guarantee us victory? And you know very well, when we come back we will start killing each other all over again!"

The old man's words reflected exactly the fears in the minds of every headman present, receiving loud acclamations of approval, except from one who shouted: "Of course, I will kill. You killed my son!" and he instantly leapt with a spear towards the speaker. In the months that followed and the years beyond years in which the incident was recounted in longhouses and embellished over and over again, no one could quite say how it happened, but the naked body of Varuna appeared between the old headman and his attacker, the spear pointing straight between her breasts.

Her movement of interception had been so fast that it had not been seen. The attacker paused in the act of throwing. His mind had given the order, but his body, though swift to act, had not been as quick as Varuna. The spear stayed in his hand, and, as if petrified by the shock of her presence before him, he lost balance and toppled on the floor. Varuna bent over, gently took the spear, and handed it to Tillotama. Reacting to an ultrasonic command from Varuna, the *Dakinis*, one by one, in the most delicate, charming fashion, divested the headmen of their weapons, then placed them before *Samathai* on the floor, and each returned to a place beside the headman of her choice.

Varuna returned silently to her place beside *Samathai* as if nothing had happened. To say there was absolute silence would not express the tension on the raft which slowly diminished as each *Dakini* with a smile held the eyes of the headman at her side and coolly dissipated his feelings of anger.

Kenyalang again came to his feet. "I have been asked two questions by a wise headman," he said, looking across towards the old man. "These are the most vital questions of all. The first – how do we gain victory? We have with us tonight eleven *dakinis* – one for each tribe. They will lead you through the jungle at Mendaram to the sacred pool. There you will assemble and at the right moment you will be shown where to strike. You will be accompanied all the way by Rogon's demons. They are your allies. They will divert, confuse and terrify the enemy while you rush in and destroy them; but there must be no senseless killing. When victory is won, the prisoners' lives must be spared. Their wives and children must also be spared.

"And that leads me to answer the second vital question: How can I be sure, with victory and your return to the Baram, that head-hunting won't start all over again? I can't be sure. Nothing in life is sure. The old headman is very wise. But I can tell you this: that all who walk the full length of the Causeway of Coom and fight against the Nagas will never be the same again. The Causeway of Coom is not only a bridge across the swamps: it is a journey through your own minds. All who take that path.... all who pass through the fires on the Rise of Rogon and pass between the storm bamboos of Kinarahengan.... all who are escorted by demons and carried on the wings of the music of Coom.... all of you will become as new people. All will share the same dangers and be fired by the same purpose, and all together will achieve the same victory. You will return to the Baram as brothers. I know this because I have seen it in my dreams. I have seen the causeway shining in the moonlight. I have seen you swarming forward upon it with the demon hosts floating around your heads. You will win, and you will return to follow a new way – the way of Sabayan! Tell them, Varuna, of the role of your *Dakini*."

Varuna stepped forward, conscious of the eyes of these warriors upon her. She *waied* to them all before speaking. "I will give you my *dakinis* as hostages for the future," she said. "One will stay with each tribe to teach you and to learn from you, and to act as interpreters for you when you deal with the Nagas; but their first aim must be to bring peace to your tribe." She *waied* again and sat down, the headmen surprised by her simplicity and practical speech.

"The Nagas will no longer rule over us," continued Kenyalang. "They are ordinary people like ourselves with special skills which we must learn from them. They can teach us how to build reservoirs and canals and plant rice. When we have plenty of rice, and when we have all the fruit we need, and when we no longer fear demons, there will be no reason for further killing. We shall all be as one tribe; and to make ours a real tribe, I shall ask each headman present to spare eleven warriors who have crossed the Causeway of Coom, and send one to live with every tribe on the Baram. Each tribe will then possess eleven new warriors. They will stay and intermarry and have children in their new home. In this way – the way of Sabayan – all your tribes will become as one tribe.

"And what will you do?" asked one headman. "Are you going to rule over us?"

"No," replied Kenyalang. "I am a *Tuai Burong*. I read omens. I see the future. I interpret the way of Sabayan. I shall help if you need my advice, but nothing more."

"And the Terajas?" said another. "Won't they join us?"

"I hope so," said Kenyalang, "but I am not their leader." What I can promise you is to send Temegoh to organise your schools and bring you young men as teachers for each tribe to increase your psychic power. Utama, the wise old monk from Lanka, will serve as your training adviser."

At this point *Samathai* stood up. "Let us return to our *ladangs* quietly," he said. "Start collecting rattan from tomorrow, as much as you can. Tell your water bearers what to do. My Punans will supply them with *datura*. They we will meet again on the Rise of Rogon on the night of the full moon."

## A DREAM OF KINABALU

With that simple speech, he then handed back the swords and spears of the headmen as they filed past, each followed by his *Dakini*, climbed into his perahu and disappeared into the darkness.

## Appointment at Wong Tebedak

It was cool by the lake under their Punan windbreak and it would become colder as the night continued. The *Dakinis* had left without rejection or incident to stay in different Baram longhouses, the windbreaks prepared for them by the Punans remaining empty. Kenyalang and Varuna found themselves alone and naturally moved in together. During the past week, they had carefully avoided opportunities for intimacy and Kenyalang was beginning to think he had successfully suppressed his feelings toward Varuna, plans for the invasion and the problems consequent upon victory filling most of his thoughts. However, mutual trust and frequent propinquity, followed in quick succession by an escape from death in the swamp, and the foolhardy exposure of her body to a Rakssassa spear, had combined to heighten Kenyalang's feelings of concern and longing.

"Why did you behave so foolishly? he said impetuously. "Your sacrifice was needless. It would have achieved nothing."

Varuna moved closer to calm him, smoothing his forehead and holding his head between both hands as she looked steadily into his eyes. "You sometimes forget what I am, Kenyalang." She spoke quietly. "Most of the time you see me as a helpless girl to be protected, and I confess that I enjoy the experience: You have saved my life. But just once in awhile, you must remember

I am a Goddess. I am divine. I do what I have to do."

"But you...." Kenyalang was about to protest further, when Varuna gently covered his lips with her palm and pressed her own nose and lips against his cheek as if absorbing all his strength and manhood into her being.

"That was no foolish act of heroism," she said. "I do not have to impress you or anyone. I merely obeyed the message within my mind. It may have been Maha Visnu commanding or Lord Siva – I know not – but that is what happens when you are divine: you act without thought... purely from inspiration. Have you never acted like that, Kenyalang?"

As Kenyalang felt the softness of her lips and the warmth of her body against him, he saw again vividly the spear poised menacingly at her heart, and the painful thought of that spear cleaving her breast made him kiss her hair, her cheeks, her neck and nipples, all in one wild over-spilling of pent-up emotion, causing her to respond with such passion that both would have swiftly ascended the path of ecstasy to fulfilment if Varuna had not summoned all her strength and forced their bodies apart.

"But why?..... why did you do it?" Kenyalang cried reproachfully, almost in tears.

"If that old man had been killed," said Varuna with controlled calm in her voice, "there would have been no invasion. Coom or no Coom, and Drona would remain King at Mendaram."

"But it was for me to act. Not for you. You must promise me you will never put yourself in danger again!" Kenyalang was so deeply affected that Varuna smiled.

"A moment ago," she said, "I asked you a question: have you never acted on impulse, Kenyalang? Or, let me put it another way: have you never acted under compulsion?"

Kenyalang searched his memory, recalling the climactic moments in his life with the Terajas, and as each episode flashed through his mind, he slowly smiled back at Varuna: "You are right," he said. "As you do, I act immediately on inspiration!"

"So perhaps we are both divine!" she said, and they both laughed, their earlier passion momentarily forgotten.

Varuna slipped from the windbreak into the darkness and promised to return soon. She needed relief, but this achieved, she paused for a moment gazing across the lake, wondering how to solve the joint problem of sleep. They would both need to cling together for warmth as neither had clothing, but Varuna knew the inevitable would happen, so intensely passionate had they both become; and this would mean death to Kenyalang. There seemed to her only one solution, at once extraordinary and previously unimaginable, had she not overhead her *Dakinis* discussing it freely with each other. There seemed no alternative.

Eventually, when both had prepared themselves for sleep, Varuna said simply: "Come and I will keep you warm." Kenyalang went hesitantly to her, slightly puzzled by her inconsistency, but now the promise of fulfilment was upon him, he wondered seriously if he were not being utterly foolhardy. But what could he do? He did not have to wait long to discover.

When they had snuggled blissfully into each other's arms, Varuna began tentatively, knowing that in this matter she had little knowledge and no experience: "Kenyalang," she began, "I have never told you this before, but when you were first brought to my apartment unconscious, I was tempted to remove your *chawat* and gaze on your *lingam*. Not just out of curiosity but because I had to see its effect on my own nature. Indeed, I not only gazed but placed my hand upon it, never having touched a man before."

As she spoke, Varuna daringly suited the action to the word, and continued talking in a rhythmic, monotonous way, all the while exploring Kenyalang's manhood with the most pleasurable and gentle movements. "I prayed then to Lord Siva – not knowing what to do – and instantly he gave me a vision. It was a vision of you and Tillotama embracing in the *maithuna*; and I knew at once that Lord Siva intended you should take part in the ceremony."

Varuna skilfully varied her pressures and force of movement in the manner described by her *dakinis*. "To us who worship the *lingam*, we regard it reverently as the source of all life.



Indeed, there is nothing more wondrous because from its seed our children are born."

Kenyalang by this time found himself totally ruled by Varuna's gentleness and responded with fullest love, and pressures of nose and mouth to her body, achieving by slow degree a state of the very highest expectation.

Varuna, with finely attuned instinct, came closer to him, and transferred her subtle attentions to his entire frame, realising that the *lingam* was only the pinnacle of a mountain, whose strength was drawn from his powerful chest, his strong sloping back, and his iron buttocks. On all these she bestowed her love, her caresses in harmony with her voice giving every assurance of sustained devotion.

"One of our Gods," she continued, "Lord Subramaniam, was once a great general in the Dravidian Army. He was otherwise called Skandha which translated means "Spurt of Semen." When he was born he was one of six twins, and in an excess of love for all of them, his mother clasped them so hard to her bosom that they became melded as one into a single child."

Varuna clasped Kenyalang tightly to make him feel the depth of the mother's love. "And as he grew up, he became renowned for his purity of thought and action, for his great integrity and honour. Like you Kenyalang."

By this time, Varuna sensed that a further stage in Kenyalang's fulfilment should begin, lying again at his side to bring him by infinitely slow degrees to that state of 'clear light' or *bodhicitta* which was the object of *maithuna*, her pressures coinciding with the gradual unfolding of her story.

"Lord Subramaniam," she continued, "chose for his symbol two interlaced triangles, the upward pointing triangle symbolising man's ascent towards divinity." She paused to allow her meaning to have full impact. "At the same time, it represents the male principle; and, thirdly, it is symbolic of fire, the flames rising freely towards the sky."

Varuna knew from Kenyalang's mounting physical response that it might be impossible to lengthen her narrative further, the monotony of her words producing a state bordering

on ecstatic trance. So she paused again, embracing him with deep affection, allowing precious moments of sustained relaxation vital to his ultimate attainment of nirvanic consciousness.

"The downward pointing triangle," she continued, represents the intensity of desire, the female principle or the *uma* which is waiting to receive all that a man can give; and, finally, water.... water which splashes downhill." With her deep knowledge of Tantric ritual and her innate sensitivity towards the elements controlled by Vritri, Varuna knew that when lightning and thunder strike as one, there is a moment when the clouds are commingling marvellously to produce the most cataclysmic outburst of light and power known in the whole of Nature. With her divine skill, Varuna was about to produce that moment of commingling in Kenyalang, the moment which climaxed every *maithuna*, the moment when 'absolute light' is experienced as the primordial splendour which created the world.

"Every man," she concluded, "must strive to hold these two opposites in balance within himself - his longing to reach upwards for divinity and the downward thrust of his desire."

As the 'absolute light' filled every corner of the soul of Kenyalang, Varuna took his head to her breast and held him tightly as a mother would her child.

For Kenyalang, that night, sleep was no longer a problem, but in Varuna herself there remained a restlessness which, in *maithuna*, would normally have been dissipated in the speed and violence of the dance; but her limbs being still, she had awakened in herself the most intense feelings which needed release. The natural method was not available to Kenyalang, but his instincts were sound and this was one problem he could solve applying the full gentleness and love of his nature. Upon Varuna the sustained and prolonged sensations she experienced in that first attainment of 'absolute light' were so overwhelming that her gratitude towards Kenyalang became steadily inter-fused with an ever-deepening love.

That night they slept contentedly in each other's arms, warming each other slowly by massage when the night became too cold. It was a night for both of them to remember. Varuna

awoke only once before dawn to the sound of a tock-tock bird. Momentarily, still half-asleep, she wondered if her new found joy as a woman would signal the end of her role as a Goddess. However, the fear was soon forgotten and she turned over and slept.

In making their plans next morning over tapioca and *kayambau*, Kenyalang was forced to mention the nature of the ordeal which awaited him at Wong Tebedak on the night of the half moon which lay only four nights ahead of them. Varuna showed every sign of distress and chided him for not mentioning it before. She became even more alarmed when he revealed that Kajup had three times achieved victory and asked him outright how he had the nerve to advance great plans for the invasion of Mendaram when he himself might end his life at the bottom of a jungle pool. Kenyalang had no answer. He could only repeat what Varuna had said to him: "I do what I have to do." Pressed further, he replied that all his life his actions had been guided by his belief in destiny. It had started with the hornbill incident in his childhood and continued throughout his youth in forays against the Nagas and other tribes in any one of which he might have been killed. "But I wasn't killed. If I die, I shall go to Sabayan," he said simply, pausing and wondering, "and perhaps I will soon find my way back again to Teraja."

"But that is irresponsible," said Varuna. "Having started something, you must finish it. You cannot leave these Rakssasas without leadership." In that moment, Varuna made her decision. "I am coming with you," she said. "If need be, I will save you." Kenyalang protested and said the Terajas, without proper warning, would be startled to see her. They might even kill her. She must be introduced to them gently. "Then I will hide," she said, "near the pool. Unless something dramatic is called for, they need not see me."

Once Varuna had made up her mind, Kenyalang could not shake her, so they turned their thoughts to the immediate problems of the Baram. For the next two days they would call unobtrusively on all the headmen, reaffirm their roles, strengthen their spirits, and remove all their fears. Varuna would ensure

that her *Dakinis* had properly settled in their respective longhouses and were receiving the consideration and respect they were due. She also had to brief them on where and when to strike against Drona and his Thunderbolts.

In the matter of dress she decided to conform to the Rakssassa custom and wore a short bark skirt. She applied the purplish blue *Pachar Gandulah* to her body and advised her *Dakinis* to do the same. To her such customs were of small account, but to tribal people any breach might create feelings of unnecessary antagonism. She wore the serpent coronet on her head, being the only ornament she had brought with her. The Rakssassas, she thought, needed to be reminded of her powers as a Goddess.

Their two days on the Baram were full and passed without incident. Both managed to evade Naga outposts with little difficulty; indeed, no Nagas in this remote part of the jungle were out looking for them. The danger of discovery might only occur as they passed through the valley of Mendaram on their way to Wong Tebedak. Kenyalang called also at the Rise of Rogon and saw the secret dumps of rattan growing fast. He also called on *Samathai* to thank him for calling the headmen together and for the promised help of the Punans in collecting *datura* and building the Causeway of Coom. *Samathai* replied that he knew of the forthcoming *selam* at Wong Tebedak and realised that Kenyalang would face many dangers before Drona was eventually killed. Since Kenyalang was without his sword, *Samathai* presented him with a Punan blow-pipe spear, pointing out that he would need to kill deer or pig for food while travelling through the jungle. As Kenyalang had learned his blow-pipe skill from *Samathai* as a boy, he accepted the gift as one of immense value coming from his honoured teacher and friend.

In the late afternoon, Kenyalang and Varuna departed. Kenyalang made a last attempt to persuade her to remain behind under the protection of *Samathai*, but Varuna refused. "Who will be there to save you from your own folly?" she said. Kenyalang made no reply, but in his mind he knew that even the jungle had its dangers and, to his knowledge, Varuna had never

before attempted a journey of any distance on foot, and might quickly become exhausted.

He had resolved not to return through the swamp, for fear of meeting Naga boat patrols, but to strike up towards Sungai Rampayoh and Sungai Damit and make a wide detour eventually passing through Mendaram valley at a point between the Sungai Tarunan and the Sungai Gatas where the local Nagas would not be prepared for them. This was a considerable journey, not of course measured by his own standards, but for Varuna it would be a harsh test of endurance. It might be simplified by risking a *perahu* that night up on the waters of the Damit, but against the current, without help from Varuna, it would mean hard going. At least they must walk to a bend in the Sungai Mendaram close to Kuala Belait by midnight and, if necessary, camp on a sandbank there.

They set off following a broad elephant track, the massive footprints of elephants and occasional piles of dung indicating to Kenyalang how recently they had passed along this way. It was wet underfoot but easy going and Kenyalang set a faster pace than normal, hoping to cover as much ground as possible before real difficulties began. Varuna followed uncomplainingly behind. To Kenyalang the jungle around was teeming with animal life but he said nothing and Varuna saw nothing. The less she knew of its dangers, he thought, the better. Only once a rhinoceros came blundering down the path – a small creature, not much larger than a wild boar, but Kenyalang heard it coming from some distance away and drew Varuna to the side of the path, letting it pass undisturbed.

Kenyalang had expected Varuna to stumble over roots in the darkness especially in deep jungle where no moon shone through; but he had forgotten her talent for seeing in the dark acquired during her serpent childhood, and was very relieved that she made such good speed and came to no harm. At last they reached Sungai Mendaram where, as Kenyalang anticipated, they found a herd of elephants bathing in the flowing water. Kenyalang reconnoitred further upstream and found a sandbank where they could sleep undisturbed by the herd:

although there was no guarantee that other animals might not choose this very spot to come down to drink. Kenyalang could see that Varuna was exhausted, their best plan being to sleep now, and set forth at dawn the following morning.

Kenyalang swiftly made a small fire lighting the soft down called *Lulup* from the *Bengkara* tree by striking a flint against a small bamboo container which he kept permanently tucked into his *chawat*. He quickly placed tiny strips of wood upon the *Lulup*, and after some sustained blowing, the wood quickly caught fire. On the flames he placed a sodden bamboo containing tree fungus he had found on the journey which heated rapidly, softened, and became palatable enough for them both to eat. It was not much but, with a drink of river water, would keep them going. Kenyalang prepared a bed of Bertam palm and a palm-leaf windbreak to keep off rain; and, being tired, they both fell asleep at once. The flames quickly died, and whatever animals came down to the water, they had no cause to disturb the two sleepers.

Later that night, Varuna yelled in her sleep and woke sweating. Kenyalang calmed her, gently massaged her limbs, pressed her cheeks with affection, and she soon went to sleep again. The following morning to loud calls of warblers and disappearing cries of a tock-tock bird, Kenyalang awoke before Varuna, slipped into the river and speared a couple of fish for breakfast. She was awake by the time he returned, fearful that she had been left in the jungle to fend for herself. He calmed her, cooked the fish, and, as they ate, asked her to recall the dream which had frightened her in the night. For Terajas it was a normal custom to enquire into dreams at breakfast time, and, for Kenyalang, a *Tuai Burong* who could interpret dreams, it was the most natural question to ask. Varuna was reluctant to speak, but Kenyalang cajoled her and said it was normal for Terajas to speak out their dreams because it cleaned out their minds in the early morning in the same way as they brushed their teeth.

"I dreamed of a tall jungle tree reaching the sky," said Varuna as she hesitantly recalled her fear, "and I dreamed of a

## A DREAM OF KINABALU

bird sitting on a branch watching me. There was a great storm and the bird flew away, and the lightning struck the tree and it burst into flames. It was so close to me so I called out. And then I woke up. Fortunately, it was only a dream. What about you, Kenyalang. Did you dream last night?"

Kenyalang admitted he had. The dream started off beautifully. "I was seated in a small *perahu* with you, Varuna, moving slowly down the red waters of the Rampayoh under an archway of giant Neram trees. The sunlight shone fitfully through the branches and birds sang as they are singing now. And then there was a terrible sound as if the whole world were coming to an end. The gently flowing waters of the river were thrown into the sky. The great trees strained and cracked above us, and the orchids from the topmost branches fell around us. Our boat overturned and we both sank deeper and deeper into the water, and then I awoke.

Having spoken his dream out loud, and comparing it swiftly with Varuna's dream, he instantly saw the symbolic meaning behind both dreams, but resolved not to tell Varuna. "Well, she said, waiting. "What do you make of them?"

"It is much easier to interpret other's dreams than your own," he said with a smile, and abruptly tried to change the subject to food. "Are you still hungry?" he asked. She laughed, seeing through his evasion.

"In both dreams," said Varuna, "there were trees."

"Well, that part is easy," said Kenyalang. "A tree represents the Tree of life."

"You mean we are both going to die?" said Varuna apprehensively.

"Well, that didn't seem to worry you when that spear was pointing at your chest," laughed Kenyalang. "No, do not worry, Varuna, dreams can be interpreted in different ways. It is all up to the *Tuai Burong*."

"But you are the *Tuai Burong*," she insisted.

"Look, Varuna, I'm not going to die in the pool at Wong Tebedak, I promise you," he said reassuringly.

"Why not? What gives you such confidence?" she asked.

annoyed by his obstinacy.

"I shall go into trance," he said. "Then it will be easy."

"You can't go into trance under water," she cried in astonishment. "You must be mad. It is not possible. Have you ever done it before?"

"No," said Kenyalang, but there was a time when I had not even been into a trance before. There must always be a first time."

"Oh, Kenyalang. Either you are very stupid or a veritable God in human form. No one but a God would attempt such a thing."

"Well, how else can I win?" asked Kenyalang with genuine humility, requiring an answer.

"You can only win if Lord Siva or Maha Vishnu want you to," she said.

"Or Coom," said Kenyalang, "Coom might help me."

"Who is this Coom?" asked Varuna impatiently. As she spoke a whole wave of wild pigs rushed through the river from the other side, plunging through the water and swimming across. Instinctively Kenyalang raised his blow-pipe to his lips and aimed at one tusker approaching the sand-bank. The pig kept going under its own momentum and collapsed on the bank within a few paces from Kenyalang, the strong Ipoh poison from the dart taking immediate effect.

As he turned the pig over, Kenyalang said quietly: "Who is Coom?" and paused a moment thinking, "I suppose that is Coom."

Kenyalang then quickly removed the pig's trotters, burned them on the fire to prevent putrefaction, wrapped them in a buan leaf, and then set off with Varuna towards the Sungai Damit. By great good fortune, shortly after arrival by the river-side, Kenyalang hailed a *perahu* of four Punan on a camphor expedition. The Punans are the only tribe in Angadvipa with a knowledge of *Pantang Kapor*, or camphor language, *pantang* meaning forbidden or tabooed. In searching for camphor, the use of any other language, even Punan, is forbidden. These Punans had heard the cry of the *bisan* in the night, or camphor



spirit, moving upriver and were now following it. They were willing to give Kenyalang and Varuna a lift as far as they were going, but they might have to get out at any time and walk.

Kenyalang had often heard of such Punans but never met them before, and admired their skill at being able to discover trees which had a flaw containing camphor gum inside. No one else could do this with any accuracy. If the right tree were found, the flaw inside the tree might extend as much as six feet and be full of crystallised camphor. It was possible to split open a hundred camphor trees and find no crystallised camphor at all, but if the *Bisan*, or camphor spirit, favoured him, a Punan could find a tree containing camphor every time.

"You are extremely lucky," said the leader of the Punans, "to join us. I even wonder if the *Bisan* knew you were coming. It looks as if he wants to help you in some way. Here take this." He offered Kenyalang a node of bamboo containing camphor oil. "It is medicine," he said, "It will give you new strength." Kenyalang was delighted, thanked him, and, in return, gave him and his companions the pig's trotters to eat.

The smooth passage upriver, uninterrupted by feared ambushes, had an idyllic quality which Kenyalang knew was too good to last. He felt certain they would have to pay for their good fortune later on.

By mid-afternoon they had completed the greater part of their river journey in peace. They had stopped only once to collect durians from a tree near the river bank, and these reduced their hunger. If all went well, they would reach Wong Tebedak by moonrise. At the *kuala* with the Sungai Tarunan they left the boat and set off along a pathway following the smaller river. As they continued on their way, Varuna seemed intrigued by Kenyalang's inconsistent behaviour earlier in the day when he accepted the camphor oil. "What possible use can you make of it?" she asked, laughingly. "You exchange a present from Coom for one from Bisan. Do you value Bisan then more highly?"

"These are mere words, Varuna," said Kenyalang thoughtfully. "We do not act according to words but to the spirit.

Coom? Bisan? Does it matter? Perhaps they are all the same. It is the effect you allow them to have on you that matters. Wouldn't you say the same about Lord Siva and Maha Visnu?"

"Maha Visnu speaks," said Varuna with a smile. "Coom does not."

"But Coom has music," said Kenyalang with finality.

"What will you do with the oil?" said Varuna, realising that a jungle pathway was not ideal for conducting a philosophical discussion and fearing this sort of argument might recur again and again.

"I don't know," said Kenyalang. "Perhaps if I rub it on my body before I dive it will keep me warm. If you catch cold in the night, it could make you better. Anyway, the smell will be good for trance!"

They continued walking in silence, Kenyalang in the lead, Varuna following – the normal mode of progress through jungle. The hills were close although not yet visible, rising behind the Naga dwellings scattered through the valley. Nearby could be heard the screech of peacocks – a favourite bird introduced by the Nagas from Lanka. They had proved difficult to rear in the wet climate, much preferring dry, open country but, kept within the Naga compounds they seemed to survive. The Nagas liked them for their feathers. Lord Subramaniam was supposed to have worn their feathers in his head-dress and peacock feathers were displayed reverently in most houses.

When they reached the jungle edge, they both waited watching warily for signs of life. Each compound had a small flattened bamboo fence around it, a narrow path allowing access between. Dusk was falling. Kenyalang would have preferred to wait until dark before risking a passage through; however, Varuna suddenly recognised the sari of a Naga woman who had just stepped into her back compound. It was a sari made to a colour and design encouraged by her *Dakinis*, and at once she recognised the woman as being a faithful and regular worshipper at her shrine. Varuna cautioned Kenyalang to hide, and then called to the woman who responded by leaving her compound and approaching the jungle edge. She *waited* in deep respect and

then quickly warned Varuna of her acute danger. Houses were regularly searched for her by Drona's Thunderbolts, and advised Varuna to flee into the jungle quickly, anxiously looking over her shoulder as she spoke.

"Then tell me quickly," said Varuna. "What news of Drona?"

"He is guarded in the Palace by Thunderbolts," said the woman. "The King was murdered. It was terrible. Indrajit was furious and has sworn to kill Drona. Upagatri has turned against Drona too."

"And the shrine?" asked Varuna. "Has that been destroyed?"

"No, replied the woman. "Drona thinks you will return. Two Thunderbolts are on guard waiting for you."

A noise came from the woman's house. "I must go quickly," she said, and *wailed* deeply. "Do please take care," she added anxiously with real affection, and promptly walked away. As she entered her compound, the woman's husband emerged and spoke to her. Then both disappeared inside.

Kenyalang wasted no time. "Let's go," he said peremptorily. "They will soon be after us." Kenyalang was swift to act but did not always temper decision with tact.

"She won't give me away. I know her too well," said Varuna, hurt by the implication of disloyalty.

Kenyalang did not argue but moved through the jungle parallel to the row of compounds without pause until darkness descended, Varuna being compelled to use all her alertness and sureness of foot combined with stamina to keep up with him. Years of dancing had made her leg muscles strong, but the constant adjustment of bare feet to slippery surfaces, of climbing over obstacles, of feeling her way across branches of fallen trees - all these, plus the fear of stubbing her feet against concealed tree roots, soon made her limbs ache with apprehension. When she had successfully avoided so many snags, the probability of an accident seemed to increase with every step forward. In addition, the sharp tearing of her skin by saw-edged palms did not improve her good humour.

Kenyalang finally stopped in a small clearing, paused, watched with the tense awareness of a *pelanduk* and then, taking Varuna by the hand, said: "Now!" They sped in the darkness together between two compounds, crossed the main track leading to Mendaram and ran for the safety of the jungle beyond, Varuna tripping and collapsing on a creeping vine. Kenyalang, who allowed her no respite, cut her deftly a strong supporting stick, and together they began climbing. The stick was like an extension of his arm. At times she would grip tight and pull herself up vertical slopes, although it was to prove valuable also when descending to probe for footholds below. Varuna, at any rate, found it comforting, knowing she would be glad of the slightest aid as the journey became more arduous.

Kenyalang had imagined her natural grace and sophisticated appearance of feminine fragility would have caused her to tire long before this and he began to persuade her to rest, speaking anxiously to her at the top of every hill, but Varuna would not hear of it, arguing that the sooner they reached Wong Tebedak, the sooner they could sleep, essential for Kenyalang if he were to have the energy to enter the contest at dawn. Kenyalang was repeatedly reminded when negotiating difficult obstacles of Varuna's uncanny gift of seeing in the dark, and was proud to discover that lissome body possessed reserves of strength equal to his own. Never once had she pleaded hunger. Together they had drunk water from running streams but neither had eaten since early morning. Kenyalang from veteran experience avoiding the intake of food in the course of a long jungle journey. Varuna instinctively fell into his rhythm and made no complaint.

As they approached closer to Wong Tebedak, they both seemed to gain strength despite their exhaustion. Kenyalang was still acutely aware of possible dangers ahead – a Naga trap near Wong Tebedak itself seemed highly probable if the Nagas had somehow gained advance warning of the *Selam* contest to be held next day – yet he felt buoyed up with new confidence now that their journey was nearly at an end. The sudden electric cry of Tumok made them both freeze, Kenyalang listening for

the slightest sound to betray the presence of those in ambush. There was a slight movement in the undergrowth to the left, so Kenyalang grabbed Varuna's hand and they rushed in the opposite direction right into the casting net of a Naga patrol. A flare was lit and one Thunderbolt shouted delightedly "We've got them both." Not however, before Kenyalang had fired off three darts from his blow-pipe, killing three Thunderbolts.

To be so near to success and then to fail was humiliating enough, but for Kenyalang his deepest reason for distress was that he would no longer be able to defend his cause against Kajup. The *Selam* would not take place. Kenyalang would be condemned as a coward and Kajup would win the acclaim of the longhouse. All his dreams would come to an end. He wondered bitterly why he had not received a vision forewarning him of the ambush.

To Varuna, their capture was particularly galling as she had suffered so many scratches, cuts and bruises, with mud caked on her body, that she bore little resemblance to the Goddess the soldiers had formerly known. However, the soldier's cry of elation proved she had been recognised. In addition, her hair was tangled and in disorder. She was stinging with perspiration, pestered by flies with sharp bites, and was nearer to sobbing than she had ever been in her life. But she retained her self-control, being so furious that she demanded to see the patrol's commanding officer at once. The soldiers ignored her request and manhandled her more roughly than was necessary, throwing her to the ground inside a small shelter. "Stay in there," one said, as if talking to a child. "Escape and the wild animals will get you!" A single Thunderbolt remained outside on guard. Varuna felt so angry that she fully expected Maha Visnu to come at once to her rescue and smite these unruly Thunderbolts either with arrows from his magic bow or at least with the transfixing thunder of his voice; but, as Maha Visnu did nothing and said nothing, she began seriously to wonder if her awakening to love with Kenyalang had caused her divine powers at last to desert her.

Kenyalang was marched down the path to the commander's bivouac, five spears pointing at his ribs to prevent escape. The

Thunderbolts were taking no chances this time. When the sound of footsteps had gone, Varuna found herself alone with the guard. After resting a little while, she called to him in a whisper. If she was now forced to be self-reliant, she would have to use her wits. Her instinct was to soften him by establishing a feeling between them of intimacy, and later, collusion.

"All I need is sleep," she said to the guard, "but I am a woman: I must wash my body. I am filthy." There was no reply.

"Please help me?" she pleaded a second time. "Let me wash in the stream we just passed. You can come with me and watch over me. If I must die tomorrow, I want to die as a beautiful woman, not as a jungle animal!"

Again there was silence, but Varuna's instinct told her she had made a dent in his insensibility. He was wondering how to react. Her voice became more coaxing, more appealing. She sounded as if she were near tears.

"Oh, please have pity," she said. "I am aching all over. If I could only wash, and then you could massage my body and take away my tiredness. Then I could sleep."

This seemingly innocent invitation was too promising for the soldier to resist. Anyone who had seen Varuna dance in the *Maithuna* must forever retain the memory of a lithe, exquisitely formed girl whose body was impelled with extraordinary energy, every movement being a perfect expression of beauty. On Cakra mountain she had appeared remote, untouchable – a Goddess. But now, in the darkness together, naked and alone, she was almost appealing for that lovely form to be stroked. She wanted him to ....?

The soldier hesitated no further. "Come," he said, "I will help you, but remember you are my prisoner." He led her back to the stream and sat on a rock straining his eyes to watch as she poured the cool water over her body. Varuna had removed her skirt and timidly asked him to wash the mud off her back and thighs. The soldier did so with a tenderness in remarkable contrast to his former brutality. His hand barely touched her skin so keen was his growing sense of anticipation. As he stroked her back, she turned towards him, her breasts almost touching his

## A DREAM OF KINABALU

own. For a moment of wonder he felt the full glory of her presence, and in that moment he died: Varuna's tiny curved knife, concealed in her hair, moved sharply upward slitting his body wide open. She swiftly moved downstream, washed the spurted blood from her body, completed her toilet as rapidly as she could, and then went silently searching for Kenyalang. She was now again as she had once been in her youth – a serpent, gliding through the undergrowth in the dark ready to sting.

## Disaster at the Selam

**T**emegoh and other Terajas heard the cry of Tumok at Wong Tebedak and Temegoh knew at once that Kenyalang and Varuna were in danger close by. This could only mean that a force of Thunderbolts were in hiding ready to swoop onto the Terajas during the *Selam* when they were least prepared. If Kenyalang and Varuna were captured, he must find them and release them quickly before they were killed. Temegoh, therefore, took three young Terajas with him and went straight to the sound made by Tumok. He discovered the Thunderbolt camp heavily guarded and realised that he stood no chance of releasing Kenyalang by surprise attack. Some other way had to be devised.

In the meantime, Varuna, thrown on her own resources, lay flat on the ground and detected, through her body, the reverberations of approaching footprints on the ground. Serpents, having no ear drums to hear, rely on this method to become aware of intruders, allowing time to glide out of harm's way. Varuna, on this occasion, waited and watched and was relieved to see in the darkness three Terajas approaching with Temegoh. She whispered his name. Temegoh stopped in his tracks, and Varuna stepped out of the undergrowth to join them.

"Where is Kenyalang?" he asked. "They have captured



him," Varuna replied, "But don't act too quickly, Temegoh. There are many soldiers... too many."

Varuna felt confident she could cut Kenyalang free if a diversion were made to draw his guards away. "Whatever happens, the Thunderbolts must not know you are here, Temegoh. They aim to surprise you all tomorrow morning at Wong Tebedak and cut you to pieces. You must wait and surprise them. The *selam* must go ahead as planned – Kenyalang will insist on that. Your warriors must be ready to ambush the soldiers when they launch their attack. So go back Temegoh and we will come to you soon."

"Then how do you plan to rescue Kenyalang?" asked Temegoh, surprised by her assurance.

"Oh, I will think of a way. Don't worry about that." Varuna's exhaustion had disappeared as her spirit warmed to the challenge. Her new-found sense of self-reliance was intoxicating. Nothing now seemed beyond her wit and capability. Temegoh said good-bye and returned, puzzled but impressed. There was indeed something very remarkable about Varuna.

When the Terajas had gone, Varuna returned to the body of the slain guard. This was a moment when she desperately needed inspiration. She sat on a rock nearby and totally relaxed her mind, hoping for a vision, but none came. The sight of blood still oozing from the soldier's body gave her the idea she needed. She looked round quickly for her fallen bark skirt smeared with mud, soaked it with blood, paddled in the pool of blood at her feet and carrying the skirt, walked swiftly along by the stream away from Wong Tebedak, leaving clearly defined blood trails, occasionally brushing the bloodsoaked skirt against trees on route. After a reasonable distance, she renewed the blood on her feet by squeezing the skirt, then left the skirt on a sandbank and continued walking along the river's edge, eventually allowing her footprints to enter the river water and be lost. She continued walking down-river for awhile, then leapt onto the far bank, ran all the way back to the soldier's body, and set off on a slight detour following the path taken by the soldiers guarding Kenyalang.

She had set up the diversion. Now she had to find Kenyalang. She listened carefully and heard a murmur of voices. Approaching silently through the jungle, she saw Kenyalang with his hands bound tightly together and his body tied with rattan to a trunk. His face and body were bleeding where he had been beaten, during interrogation. His head was slumped on his chest. Three soldiers were seated on the ground idly talking. Another group sat some distance away, barely visible in the darkness. The murmuring came from the group nearest Kenyalang.

As the distance between Kenyalang and the dead soldier's body was so short, Varuna knew that her plan would succeed. Her principal concern was for Kenyalang's condition. If she cut him free now, would he have the strength to escape. She waited anxiously watching for some sign of life. The thought of the pain he must have suffered seared into her mind. And then, an extraordinary thing happened. Kenyalang gave a feeble groan, imperceptibly turned his head towards her and winked! Of course, she had forgotten his wonderful gift of hearing. He must have heard her stealthy approach through the jungle when the guards were talking. Although badly hurt, he was certainly not unconscious.

Varuna returned swiftly and silently to the dead soldier's body; gave an ear-splitting scream, repeating it again and again, piercing enough to make any Naga's blood freeze. Then, behind a screen of trees running parallel to the path, she raced back to Kenyalang, arriving to find him unguarded and already straining at his bonds. She embraced him with tenderness and relief, and, using her sharp, curved knife, she freed him in a matter of seconds. The guards had behaved predictably and rushed off to investigate the screams. Once free, Kenyalang and Varuna with one mind rushed downhill away from Wong Tebedak, deliberately lost their trail in a stream, then took a wide detour to bring them back to the basin of hills which drained their waters into the ceremonial pools.

Their problem on arrival was to contact Temegoh in the darkness without disturbing the other Terajas. Normally,

repeated *wah-wah* gibbon cries would have found a response from him at once, but these could also be heard at a distance and would attract the attention of the Thunderbolts. Instead, Kenyalang made a low sound like the tearing of silk. It was the sound of a hornbill which Temegoh would instantly identify as a sign from Kenyalang since hornbills are normally not heard at night. Other Terajas hearing it would be puzzled but would assume a hornbill had been disturbed in its nest.

Kenyalang repeated the hornbill sound and it was a matter of only moments before Temegoh stepped into a clearing before them.

"I've got a chicken for supper," said Temegoh in the most matter-of-fact voice. "You must both be hungry." He showed them to a substantial wind-break which had been specially prepared for them. "We made it yesterday," he said, "certain that you would come as you promised. Now you are here."

Varuna was privately amused by the lack of emotion between these two. Whatever the dangers, however long the period of separation, they would probably greet in the same practical way. The chicken had been cooked that afternoon. It was cold but tasted delicious, especially followed by the soft hearts of palms.

When they had eaten, Temegoh presented her with *Bunga Buot* flowers to apply to Kenyalang's wounds. "Tonight there will be heavy rain," he said. "You must get some sleep."

He was about to leave when Kenyalang called him back, "Tomorrow we shall be busy fighting and I may not see you. Don't stay here too long. Go back to *Samathai* as fast as you can and take control of the invasion of Coom. He will tell you what to do. After victory, you will bring schools to all the tribes. Utama and the *Dakinis* will help you." That was the last time that Kenyalang spoke to Temegoh.

Before they turned into their shelter, a Teraja girl appeared and presented Varuna with a sarong to wear. "It will keep you warm," she said, and smiled.

Varuna found she could not embrace Kenyalang for fear of hurting him. She wanted so much to express her love. Together

they laughed over Varuna's cunning ruse, and when Varuna explained the details of the blood-soaked skirt, Kenyalang congratulated her on her quick thinking and speedy action. He knew he could not have done better himself. Their gaiety and relief at being alone together was inevitably to be short-lived. The events of the coming day loomed over their thoughts with the blackness of the clouds which had built up throughout the previous day.

"Don't worry," he said when for a moment she fell silent. "You have Maha Visnu to take care of you and me as well. That's two of us. And you seem quite good at looking after yourself!"

She tried to smile in the dark but her one thought was for Kenyalang's safety. "Oh, Kenyalang," she said, "how can you be so light-hearted. We are surrounded by Thunderbolts who will attack as soon as it is light. Your people will be massacred even if you kill a few Thunderbolts. Are you still going to dive in that pool?"

"I must," he said quietly.

There was a footstep outside their shelter. Kenyalang sprang to his feet with his dagger at the ready. "Don't get excited," said Kajup. "It's only me. I heard you'd just arrived. Are you still going ahead with this ridiculous *selam* tomorrow? You know we've got a battle on our hands."

Kenyalang stepped out into the open and found to his surprise that he felt no animosity towards this man. "Doesn't the whole tribe expect us to see this thing through?" he replied.

"No. It is a personal matter which can wait. The safety of the tribe comes before everything," said Kajup. His voice was deep, commanding, and he knew he was right.

Kenyalang paused for a moment of thought. "If it were a personal matter, Kajup, I would agree at once. Obviously we will fight side by side to protect our people as we have always done. But the *Selam* is a matter calling for the decision of the Gods. If the Gods want our people to die, they will die and nothing we can do will save them. If the Gods want them to live,

they will live. But you cannot postpone an appointment with the Gods."

"You talk a lot of nonsense, Kenyalang," said the older man. "You know you are bound to lose tomorrow, and we admire you for making the attempt, but you are being young and foolhardy. While you and I are in the bottom of that pool, our mothers and sisters will be murdered. Come to your senses boy."

Kenyalang felt the force of his words. "You are a brave fighter, Kajup, but misguided. Much more is at stake than your future or mine or the future of the Terajas. I *must* dive in the *selam*."

Kajup was surprised at his stubbornness and tried to reason with him. "You have been away," he said, "and do not know what has happened here in the last week. I say this not to boast but to tell you the facts. Three times I took a Teraja force to ambush the Nagas at Merimbun. Three times we defeated them, inflicting terrible losses. News has gone back to Mendaram. Their spies reported that we should all meet here tomorrow for the *selam*, so the entire force of Nagas will come to destroy us. We will be outnumbered ten to one. Now will you give up this crazy idea? I myself cannot do so or it will be said that I defied the Gods and was frightened of losing. But we can both make the decision together now. *Now*, Kenyalang *now*, and let all our people disperse into the jungle and get away from here before it's too late!"

Kenyalang stood for a full minute before speaking. His mind raced back to Sabayan, to Kinarahengan, to Singalang Burong and to Rogon. He stood for a moment with the great wreathed hornbill above the gulf of Panataran and gazed out across the landscape and mountains of Angadvipa from the summit of Nulu Takawas. He saw in his mind the Causeway of Coom and the great procession of Rakssassas and demons on their way to Mendaram. He heard in his mind the orchids above the Serewangan trees playing the ethereal music of Coom. Then he turned to Kajup and said calmly, "All that you have said is

common sense, but this is not a time for common sense. Everything depends upon the will of Coom."

"Coom, Coom, who is Coom? You're behaving like a lunatic. I ask you for the last time to let our people leave now, and give up this madness?"

"Certainly," said Kenyalang. "Tell them to go. All we need is two judges and they can remain concealed in the trees. But you and I are going to *selam*."

Kajup turned furiously and walked away into the darkness.

During this whole conversation Varuna had remained concealed unnoticed listening, so that when Kenyalang returned she pleaded with him not kill himself needlessly. Why must you die in the mud at the bottom of a pool?" she said angrily. "If you must die, let us die together in the flames of Cakra mountain. Let it be a proper sacrifice. That is the right way to go to heaven."

"What do you mean?" said Kenyalang.

"The Sanskrit name for sacrifice is Catapana Brahmana or the ship that sails to heaven! There would be sense in that but not drowning in the mud."

"Why in the flames?" asked Kenyalang. "We've already managed to avoid that. It would be silly for us to go back again."

"You still have so much to learn Kenyalang. Why die at all? But if you must, the Vedas tell us that Creation cannot take place except from a living being who is immolated. This is the whole reason for sacrifice. It must be either a cosmic male – that is you – or a Mother Goddess, or a mythic young woman – that is me. If I die a violent death voluntarily I fulfil the wish of Lord Siva; and if we die together, our deaths will symbolise the rebirth of the great unity when life was first born out of Chaos."

Kenyalang looked stunned. These were all so many words. He was out of his depth completely. "Look," said Varuna, "our death together can inspire others. To my worshippers at my shrine in Mendaram I would lead them to think of the Primal Source of Life. I would tell them to seek that perfection at the beginning of Time when Life, like the whole of Creation, was still sacred because it was still new from the hands of the

Creator. But to you, Kenyalang, I would say it will inspire others to seek for Coom. Who is Coom? You never told me that. I have imagined it to be like a dancing light across a swamp – a kind of marsh gas. Who is Coom, Kenyalang?”

“That’s exactly what it is,” said Kenyalang as if Varuna’s analogy was brilliant – “a light across a swamp. If you lived in the jungle as I have done all my life, you would feel the growth of trees and plants and flowers around you. Each one is reaching upwards towards the light. If you were to ask a fern on the forest floor: “What is light?” she could not answer you – because she has never seen light; yet she struggles all her life-time to reach it. Yes, Varuna, this life is a swamp. It is full of misery and suffering as Utama says, but he is wrong to insist that to avoid suffering we must remove all desire. There is one desire we must never lose – the desire for divinity – for light! Because you have lost your divinity and become a woman, don’t expect to give up the light which guides my whole life. I can’t describe it to you. I see it only in brief visions. Often I can’t see it at all. I don’t know what to call it, so I call it Coom. Can you think of a better name? From where do you think Maha Visnu and Lord Siva draw their strength and marvellous power? They were only human once, as I am. Coom is the light which uplifts us all and makes each one of us a God. To die in the flames or the mud of a pool – does it matter?”

Varuna had never heard Kenyalang speak at such length before, nor with such conviction and passion. She realised that she loved him so deeply that all her instincts, all her reason, all her arguments were compelling her towards a single objective – to save Kenyalang’s life, to keep him alive a little longer.

“But Coom is not in the bottom of the pool,” she protested. “He is with the Rakssasas building a causeway.” Her words petered away. It was useless. Somehow their roles had been reversed. His sense of the divine was flowing strongly, but in her own case she understood clearly that her own loss of divinity was directly due to the intensity of her love for Kenyalang. Her emotion was so strong that no signal or command from elsewhere

could break through. She lay down numb and exhausted, resigned to sleep.

Kenyalang stood awhile and soon felt a powerful wind blowing heralding a storm. He quickly made a half circuit around the cluster of fires dotting the jungle above the two pools and saw no sign whatsoever of the tribe withdrawing to safety. Kajup evidently, he thought, intended the *selam* to be held at dawn in full view of the whole tribe because he felt so confident of victory. After Kajup's successful row of ambushes at Merimbun, he planned to consummate a necklace of victories with an historic battle at Wong Tebedak using the *selam* as a decoy to trap the three Naga forces concentrating all their strength within the valley. If so, Kenyalang conceded it was a masterly idea which could only be seriously considered by Kajup with his withering contempt for Naga incompetence at fighting in the jungle. No doubt, the thought of being outnumbered ten to one had originally caused him to seek agreement with Kenyalang to postpone the *selam*, but as Kenyalang had refused, so Kajup's master plan would take effect.

For Kajup's overall plan to succeed, it needed complete surprise by the Terajas; therefore, the Naga spies overlooking the Teraja families encamped above the pools must report back to their leaders that the Terajas appeared to be totally unaware of the presence of Nagas on three sides on the hills above them. It might succeed, thought Kenyalang, for the very reason that the battles would be fought among the jungle trees on paths made quagmires by the night's rain, making it impossible for the Nagas to remain on their feet. But how had Kajup planned to avoid a massacre of the women and children? Their only escape route lay down the river which flowed from the waterfall out of the lower pool. And even this made sense because the Terajas hardened feet were well adapted to negotiating the stones on the river bed, whereas the Nagas, relying on their sandals, would have them ripped off in the torrent and would be unable to go far.

As Kenyalang returned to his windbreak, the first drops of rain fell, the downpour intensifying and continuing until the



early hours of morning. At first, Kenyalang heard the usual thuds of trees falling and then drifted to a dreamless sleep, undisturbed by the pounding rain on the *bertam* roof.

An hour before dawn he woke to find the rain stopped and listened to the gentle sounds of the sapè coming from the higher pool, the traditional home of the white crocodile. This was an ancient creature which lay around asleep all day and was regarded as *keramat* or sacred, the custom being to place chickens and rice on the water's edge to appropriate music for the crocodile to be permanently fed. The creature was so much a part of Teraja tradition that Kenyalang had not even considered its possible use as a tactical weapon against the Nagas. But evidently Kajup had surpassed his customary ingenuity by staging a ceremony at the crocodile pool. All the women and children were filing past the sleeping crocodile carrying *damar* torches in one hand and sacred offerings in the other, singing a dirge about hornbills as they went. The song had no relevance to the ceremony nor to the crocodile but no doubt would achieve its purpose in disarming the suspicions of the Nagas. Such a display could only make the enemy feel the Terajas were unprepared for a Naga attack. Kenyalang had to admire Kajup's cunning.

Kenyalang also noticed that once the procession had filed past in the darkness, the women and children extinguished their torches and slipped away soundlessly downriver, their instructions no doubt being to move unobtrusively out of sight and out of danger. Dawn would soon come and, with it, the single reverberation of a gong would herald the *selam*.

Varuna had woken, noticed Kenyalang's absence from her side, and crept out in search of him. She arrived above the crocodile pool just as the last lights in procession were extinguished. She still looked desperately tired after the previous day's ordeal and Kenyalang, concerned for her safety, advised her to hide in the branches of a tree overlooking the waterfall and the lower pool. There she would have an excellent view and, being herself unseen, would remain secure.

Varuna sensed Kenyalang's icy calm and knew that a final demonstration of emotion on her part would neither deflect him from his purpose nor improve his chances of entering trance when the contest began. She moved away from him to her observation post with a look of grave concern and climbed, by coincidence, onto the very bough on which Tumok was perched. Tumok had seen enough of enemy movements in the night and Kajup's main ambush dispositions to realise exactly what was going on: she deemed, therefore, that no warning to Kenyalang was necessary. Her only fear was that the race of waters flowing down in all directions from the hills would cause a flash flood highly dangerous to anyone either in the pools or river, but she had to assume that Kenyalang and Kajup knew what they were doing. After all, they too had experienced the downpour in the night and could make their own deductions. Part of the function of a successful *ngarong* was to give warning only when immediate danger threatened.

Gradually the light stole between the trees. There was mist in the hollows and white slivers of cloud were nestling between the hills. Two barbets were the first to sing followed by flamboyant warblers who seemed determined to astonish their silent audience with the richness and variety of their song. Kajup stepped into the open and walked around the edge of the lower pool, finally entering and pushing his way towards a tall pole which had been sunk into the mud for him to cling to under water. Normally, on such an occasion, there would be a great hubbub of excitement from all the watching families, to be succeeded by a hush following the sounding of the gong. Now, in the pre-*selam* silence nothing stirred. Even the voice of the warbler was stilled.

Kenyalang, seated cross-legged above the waterfall, was gradually entering trance. His objective was to achieve a state of auto-hypnosis which would enable him to leap into the pool as the gong sounded – a purely automatic reaction – and then sink like a stone. There was no need for him to make use of the pole provided. Finally, he would end in a state of catalepsy on the bottom. Catalepsy was a new experience for him. He had seen it

and observed it carefully in animals and often wondered how they achieved such a condition. Now he was to put his conclusions to the test. He assumed rightly that the very act of withholding breath in trance must inevitably produce such a state or kill him. All the events of his life so far indicated that Coom wanted him to live long enough to achieve the destiny planned for himself and Varuna. He found it impossible to believe that this dive was his last, whatever feminine fears Varuna might have. He knew that Kajup could not possibly remain submerged for more than a short period. Trance would give Kenyalang the certainty of staying under for very much longer.

The gong sounded and the contestants dived. At the same moment, three fully armed groups of Naga soldiers converged on the Teraja encampment intent on burning their windbreaks and massacring every Teraja in sight. Under Drona's new orders there were no reservations about sparing able-bodied men to work on the reservoirs; all had to be killed, and the entire tribe destroyed. As each group came within sight of the pools, cunningly concealed Teraja nets descended from above enclosing at least the first six Nagas in each group. Kajup's warriors promptly pounced upon them and chopped off their heads. Kajup's scheme of total surprise had given him the startling advantage of wiping out eighteen of the finest Nagas in one swoop. However, once the Teraja presence was known and became visible, the Nagas following swiftly behind fought valiantly, spearing many Terajas and finishing them off with their swords.

The more intense became the battle, the more confusion gave advantage to the Terajas. Naga soldiers found themselves floundering in mud and water on paths which had quickly developed into swirling rivers. For every Teraja killed or wounded at least four Nagas perished, trying clumsily to regain their feet. In a melee of iron blades, there were times when the Terajas seemed to outnumber the Nagas so swiftly did they turn and twist and leap upon their foes with the remorseless fury of demons. However, a new wave of Nagas poured into the gaps left by the decimated vanguard.

As the remaining Terajas began to tire beneath the onslaught, Varuna saw a young Teraja warrior dive into the lower pool to haul Kajup to the surface. Kajup was furious at being interrupted, but quickly saw that his strength was urgently needed to put new heart into the fading Terajas. Instantly, Varuna leapt from her branch above the waterfall straight to the point where Kenyalang had originally disappeared, swam like an arrow towards him, grabbed him beneath the armpits and brought him to the surface still in trance. Ignoring the fighting which swirled above her, she vigorously rubbed the back of Kenyalang's head, slapped his cheeks and shouted a *mantram*, and, to her relief, Kenyalang opened his eyes.

"Kajup is out of the pool. We must fight," she said. Once recovered, Kenyalang leapt into action like a whirlwind, grabbing a sword from a Naga soldier after tossing him into the crocodile pond. Unfortunately, his intervention was too late. Only four Terajas remained fighting; all the rest lay dead. Varuna, being a fifth defender, added touches of fury by striking with her tiny blade, moving with the intentness of a mosquito and the elusiveness of a dragon fly.

At one point Kajup found himself defending, fighting against three Nagas simultaneously and was becoming sorely pressed. Kenyalang jumped to his aid, beheaded one Naga with a clean sweep of his blade, allowing Kajup in successive blows to decapitate the other two. Kajup gave Kenyalang a fleeting smile of gratitude before coming under attack from more Nagas. There had to be some dramatic change in fortunes if these four Terajas and Varuna were to be saved, and it came surging through the jungle straight towards them and the pools below – a crashing tide of water off the hills. Three separate flows had combined in the valley to smash their way towards the pools, carrying trees, rocks, and animals in one mighty flood overwhelming Nagas and defenders alike. All were thrust willy-nilly into the top pool and down the waterfall and into the river, being swept along until they saw below them the women and children waiting, as they had been instructed to, on sandbanks by the river. Rocks and tree trunks smashed into them. Most were

## A DREAM OF KINABALU

killed by the first wave. The bodies of Terajas and Nagas were flung high onto the banks. The flash flood continued along the Sungai Rampayoh until its force was spent. For many hours nothing moved on the banks of the Sungai Rampayoh, but overhead watching over the scene of devastation was Tumok, the *Ngarong*.

## Rafting the Rampayoh

**W**hen Kenyalang regained his senses, he found himself alone, concealed by undergrowth and, protected from the sun. It was late afternoon. He had been battered against rocks, his body covered with cuts, and one leg seemed to be broken. His first thoughts were for Varuna, Kajup, and his tribe. As the wall of water had swept towards them, Kenyalang remembered breaking away from an attacking Naga, and in the same instant grabbing Varuna's arm and holding on with all his strength as they were carried above the pools and thrust into the narrow river. He must then have been hit by a log because he remembered nothing more. Varuna, he thought, could not be far away, but was she still alive and, if so, had she been captured and molested by surviving Nagas?

And what of Kajup? Kajup was a strong swimmer and would almost certainly be alive. But where was he? Then, as Kenyalang's thoughts slowly encompassed the full extent of the tragedy, he realised with horror that none of his people could have survived that terrible onrush of water. They would have been trapped in the narrow river and overwhelmed by the first great wave. And it was his fault! If he had not insisted on continuing with the *selam*, none would have died. He tried to recall their faces one by one and sobbed silently, not only because he had lost those he loved, but because they had died through his

own stupidity. All could have escaped back to the longhouse in darkness, and the Nagas, when they attacked at dawn, would have found the pools deserted.

Kenyalang recalled Varuna's pleas and Kajup's pleadings not to go ahead with the ceremony. "The safety of the tribe comes before everything," Kajup had said. And then his own words came back to him. "All you have said is common sense, but this is not a time for common sense. Everything depends upon the will of Coom."

"Coom, Coom, who is Coom?" Kajup had cried contemptuously. Kenyalang's eyes were full of tears. His leg ached. The thought that he had lost Varuna, that he might never see her in this life again was almost more than he could bear. "Coom, Coom, who is Coom?" echoed his mind with grief. "If this tragedy was his doing, he must be mad!" Looking back miserably across the years, Kenyalang saw that his one purpose in life had been to increase the morale and the happiness of his people. Yet all his efforts had led finally to their annihilation, thanks to Coom!

While preoccupied with these thoughts, Kenyalang had not noticed Tumok perched overhead; indeed he had become so overwhelmed with remorse that he had even forgotten Tumok's existence. A slight movement on a branch above him caused Kenyalang to look up and he was surprised and excited to see Tumok. "Where is Varuna?" he asked.

"She has been hurt badly and is dying," said Tumok.

"Where?" shouted Kenyalang desperately. "Where?"

"On this side of the river, a little way down," said Tumok.

Immediately, Kenyalang tried to ignore the piercing agony in his left leg, and after walking a few paces, realised that, although the bone was not broken, he had been badly battered and the pain would be constantly with him. Using all his determination and strength, he dragged himself downriver to find Varuna. When he found her lying on the sand, he could see that she had received a savage blow to her left shoulder and had lost a great deal of blood. Instantly, he called Tumok to find some *Bunga Buot*. "She will not die," he said, "if we are quick."

Tumok flew away and came back shortly with the flowers which had saved so many Teraja lives in years past. Kenyalang squeezed them and gently and lovingly smeared their juice over Varuna's wound. He then fashioned a simple cup out of tree bark, filled it with river water, and poured its contents, drop by drop into Varuna's mouth. Kenyalang knew it would take some time for the *Bunga Buot* to take effect. All he could do was to hide her from returning Nagas and keep her warm throughout the night, hoping that by dawn she would regain consciousness. Despite his pain, long experience of the jungle enabled him to carry out a number of tasks comparatively quickly to ensure Varuna's comfort and to prepare for the journey to the safety of the Baram without interception by Naga patrols.

Kenyalang tore off strips of loose bark from the common *sedaman* tree and dried them in the sun to use them at night as blankets to keep Varuna warm. He constructed a shelter of *Bertam* palm to keep off rain, and chopped equal lengths of bamboo to form a small raft for two, lashed together with rotan. At the same time he kept his eyes open for *keludi* roots, palm hearts, and tree fungi to build up a small store of food. He reckoned the journey down the Rampayoh and down the Damit, including necessary interruptions, might take three days. What sort of state Varuna would be in by then he could not imagine, so he instructed Tumok to fly to *Samathai* and arrange for two litters to be sent to await their arrival at a sandbank near Kuala Belait. He ordered two litters because he wasn't sure if his own leg would be well enough for him to make the remainder of the journey by foot.

In moving along the bank, Kenyalang kept an eye open for Nagas, at the same time hoping he might see some sign of Kajup. Even Kajup's war hat or argus pheasant feathers would suggest his body must be near; but Kajup had vanished and Kenyalang wondered if he would ever see his adversary again. Continuous movement throughout the day had two beneficial effects; it kept his muscles active and by evening his pain was much reduced; it also compelled his mind to attend to a variety of practical problems, thus helping to expunge the feeling of



guilt which lay heavily upon it. At nightfall Kenyalang was exhausted and Varuna was still unconscious, so he slept soundly.

During their three days on the raft, Varuna remained physically unconscious but her mind became astonishingly active. Indeed, her shoulder wound healed quickly through the plentiful supply of *Bunga Buot* flowers brought by snakes who not only kept guard over her on the raft but swam ahead like outriders as the raft glided slowly down river. Others followed in procession. Many had come to listen to stories conveyed to them ultrasonically in her sleep by Varuna. Their favourite was the epic of the Ramayana which Varuna recounted each morning in marvellous detail, dwelling with fascination on the individual exploits of King Ravana in his peacock *vahana*, or aerial chariot, in which he rode the sky commanding his elephant army. Varuna seemed unconsciously to be preparing herself for her divine role among the Rakssassas to lead them to victory against Drona. On her first visit, her sudden intervention to save the life of one of the Rakssassa's most distinguished warriors, had already made her a legend. Now she had to weave glorious fantasies in the minds of the Baram Rakssassas to bind them with a divine cord of unity. It was as if her stories told to the serpents on the raft were a rehearsal; and there were times as she repeated her *mantrams* in a hypnotic rhythm that the serpents swayed in unison as if combining to give Varuna the access of psychic power she would need for the assault on Mendaram.

When Kenyalang suspected what was happening, he remembered the *anklong* rhythm which had so profoundly impressed him in the Schools of Illusion high up on the western *daratu*. It was an easy rhythm to recall and he played it skilfully on his *rudi-ng* made from the rib of the *langkap* palm. The serpents, being without ear-drums, could not hear the drone, but they responded enthusiastically to its ultrasonic overtones.

In the evenings, the snakes unobtrusively left the raft as groups of hornbills flew in formation overhead, paying homage to Kenyalang and bringing stirring greetings from Panataran. They promised to accompany the Rakssassa and demon forces

as they crossed the Causeway of Coom. Kenyalang was pleased to see so many friends he had known down the years. All commiserated with him in the loss of his tribe, but they assumed this tragedy was part of a greater plan devised by Coom. Kenyalang and Varuna, they said, had been spared for leading the historic invasion to overthrow Drona's malevolent power. As they squabbled among each other in their raucous dialect, Kenyalang began to wonder if the hornbills were not far better informed than he was. They seemed to know exactly what he was going to do; and he wondered if the whole process of victory was going to be so automatic that his own role and that of Varuna might conceivably have become redundant! However, while he was tired by their gossiping, he enjoyed their goodwill. It helped to faze over the painful memories of the past week.

The last of his visitors before nightfall were the *kluang*, or flying foxes, who swept in with powerful wings out of the sunset. Having already created total confusion once on Cakra mountain, they were eager to finish the job. Not normally aggressive, the *kluang* felt personally involved. They had put Drona out of action once and now discovered, to their chagrin, that he had not only foully murdered Culodaro but supplanted him as King. Kenyalang welcomed the flying foxes because they brought with them succulent mangoes as gifts. He had also excellent reasons for remembering their help, having saved his life, and thanked them for their promise of massive support during the forthcoming invasion.

What had started near Wong Tebedak as a nightmare journey, ended in the atmosphere of Festival. Punans were present with litters at the appointed sankbank to meet them, and they were carried with comfort and speed to Luagan Teraja, Samathai, Temegoh and the Punans being delighted that they had survived the battle of the *selam*. While Kenyalang could not help feeling warmed by their congratulations and displays of affection, inwardly he felt a deep foreboding about the future. Like the hornbills, Samathai and the headmen on the Baram regarded the loss of the entire Teraja tribe as a divine manoeuvre on the path towards ultimate victory. How easily

humans deceive themselves, he thought. They argued that the Nagas had suffered terrible losses at Wong Tebedak and that Drona, determined to reinforce Mendaram, had ordered immediate replacements of soldiers from the Naga garrisons on the Baram. No less than ten soldiers from each of the eleven outposts were ordered to return, leaving the Baram Rakssassas cock-a-hoop over their departure. Once the Rakssassa invasion had succeeded, they said, the later mopping up operations on the Baram would be relatively easy!

Yet Kenyalang remained troubled. The loss of those he loved preyed deeply on his mind. Why, he wondered, were they allowed to be so lightly destroyed? If this entire operation against the Naga Headquarters at Mendaram were dependant on the will of Coom, how was he to know that a similar catastrophe was not in store for them at the end of the Causeway? His confidence in Coom had been dealt a savage blow. He felt humiliated and pathetically weak. For awhile all sense of destiny deserted him. He would use his own judgment and common sense in future. Never mind Coom!

While Kenyalang suffered silently and tried to hide his fears, Varuna's divine personality blossomed and brought strength and confidence to the headmen and their tribes. She called on each community and was pleased to find the *Dakinis* had not only been accepted for their grace and beauty but also for their tact and wisdom. The best warriors in each tribe vied for their attentions and it was easy to see that when the time came, marriage would be no problem to any one of them.

Many problems were brought to Varuna for solution which she handled with speed, insight and skilled improvisation. Any matter concerning the Causeway was dealt with by Temegoh. More than three quarters had been completed and the full amount of rattan had been assembled and concealed near the Rise of Rogon. As one load was being delivered, a Naga soldier had demanded to know what it would be used for. The Rakssassa, thinking quickly, had replied "For a Festival." Shortly afterwards, a headman told Varuna of the incident, pointing out that the same answer should be given by anyone

else confronted by a Naga with the same question. Varuna promptly leapt at the idea and knew instantly what Festival it should be on the night of the full moon just before the invasion. In a flash of intuition, she had seen that such a Festival would unite the Rakssassas and demons as nothing else could; and it would send them forward with uplifted morale on their journey. The Rakssassas, after all, were remotely descended from those very legions used by King Ravana in his battles with King Rama centuries before; and the demons in their turn owed their allegiance to Rogon of Pakka Cave who had always spoken with pride of his descent from the Demon King.

Now that the Rakssassas had gathered the rattan required, Varuna wanted them to construct a great effigy out of bamboo of Ravana's *Pushpakha*, his aerial peacock chariot, to serve as the central motive for the Festival. To this end, she immediately communicated ultrasonically with all her *Dakinis* and asked them to arrange a meeting of headmen on the Luagan Teraja that very evening. The headmen were astonished by her speed of reaction and saw the need for this deception, at the same time realising its value in creating a bond between Rakssassas and demons. Plans were agreed without opposition. Nothing like it had ever occurred on the Baram before. What appealed to them most was when she told them of the Causeway from India to Lanka used by Hanuman's monkey host to conquer the Rakssassas. Now, centuries later, the Rakssassas would be swarming across a similar causeway to conquer their foes from India. The tables would be reversed!

However, the actual construction of the Causeway, although continuing apace, was the source of constant aggravation to Temegoh who spent much of his time trying to keep the peace between the mild-mannered Punans and Rogon's demons. The Punans were shy people who traditionally kept away from other tribes, moving through the dark jungles in a continuing search for food. If they normally avoided the presence of other human beings, the physical proximity of demons along the Causeway made them highly nervous. When the demons left them alone, they got on quietly with the task of weaving rattan, using excep-

tional skill. However, being unaccustomed to full sunlight, they often found the sun on the treetops far too hot for them to bear, so they would retire for brief periods beneath the canopy to rest. The demons chided them for their laziness, and sometimes became insulting, at first heaping scorn upon them; and when this had no effect, they would swoop on them delivering a painful sting like a jungle horse-fly.

Time and again, the Punans reacted furiously and threatened the demons with their blow-pipes, but always refrained from their use; firstly, because the demons were a perpetually moving target, never still, and secondly, the Punan tradition was adamant that blow-pipes should never be used against humans – the demons being regarded as human allies in the expedition against Mendaram. Thus the Punans suffered much torment at the hands of the demons. Observing this, and frequently interceding on their behalf, Temegoh began seriously to wonder how the demons could possibly co-operate with Rakssassas in the invasion of Coom. Nevertheless, so it had been ordained. His job was to create harmony and this he attempted until the causeway was completed.

On the night before the invasion, Varuna realised she had been so busy building up the morale of the tribes that she had seen little of Kenyalang, and was now distressed to see him looking pale and filled with gloom. She had hoped the immense activity of the past few days would have eased the pain in his mind, but on questioning, Kenyalang admitted the problem went deeper than the loss of his loved ones: his misery was caused by his total rejection of Coom. How could Coom have been so destructive and wasteful? This was the question which seared his mind to which there appeared to be no answer.

“What makes you think Coom destroyed them?” said Varuna.

“It’s obvious,” said Kenyalang. “I was inspired by Coom to insist on holding the *selam*. Because of my insistence, the whole tribe remained behind until morning and then were forced to go into hiding down river where they were drowned.”

"But that had nothing to do with you or Coom," argued Varuna. "Don't you remember your last words to Kajup: – 'let them go' you said. All we need is two judges! It was Kajup who made them stay and it was Kajup who told them to hide in the river. It had nothing to do with you or Coom. You are blaming yourself for their deaths and you have no cause to do so. By insisting on the *selam*, you made the ambush possible, and that led to a great victory. Now the entire structure of Naga control has been weakened both on the Mendaram and the Baram. Come, cheer up, Kenyalang. Be yourself. You did all in your power to help me recover on the raft. Now I must help you to face that battle ahead with all your old courage. Your victory tomorrow will make your name live forever in the longhouses of Angadvipa. Be brave, Kenyalang, and be thankful to Coom!"

Varuna's forceful pleading did much to restore Kenyalang's confidence, and by the morning of the invasion he seemed to be his old self again.

## The Invasion of Coom

**O**n the night of the full moon, over the Baram, water carriers delivering their daily bamboo supply went unobtrusively to work placing *datura* roots beneath each Naga house, returning after dark to ignite them and stupefy those above. When the fumes had dispersed, they crept back to collect every Naga weapon in sight and bring them to Rogon's Rise for later distribution to each Rakssassa setting forth on the Causeway of Coom.

The Rakssassa attacking force was drawn up on rafts and *perahus* at one end of Luagan Teraja, each warrior painted bright blue with distinctive face markings in red, yellow and white according to the custom of each tribe – all eleven tribes, led by *Dakinis*, united by identical dark red war hats surmounted by peacock feathers. Above them, like wavering balloons of phosphorous, floated the demons.

At the far end of the lake, illuminated by *damar* flares, rested a massive bamboo bird – a towering reconstruction of King Ravana's aerial peacock chariot. Whoever set forth in conquest from Ravana's famed *Pushpakha* would be infused with demoniac strength and courage. The peacock's great wings, covered with tree bark, were painted in mixed shades of blue and green; its eyes bright rock crystals; its beak high above the lake to serve as a diving board for each rededicated soldier to

leap and be cleansed, the water of Luagan Teraja giving him immunity from pain as he rushed across blazing coals towards the Rise of Rogon, there to seize a weapon, pass between the storm bamboos of Kinarahengan and move onward to the Causeway of Coom. It was a form of divine initiation conceived by Varuna, a sacred rite designed to accomplish victory and unite the Baram Rakssassas for evermore.

*Damar* lamps on the peacock's crown and along both wings were lit in readiness for the gathering mist which, swirling past, might soon hide it from view; and above the lamps, huge moths with tissue paper wings performed a dance of sacrifice, flying too close to the flames, catching fire, and sizzling momentarily as they fell into the water. Around the long lines of *damar* torches held by the Rakssassas, and around the demons themselves, the same whirl of pale wings could be seen.

As the great moon rose above the trees, the big drums began to thunder, soon to be joined by gongs, the signal for the entire force of Rakssassas to move the full length of the lake eventually to rest below the Pushpakha where on a raft *Samathai* the Shaman of the Birds stood with his blow-pipe spear awaiting his guests. Along each side of the great raft, seated by small lamps, were Rakssassa girls with *balong* flowers in their hair ready to beat out the rhythm of war with their bamboo stampers; and in the foreground, girl musicians in a row sat to welcome the guests with enchanting tunes on the *kulintangan*, rows of small gongs made of polished *sedaman* wood.

*Samathai*, in a simple gesture, lay down his blow-pipe and with both arms held outwards, he slowly brought them together above and in front of his head and gave a slight flip with both hands as a signal. He then took his flute from his *chawat* and as he did so the drums and gongs instantly ceased. In the silence of the moonlight he began to play his own signature tune. From all parts of the sky came the whirring of a myriad wings. Thousands upon thousands of flying foxes flew across the moon and settled on lakeside trees, filling the air momentarily with their raucous chatter. The flute stopped and they fell silent. And then from the direction of Gunong Kinabalu, the moonlight



shining on their wings, flew a single family of hornbills. They came straight to *Samathai* and formed a semi circle on the raft as guardians of the Gods who, by their presence would confer their blessing on the invasion of Coom. As the first of the Gods was sighted, a tiny fleck of silver wings in the dark sky, the great drums began their greeting. It was Singalang Burong in his earthly guise of Brahminy kite, his rich brown feathers becoming visible as he glided onto his perch to the right of *Samathai*. Behind him, making a dramatic entry, with a whoosh of wings, came Rogon, choosing the deceptively innocent form of a white crow, and, in quick succession followed the Wreathed Hornbill of Panataran, and Suprabha, the *Kinnari*, or bird woman, representing Kinarahengan. Each settled on the perches allotted in their honour.

Finally, when the Gods were in position, Kenyalang, Varuna and Temegoh arrived in a *perahu*, Kenyalang and Temegoh moving to places below *Samathai*, and Varuna taking her seat alone at the front. Both Kenyalang and Temegoh were magnificently dressed as Teraja warriors, wearing peacock feathers in their war hats as a symbol of unity with the Rakssasas; and Varuna, in deference to Rakssassa custom, wore a peacock blue and green waist-tied sarong and a Naga coronet surmounting her long black hair.

Suddenly the drumming stopped and all eyes turned to Varuna. She stood, fully expecting at this moment of consecration to hear the voice of Maha Visnu emerge from her throat, but as no overmastering sounds came, she improvised as she would have done at her own shrine in Mendaram, first playing gently on the ravenastrom a succession of exquisite mellifluous notes such as the Rakssasas would never have heard before. She followed this with a Vedic hymn, such a hymn as the great King Ravana would have sung before battle, her voice penetrating the mists with a bell-like sweetness that must have softened even the hearts of demons.

As Varuna finished, she called upon Kenyalang to speak. Conscious of the magnificence of the setting and the honour done to him by the presence of the Gods, Kenyalang spoke with

a fire and certainty in the outcome that he had not felt before. His theme was unity in battle and after battle, with an eventual return to the Baram to practise the ways of Sabayan. He ended by calling on them to be merciful in victory, to remove the Naga's weapons, but to remember Naga skills would be needed to help the Rakssassas in the future; therefore, prisoners lives must be spared and their families well treated.

Varuna sensed the heightened power of Kenyalang's rhetoric and the impatience of Rakssassas and demons alike to surge forward into battle. With a signal to the drums, she began her dance, flinging her sarong away in a violent movement as a thousand shouts of encouragement came from the throats of the entire throng of Rakssassas, and performing a dance of destruction with all the divine energy of Lord Siva. All who saw it marvelled and felt inspired. The soldiers pressed forward behind their *Dakinis* to enter the Pushpakha, leap from its beak into the water, splashing violently as they fell, then rushing through the pathway of flame to the Rise of Rogon where the fresh winds blowing the mists across the lake, entered the storm bamboos of Kinarahengan filling the night air with the powerful music of an organ. Onward they surged to the Causeway and, in single file, with demons bobbing above their heads, they ran across the treetops to their destiny.

The Punan had done their work well: the Causeway was strongly built and the entire force crossed without mishap in two hours – a remarkable achievement for which Kenyalang was deeply grateful. His one moment of grim foreboding came when he saw the family of hornbills who had served as guardians of the Gods, flying above the Causeway from right to left. To him as *Tuai Burong*, indeed to any Teraja, the Hornbill warning would have clearly indicated the need to postpone the invasion and turn back; but Kenyalang was now the prisoner of his own momentum. The forces set in motion could not be reversed. It was too late. Therefore, the warning must be heeded and extreme care taken to avert catastrophe.

As they approached Mendaram, Kenyalang heard the sound of Nageswaram and great drums coming from Cakra

mountain where a ceremony must be in progress. Varuna explained to him that Drona would have ordered a sacrifice to Indra on the night of the full moon to replace her own *Maithuna*, and it was certain that all soldiers loyal to Drona would be present at the ceremony. To Kenyalang this seemed an extraordinary piece of good fortune. As pre-arranged his entire force of Rakssassas and demons assembled by the sacred pool. He ordered the different tribes to envelop the mountain and to attack only when he gave the order. Together, Kenyalang and Varuna crept up through jungle to the summit and saw Drona on Culodaro's throne facing two sacrificial stakes, the entire summit ringed by Naga soldiers. Tied to the stakes were Kajup and Selinka. Soldiers stood by them with *damar* flares awaiting the order to ignite the piles of mangrove surrounding them.

Instantly, with a swift order to Varuna: "You release Selinka." Kenyalang leapt into the open and with swift strokes cut the bonds binding Kajup, handed Kajup his sword for battle, and swung round to face the nearest Naga about to cleave him from head to foot with his up-raised sword, wrenched the sword from his hand and hurled the soldier over the edge of the summit. Varuna quickly released Selinka who ran for her life but was herself over-powered by Naga soldiers and tied to the stake. Meanwhile, Kajup and Kenyalang held off their swords with dazzling dexterity, but it was obvious to Kenyalang they could not hold them off much longer. Raising his voice to its loudest he gave the order to 'Attack'. As he did so, his sword was sent spinning from his hand. Five Nagas seized him and rushed him to the stake to secure him fast. In that moment, Kajup leapt towards Drona. As Drona shouted the order; "Burn them!" Kajup killed him with a single thrust before he too was killed outright by an accurately hurled Naga spear.

As the flames leapt up around them, Kenyalang could see a look of beatific joy on the face of Varuna. This is the way, he knew, she wanted to die. He saw through the smoke the entire summit of Cakra mountain filled with Rakssassas and demons, and above their heads, a myriad shapes of flying foxes. And, in that moment before he died, he knew that Coom would grant

them victory. His last thought was that he would soon be reunited with Varuna in Sabayan.

For Temegoh, commanding the Rakssassas and demons attacking the mountain, the destruction of the Nagas seemed inevitable. The enemy was decimated rapidly by overpowering force; but, in the confusion, Temegoh himself was sent spinning by an over-zealous demon and fell unconscious. This act of seeming treachery gave cause for instant retaliation by the Rakssassas who hurled their spears in fury at the demons, some striking flying foxes in flight who screeched in pain and began attacking the Rakssassas. The demons simplest expedient was to set fire to the long hair of the Rakssassas, burning and destroying many in great numbers. Everywhere there was pandemonium. Those few Rakssassas who survived, fled the scene only to see the Causeway of Coom going up in flames. These were compelled to return through the swamps to their homes on the Baram. The demons continued on the rampage right up the Rampayoh valley setting fire to Naga houses and destroying women and children. Others, determined to complete the full work of vengeance, flew back across the treetops to the Baram and destroyed everything in sight.

The only ones to survive the holocaust were the passive Punans whose modest role had been to help others; *Samathai*, their leader; a few Rakssassas who returned to burned-out longhouses; Utama who had been meditating in his cave; and Temegoh who recovered from the blow he sustained in battle, wandering in shock among the litter of burned bodies scattered across the summit of Cakra mountain. He shuddered to find among them the charred bodies of *Dakinis*, once beautiful, now no more. Dazed and bewildered that so much devastation could be so swift and total, he took the familiar path back to Teraja where he received comfort and love from the few elderly people left behind to care for their grandchildren.

Temegoh's state of shock lasted for more than a year. *Samathai* occasionally came through the jungles to visit him, but the horrors which had seared deeply into Temegoh's memory had blotted all else from his mind. During the nights, he was

delirious. In day time, in rational moments, he was able to discuss what went wrong, but the effort to recall proved too painful for him, and he relapsed into stupor.

At first, he could not believe that Kenyalang and Varuna had really died. He felt sure they were on a journey and would soon return, but months passed, and Temegoh was forced to accept the truth of *Samathai's* words. What had made his condition more difficult was his insistence that the entire blame for the failure of the invasion should fall upon himself. All was going well until he was struck and lost consciousness.

"Then it was not your fault," argued *Samathai*.

"I shouldn't have ignored the omen of the hornbills," replied Temegoh. "They flew past us from right to left above the causeway of Coom. That was a warning for me to stop the invasion and wait, but I was too excited, too proud, too eager. I had to go on."

"Was that the only warning?" asked *Samathai* who realised it was grave enough. Temegoh thought a while.

"Perhaps the orchids," he said. "I was expecting them to uplift us with beautiful music. Instead, they were crying out in pain. I am sure now they were damaged by the demons determined to upset your Punans."

"You don't think their cries were a warning from Coom?"

"Who can tell," said Temegoh. "What is in the mind of Coom? Perhaps he was tired of our stupid head-hunting. Kenyalang had failed. Perhaps Coom ordered Rogons and his demons to destroy us!"

"It is strange that you should think that," said *Samathai*. "Rogon often used to say: *It is my job to destroy: it is Kinarahengan's to rebuild*. Perhaps Coom now wants you to start all over again."

Temegoh rejected his old friend's suggestion with a shrug, and offered him another drink of *tuak* while a small girl and boy rushed past to play with *tapang* fruits.

"You see that boy," said Temegoh. "That's all that's left of Kenyalang."

"You mean - his son?" asked *Samathai*.

"By one of the girls," replied Temegoh. "You know Kenyalang slept with many in his time. Of course, he never married."

"I know," said *Samathai*. "The boy looks like his father."

He goes every day to take food to Utama. The old man still lives in his cave on top of Cakra mountain. He teaches the boy and tells him stories. That's what Kenyalang would have wanted."

The children climbed down the house-ladder and silence returned to the longhouse.

After more than a year had passed, *Samathai*, on one of his visits to Teraja, noticed a change in Temegoh's behaviour. Temegoh actually welcomed him with a smile. *Samathai* put it down to the end of the Monsoon: weeks of rain had sapped the spirit; food was difficult to obtain; and the longhouse had been in perpetual gloom. When the rains stopped, the sun once again shone upon the glistening leaves of Teraja and lit the clear, deep pools of the river.

Temegoh went out hunting after wild pigs, and with each expedition his strength and enthusiasm returned. On the very evening before *Samathai's* arrival, Temegoh had been seated on the longhouse verandah watching the red globe of the sun disappear into the trees; but, as he did so, he saw directly in front of the sun a sight so auspicious, so full of hope, that he leapt up and called the children with the magic shout: "Kenyalang!" An entire formation of hornbills spread out across the valley as they passed from left to right, calling loudly as they came. "Kenyalang! Kenyalang!" the children shouted while Temegoh stood in wonder, his heart surging with astonishment and gratitude.

When, in the morning, *Samathai* saw the total change in Temegoh, he said: "I have been talking to my people. They have agreed to come to Teraja for awhile if you need their help."

"That is wonderful," responded Temegoh. "Last night I saw the hornbills, and in my sleep I dreamt that we were erecting the house posts for a new longhouse at Mendaram where

our old home used to be before the Nagas came. Lang, the kite, came to watch us at work, sitting there on a *temiang* bamboo as if he had come to confer a blessing. Then I heard the sharp cry of Tumok above my head. I could scarcely believe it. He was so excited, he couldn't keep still. "It's too cold on Kinabalu," she said. "Now the rains have stopped, I'll come to Mendaram and be your *ngarong*. She actually said Mendaram as if she knew what was in my mind! Then I woke up this morning and you were here, but no Tumok?"

"Ah, but there you may be wrong," said *Samathai* with that mischievous smile of the olden days. "Tumok saw me in a *perahu* on my way here and asked if you had recovered enough for him to give you the help you need."

"And what did you say?" asked Temegoh; and, as he spoke, the children crowded eagerly to hear the answer.

"I told him that one day you would be ready. Perhaps not quite yet, but one day," *Samathai* smiled teasingly, and the children groaned.

"So Tumok flew back to Kinabalu," said Temegoh with acute disappointment.

"No, silly, I'm here!" said Tumok, appearing suddenly. "Someone's got to look after you."

The longhouse once again rang with laughter as it had done so often in the days of Temegoh's youth.

"Your first job, Tumok, is to call my Punans to Mendaram," said *Samathai*. "Can you fly there tomorrow morning?"

"What does Temegoh say?" asked Tumok.

All eyes turned to him in expectation, and Temegoh was aware of the historic importance of the moment. With excitement and urgency in his voice, he said: "Please go *now* Tumok, *now*. The old world has died. Together we must build a new one!"

