

# THE FALL OF INRAMONDA

## CHAPTER ONE

### *The Green Man*

“Oh!” said Francis Ardan Jr., as he saw a canoe appear, dragged at a vertiginous speed by the subterranean current he was studying.

In fact, he had no time to say anything else before he heard the fragile vessel smashing apart against the rocks a few meters below him.

He climbed down, using a barely visible path that wound between blocks of granite. He immediately saw that the canoe was now nothing more than a pile of matchsticks. Next to it was an apparently lifeless man, his head fractured at the temple with a thin trickle of blood flowing down his face.

“No one could have survived such a shock,” thought Ardan. “But I wonder if I’m hallucinating? This man’s face is *green!*”

Surprised by this bizarre detail, the young man quickly climbed back up the path and ran to where he knew he would find his father. He didn’t even think about the possibility that the man from the canoe might have just been knocked out from hitting the rocks, or simply fainted. He’d lost all his impetus because of the man’s oddly colored face.

Francis Ardan Jr. was the type of man who possessed all the characteristics necessary to take on daring adventures and explorations. His father, Francis Ardan Sr., was a wealthy industrialist and archeologist. They were studying the Laniang valley in Upper-Siam, almost at the Chinese border. According to certain ancient texts that Sr. had discovered in the main library in Bangkok, the valley hid a buried treasure trove of ancient monuments of incalculable value.

Only 20, the young man already had a doctorate in earth sciences. He was also fluent in both Mandarin and Siamese, making him an incredible asset in his father’s search.

Ardan Sr. was known world-wide. At 52, he still maintained his youthful exuberance. He had already carried out several other missions in Siam, and each time brought back such valuable information that the scientific world had honored him multiple times. When he noticed his son breathlessly running towards him, he was examining a flat stone engraved with ancient characters.

“Clearly,” he said to himself, “it’s an incomplete text... the writing is extremely old... but, why is Francis running like that? I was just getting somewhere with all this.”

He stopped his inner dialogue when his son reached him.

“So? Are you trying for some kind of world record?” he asked.

The younger man, still out of breath, spoke with difficulty,

“A man was just killed... in the underground stream... his face was green... really, really green!”

Ardan Sr. looked at his son in shock.

“A *green* face?” he repeated, “You aren’t imagining things by any chance, are you, son?”

The young doctor, who had now caught his breath, answered:

“Come and see for yourself, father. I looked at him carefully, since as far as I know there isn’t any such thing as a green man, but it appears I was wrong.”

Ardan Sr. regretfully abandoned his rock, although he took the time to carefully hide it under a covering of moss.

As the two men made their way to the body, the younger man recounted everything that had happened. The archeologist was very familiar with the underground stream that surged from between the rocks to create a torrent through the forest. He knew that the water level was barely twenty-four centimeters below the vault and wondered how a boat could have maneuvered through it when there wasn't any river feeding it from upstream.

When they reached the green man, who was stretched out at the base of a rock, they saw that he had opened his eyes.

The stranger saw two faces bending over him and spoke several unintelligible words. But while not understanding them, the archeologist thought they were an ancient dialect spoken on the island of Malacca six hundred years earlier!

Ardan Sr. repeated, "Escape... condemned to death... *Raja Api*... Blue Elephant..."

The green man uttered a deep sigh, his body shook a last time before he collapsed. He was dead.

"There's nothing more we can do," said Sr. "Whatever his secret was, he carried it with him to the grave."

"What does *Raja Api* mean?" asked young Francis.

"It means the Fiery King," replied Sr. "If memory serves, it was a nickname given by the Portuguese to the King of Siam around 1600 AD.<sup>1</sup> I wonder why he used that expression. It certainly doesn't describe the current King,<sup>2</sup> who isn't even a direct descendent of *Raja Api*. But what intrigues me the most is that green face of his. That's a real mystery. Also the fact that he spoke in the Ancient Malay tongue. But if somehow we manage to solve it, I can think of plenty of colleagues in Boston and New York who will turn just as green, but with envy!" he finished, laughing.

"Why?" inquired young Ardan.

"Well, old Clérambard, for one, sent a memo to the College de France only last month in which he peremptorily declared that Ancient Malay was now a dead language because he'd never met a native who spoke it, and we've just proven him wrong. Granted, the native in question is dead now, and if we tell people his face as green, no one would ever believe us!"

"There's something else..." said his son.

"What?"

"I could be wrong, but before he died, I thought the green man was trying to point at his heart."

"Maybe he was suffering from heart trouble?"

But young Ardan was now leaning over the body and feeling under his tunic.

"A pouch! He was wearing a small pouch tied around his neck..."

The young man grabbed the pouch and opened it.

"Jade!" he explained pulling out half a dozen green jewels from the pouch.

"And not just any kind of jade, but ancient jade," said his father. "Look at the carvings. These jewels are worth a fortune. How can they be in the possession of someone dressed so poorly..."

The young man continued his search of the body and found an aluminum tube seven inches long and less than an inch diameter. Inside it held a tightly rolled parchment.

Sr. unrolled it, looked at it and whistled.

"This also looks like Ancient Malay. It will take me a while to decipher it..."

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<sup>1</sup> Thailand's designation as Siam by Westerners likely came from the Portuguese. Following their conquest of Malacca in 1511, the Portuguese sent a diplomatic mission to the region. On 15 August 1612, *The Globe*, an East India Company merchant vessel bearing a letter from King James I, arrived in "Syam." By the end of the 19th century, the name had become enshrined in geographical nomenclature. In the 16th century Burmese-Siamese Wars, after the death of the legitimate king of Siam, two of his sons, who had been brought up at the court of Pegu, returned to Siam. The eldest of these, called in the Malay language, *Raja Api*, or the fiery king, set himself up as king of Siam. It was he whom the Portuguese used to call the Black King of Siam.

<sup>2</sup> King Rama VI (1880-1925), who reigned from 1910 to his death. The king was said to prefer the company of men to women, a matter which, of itself, did not much concern Siamese opinion, but which did undermine the stability of the monarchy due to the absence of heirs.

He sat down on a rock, opened his note book and began the arduous work. Meanwhile his son was studying the dead man's skin. Neither water, nor alcohol, seemed to be effective in washing away the green tint.

"Could it be natural and not artificial?" he wondered. "But how...?"

Meanwhile, Sr. was busy deciphering the parchment, muttering unintelligible expressions of frustration under his breath, writing, then angrily, scratching out words in his notebook, not paying the least bit of attention his son's doings.

Finally, after a good hour of this, Ardan Sr. finally sighed deeply, put his notebook down, and rubbed his hand together in glee. His son guessed that he had succeeded in his task.

"So?" he inquired.

"To begin with, this is much older than the Ancient Malay they spoke in the 17th century. My guess is that this writing goes all the way back to the Pre-Christian era. I had to extrapolate quite a bit, based on my knowledge of Sanskrit. If I'm correct, the dead man's name was Jangoma and he wrote this so that, in the event of his death, his story could be told and his soul would rest in peace. A religious man, as you can see. He wrote that he lived in an underground kingdom inhabited by the followers of the Fiery King, where lies the temple of the sacred Blue Elephant. He was sentenced to death because he disobeyed some kind of law—he doesn't say what. He says he knew he would die six months after his escape, assuming he wasn't killed sooner."

"That's a strange thing to write. It's almost as if he knew in advance that he could only survive for six months outside of that mysterious kingdom of his. I don't understand."

"I'm only telling you what he wrote," said Sr., shrugging.

"What a puzzle! A green man who writes in a language from before the Christian era, who's escaped from an underground kingdom inhabited by people from another era... Well, I suppose anything is possible..."

"We're going to look into it," said his father. "Let's carry the body back to the village. We'll ask Doctor Jahor to take a look at it."

They hastily built a litter for the green man's body and, dragging it behind them, taking turns, they walked back to Laniang, where they had made their home base.

There, they fetched Jahor, the local doctor, a thirty-year-old native, small in size but unusually resilient, with eyes sparkling with intelligence. They left the body with him, asking him to perform an autopsy.

Back in their bungalow, Ardan and his father reviewed the events of the day. Sr. had gathered all the documents he had taken with him on their expedition, many of which he had copied from old books kept in the archives in Bangkok. He looked, but in vain, for a reference to a "Temple of the Blue Elephant."

"Nothing," he said finally. "But I do know that the so-called Blue Elephant was a sacred animal in Siam at the time of their first contact with the West. It is possible, after all, that there's a temple dedicated to it somewhere in the region..."

They continued their discussion for a good hour. Suddenly, young Ardan motioned his father to stop talking. Stealthily he got up from his chair, rushed to the door and opened it wide.

There was a small cry; behind it, one of the villagers, a man named Jambi, had been spying on their conversation.

Thus discovered, he ran off.