

The Merry Misogynist

Colin Cotterill

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Colin Cotterill's Dr. Siri Paiboun is back for his sixth adventure. The seventy-three-year-old is the only medical examiner in Laos in the mid-1970s, but he'd rather be out solving crimes than working in his lab. In *The Merry Misogynist*, Siri investigates the gruesome murder of a beautiful young woman who was brought to his office, while also tracking down a missing homeless eccentric and negotiating with the communist government to keep possession of his house. He is helped along the way by his motley staff, his friend the police inspector, and his wife Daeng.

Although Cotterill allows readers inside the murderers' head in alternating chapters, Phan's true identity is kept secret until the very end. Armed with a government job that allows him to travel and spend time away from prying eyes, Phan drives to rural areas of Laos with forged documents, seducing and "marrying" poor young women, then ritualistically murdering them and leaving their bodies in the woods. The girls' families are overjoyed when their daughters are taken away by the apparently charming and successful young man; because of the nation's disorganized criminal justice system they are left unaware that the girls have been murdered. Siri and his team are able to overcome the obstacles and use the killers' consistent *modus operandi* to track him down.

Meanwhile, the homeless, nude, and apparently insane "Crazy Rajid" has gone missing. The man is a fixture of the community, and Siri and his friends notice his absence. They track down his father and follow a series of clues left by the homeless man who is actually quite brilliant in some ways.

Along the way, readers learn about the politics of Laos, including the fact that religion has been all but outlawed, the mail service is sorely compromised, and although Siri owns a house, it is closely watched since he is a government employee. Now that he spends most of his time at Daeng's noodle shop, he's in danger of losing the luxurious villa where he has allowed a bunch of vagabonds to stay.

Familiarity with the previous books in the series would certainly be helpful, but the book is accessible to first-time readers of Siri Paiboun. It is easy to fall into Siri's circle of friends and pick up on their humor. Despite its sometimes dark subject matter, *The Merry Misogynist* is funny and truly entertaining.

WHITNEY HALLBERG (June 12, 2009)

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