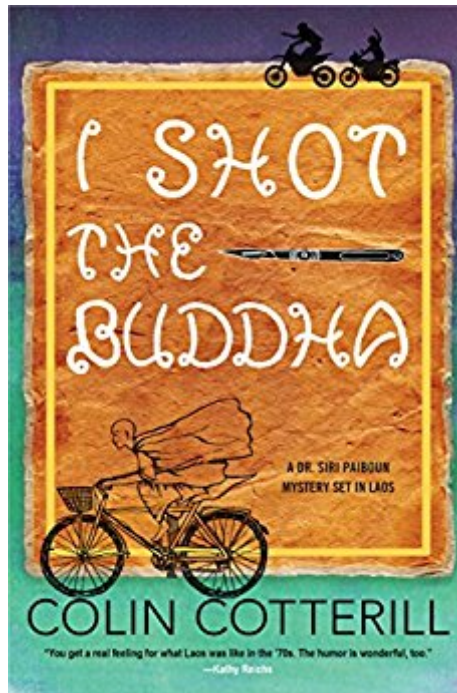


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I Shot The Buddha (A Dr. Siri Paiboun Mystery)



Synopsis

A fiendishly clever mystery in which Dr. Siri and his friends investigate three interlocking murders and the ungodly motives behind them. Laos, 1979: Retired coroner Siri Paiboun and his wife, Madame Daeng, have never been able to turn away a misfit. As a result, they share their small Vientiane house with an assortment of homeless people, mendicants, and oddballs. One of these oddballs is Noo, a Buddhist monk, who rides out on his bicycle one day and never comes back, leaving only a cryptic note in the refrigerator: a plea to help a fellow monk escape across the Mekhong River to Thailand. Naturally, Siri can't turn down the adventure, and soon he and his friends find themselves running afoul of Lao secret service officers and famous spiritualists. Buddhism is a powerful influence on both morals and politics in Southeast Asia. In order to exonerate an innocent man, they will have to figure out who is cloaking terrible misdeeds in religiosity.

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Customer Reviews

It's always a pleasure to visit with Dr. Siri and his friends, and *I Shot the Buddha* is no exception (even though I still hear Eric Clapton singing "I Shot the Sheriff"). Colin Cotterill has taken a rather

dire period of Laotian history and peopled it with a memorable cast. He has a rare talent for combining truth and humor-- showing how miserable life under Communism in Laos could be, having us feel it, and then making us laugh about it all. To some this may sound callous, but it's not. People living in want and drudgery will often find the humor in day-to-day living; it's human nature. And while readers may laugh, they will also remember. Although Dr. Siri, his wife, and his group of friends are all marvelous characters, I think Mr. Geung is my favorite. Mr. Geung has Down syndrome. He earns a living. He's in a good relationship. He's hard-working, kind, loving, and funny. He can also make observations that help Siri solve his investigations. Not only that, but Mr. Geung is probably the happiest character of them all. He is a man to respect, and I do. I also have a great deal of affection for him. See? That's one of Cotterill's greatest strengths: creating characters that worm their way into our hearts. *I Shot the Buddha* has one of Cotterill's trademark convoluted plots that's enjoyable to read all the way to its conclusion. I do worry though. Dr. Siri is almost eighty-- how many more investigations are in store for him? Slow Father Time down as much as possible, Mr. Cotterill. I want these wonderful characters to hang on for as long as possible!

Cotterill just keeps getting better and better. In *I Shot the Buddha*, all the several Dr Siri characters we've come to love get major roles. At one point there are three investigations going on, each by a different one of our heroes. All involve animism, for which Cotterill apologizes before you start reading, but you're reading a book that takes place in Southeast Asia, and even if animism "isn't valid," it is to the people who live there, which then provides its existence. The stories all take place in the late 1970s in Laos, and I suppose that Dr Siri is no longer alive. But he's certainly with us, and I hope we can keep reading of his exploits until I'm not. After that, you're on your own.

I am always happy to see a new book in this series. I have them all and have given copies to friends and family. Cotterill does a great job of portraying Laos shortly after the 1975 communist takeover and provides plenty of background on the decades leading to the fall of the "dominoes." His dialog and character development is totally believable and likely provides an accurate picture of life in the lackluster socialist paradise. He injects plenty of humor into his stories, which is probably a necessity for survival in Laos. What really surprises me is that I have a low tolerance for spiritualism or the occult in anything I read, but somehow Cotterill makes it work as an integral part of his storylines. His novels are absorbing, funny, and enlightening. Nothing will ever make me nostalgic for my time in Vietnam during the war. But Cotterill's books provide a perspective from both the communist and anti communist Laotians, points out the follies of leaders on both sides, and shows

us what happened after Southeast Asia fell and communism took over the entire world. Oh yeah, that last thing didn't actually happen.

Like all the Dr. Siri books, I found this installment, *I Shot the Buddha*, hard to put down from the moment I began reading until the surprising conclusion. I love spending time with Siri Paiboun and friends (and even his dog Ugly, who figures largely in this novel). And I admire Colin Cotterill's imagination and ability to combine humor with a serious look at the shortcomings of Lao and Thai cultures in the 1970s. Cotterill also has an amazing ability to send Siri, Comrade Civilai, and Inspector Phosi and his wife Nurse Dtui off on different investigations that end up being connected in unexpected ways. However, I believe that complexity does not work as well in this book as in previous Dr. Siri books. There are more murders than the three mentioned in the blurb for this book and introduced in its first chapter. The three murders in the first chapter don't come back into the story for a while, so I had to keep looking back at the first chapter and using the Kindle search function to keep track of the murders. The second chapter begins two weeks earlier than the first, which is a tipoff that Cotterill will be playing with time in this novel, but that innovative attempt also makes the plot(s) harder to follow. Also unusual for mystery novels, Cotterill includes a mental health warning to forewarn readers of his heavy use of supernatural elements. On the other hand, the last pages of the previous novel, *Six and a Half Deadly Sins*, are clarified by explanations in this novel. I encourage faithful readers of the Dr. Siri series to read this one as well, but *I Shot the Buddha* would not be a good place to begin an acquaintance with Siri Paiboun and friends. Three and a half stars.

Colin Cotterill is a magnificent story teller. I love his style. I love Doctor Siri and his little problem with those pesky Phiboh. *I Shot the Buddha* is the best yet with a cast of characters best described as brave, loyal and a bit gonzo. And the book ends with a huge bang. All a reader could ask for and more.

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