



Six and a Half Deadly Sins

Colin Cotterill

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Laos, 1979: Dr. Siri Paiboun, the twice retired ex-National Coroner of Laos, receives an unmarked package in the mail. Inside is a handwoven *pha sin*, a colorful traditional skirt worn in northern Laos. A lovely present, but who sent it to him, and why? And, more importantly, why is there a severed human finger stitched into the *sin*'s lining?

Siri is convinced someone is trying to send him a message and won't let the matter rest until he's figured it out. He finagles a trip up north to the province where the *sin* was made, not realizing he is embarking on a deadly scavenger hunt. Meanwhile, the northern Lao border is about to erupt into violence—and Dr. Siri and his entourage are walking right into the heart of the conflict.

Six and a Half Deadly Sins Details

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Author : Colin Cotterill

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From Reader Review Six and a Half Deadly Sins for online ebook

Heidi Burkhart says

This was a reread....loved it.

Cathy Cole says

From its punny title to its very last sentence, I loved immersing myself in the world of septuagenarian Dr. Siri Paiboun once again. There's no other character quite like him in all of crime fiction, and the rest of the characters Colin Cotterill has created are every bit as wonderful. Time has passed since the last book (The Woman Who Wouldn't Die), and the Communist government hasn't been kind to Dr. Siri's friends and former co-workers, but they're all managing to work with what they've been given. Moreover, it would seem that what they've been given is pretty dull because they're more than happy to help Siri in his latest investigation.

One of the things I love about this series is its glimpse into the culture of Laos and of life in a Communist regime. In Six and a Half Deadly Sins I learned what a precarious position Laos was in at that time due mainly to its location-- surrounded by Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, and China. Three of those countries would have been more than happy to gobble this poor country up, and all any of them would need was the smallest excuse.

The mystery in this book completely engaged my interest because it kept changing as more information was learned. No one is whom they appear to be-- even the good guys-- and this isn't always a bad thing. Cotterill kept me guessing, and he certainly had me worried for Siri's safety.

If you're new to this series, you should be able to read this book as a standalone and still enjoy it, but I would recommend beginning with the very first book, The Coroner's Lunch. What you'll learn about the culture and the time period is invaluable, but it's the humor and the characters who will take hold of your heart. Colin Cotterill's Dr. Siri Paiboun series is essential reading for me, and I sincerely hope that it becomes that for you, too.

Sandra Snook says

I am sad that I am now all caught up with the Siri mysteries - sure hope there are more coming. They are exceptional because:

- they have a diverse, interesting cast of characters that you grow to care for.
- the setting in 1970's post revolutionary Laos is fascinating. This series sent me to read up on the history of SE Asia more than once and is in itself historically and culturally accurate. I enjoyed learning about the Laotian peoples and cultures, including the mysticism.
- the mystery plots were engaging and usually had me stumped or not bothering to guess the answer before the real ending - complex, witty, even sometimes belly laugh funny, yet serious, deep and heart wrenching at times.

Gail Baugnet says

When authors entertain me from cover to cover, this solidifies my belief that the art of writing is fun. Every writer knows to balance reading with writing. How easy that goal is to meet with books that are fun to read - from cover to cover; books like Six And A Half Deadly Sins.

Six And A Half Deadly Sins by author Colin Cotterill is a Dr. Siri Paiboun mystery set in Laos. When I learned that Mr. Cotterill was invited to be a guest speaker at the 2017 Left Coast Crime Conference in Honolulu (another event where you can have fun being a writer), I looked for his books at the main library on King Street. How lucky of me to have found this book, one of my “fun-est” reads of the year.

Dr. Siri Paiboun’s witticisms make him a loveable character who never becomes overbearing or boring. The novel’s humor is subtle, woven into the fabric of the story. It creeps up on you with a quick punch while the action continues to move forward, leaving you to catch up.

Retired coroner Siri and his wife are the quintessential happily-married couple; their love undying. When the doctor receives a mysterious package containing a handwoven skirt, known as a “pha sin” with a human finger sewn into the hem, it sends them on a scavenger hunt of clues around the countryside of Northern Laos.

Adventure within the pages, the historical narrative, clever clues, and dangers encountered along the way make this a unique mystery. Another Dr. Siri Paiboun Mystery will be available on August 2, 2016, I Shot the Buddha. With a fun title like that, how can I resist?

Lynn says

This series is fun to read and still producing a nail-biter with book #10.

Calzean says

Dr Siri and his gang are back. A little bit older and now in retirement, Siri seems to be more relaxed and cheeky. His exploits are in the north of Laos at a time Vietnam has invaded Cambodia and in turn was invaded by China.

It’s a fun book that pokes fun at the struggling Laos government, is cleverly written, provides some graphic murders and a lot of the power of the friendship that Dr Siri and his menagerie of waifs and orphans bring to each other.

Cyndi says

This was an amusing, well structured tale of a treasure hunt gone awry. Lots of interesting elements, good flow and as ever, focus on the dry and wonderful humor of the 3 elder friends. Siri and Daeng are a love

story for the ages.

David says

I love the character of Dr. Siri Paiboun, so I hope the end of this book still leaves open the possibility of future books in this series. This speaks to the power of character-driven stories, as I continue to read these books even as the mayhem level rises, because I cannot resist spending time with the characters. These books are so impressive in their combination of politics, history, and plot with charming characters and humor, I would hate to see the series come to an end, and hope the author keeps up the good work.

LJ says

First Sentence: On December 25, 1978, the concrete public-address system pole in South That Luang's Area Six unexpectedly blue itself up, a Lao skirt with a severed finger sewn into the hem passed through the national postal system unchallenged and Vietnam invaded Cambodia.

Things have changed in Laos. Dr. Siri is no longer the national coroner—there isn't one—has his team has been disbanded. That doesn't mean his curiosity is any less sharp. When he receives an anonymous package containing a traditional Northern Laotian skirt and a severed finger, Siri and his wife, with the help of friends and a couple of spirits, set off following a trail of clues against a brutal adversary and a potentially unseen killer.

Even if you're not read a previous Dr. Siri book—which would be a shame—one cannot help but be charmed by him and his friend Civilai. Then you set the two of them next to the time period of Laos in 1979, and you know you're in for something different and special. In spite of Siri's increasing age, it's clear he has lost none of his skills of negotiation.

Cotterill does an excellent job of introducing his characters, providing their backgrounds and an understanding of the relationships. This is particularly important for those who come into the series with this book. His descriptions of people make you smile, but also impress the character clearly in your mind... "The choirmaster was an elderly balding version of what Santa Claus might have looked like after a crash diet."

He also provides a good sense of where and when we are in history. Kudos to the Soho Crime for providing a map at the front of the book. In addition to the wonderful descriptions... "There was far more action in that sky than there was on the ground, meteoroids shooting back and forth like drunken fireflies." ...He also makes you stop and think... "Driving alone on bad roads gave a man far too much time to weigh the good against the bad. Bad invariably won, though." ...and the Chinese attitude toward war... "They win wars by sending in wave after wave of expendable militia until the enemy runs out of bullets. It's like Stalin said, 'One death is a tragedy. A million deaths is a statistic.'"

"Six and a Half Deadly Sins" takes you down a seemingly innocent road. And then, the road turns to dark and dangerous with the danger and threat steadily increasing all the way to the end.

SIX AND A HALF DEADLY SINS (Lic Invest-Dr. Siri Paiboun-Laos-Contemp) – G+
Cotterill, Colin – 9th in series
Soho Crime – May 2015

Orinoco Womble (tidy bag and all) says

I devoured this in a single Saturday. I was catching cold and felt like death, and wanted a good read. This was it.

Why has someone sent Dr Sri a pha sin with a human finger sewn into the lining? Where is Phosy? And why did he tell Dtui to go into hiding?

A fitting end to the Sri Paiboun series. It took me a bit to catch on to the joke in the title, but as I say, I'm not well. ;) The plotting is good, and even the cuts between people/plot threads weren't quite as abrupt and "made for TV" as some other installments. The ending is a bit choppy, and I found myself having to go back and re-read the last few pages, but I was running a low fever so that may have been it.

I was surprised by some of the odd language Cotterill used; his proofreaders must either be under 25 or have taken the day off. We are told that "religious ceremonies *fell under the auspices* of superstitious nonsense." Oh? does superstitious nonsense sponsor religious ceremonies? No dear it does not. Therefore those ceremonies might "fall into the category" of nonsense, but not "under its auspices." At one point Sri "walks up a ladder" onto the front deck of a house. Granted he's a bit old for climbing, but surely that's the right verb for a ladder--and surely an author with so many novels to his credit should know that? Let alone saying that Phosy "would *stop heaven and earth* to do (X)." The phrase is "move heaven and earth"--at least, up to now.

And then there's the fact that his Laotians talk like Americans in spots. I doubt that a 1979 Laotian village gas-station attendant would say a truck had "bull bars the size of Alaska"; I doubt he would know Alaska existed. Let alone saying that someone had "a frog's chance in a French restaurant of that happening." They eat a lot of frogs in S. E. Asia, according to my Cambodian cousin-in-law; I have pictures of her, cooking some up. Surely if Cotterill spent the amount of time there he claims to, he would know that.

But hey, it was a good enough light read for a day when I needed entertainment. I will miss the series, but of course all things come to an end.

dianne says

Funny, cleverly plotted story, sprinkled with delightful observations:

"Now, anyone who's ever engaged a monk in a gunfight will know a saffron body cloth does not lend itself to a quick draw."

"...a nebulous aid group by the name of Physicians Eschewing Agendas...had been invited to stay on in the country and do...whatever it was they'd been doing before the takeover. Nobody was too clear what that was. But brotherhood had to be rewarded."

"One of the elders, a ginseng root of a man...."

This book is the most recent in a series about a Laotian coroner who loves a good mystery. i will definitely be reading another.

Dorothy says

Finally! Another Dr. Siri mystery. It seems like I've been waiting for this forever.

We rejoin Dr. Siri Paiboun and his cohorts in late 1978. Dr. Siri's second resignation from the position of national coroner of Laos seems to have taken. The up side of this is that Dr. Siri is now retired. The down side is that Laos now has no national coroner.

Retirement has not in any way dulled Dr. Siri's curiosity or his appetite for solving mysteries, so when the postman delivers a package to him that contains a traditional Laotian skirt that has a severed human finger sewn into the hem, he is, naturally, intrigued and determined to find out who sent it and what it means. From the pattern woven into the skirt, he is able to deduce that its origin is somewhere in the north of Laos. He proposes to his wife that they go on an adventure to the north of the country and trace the source of the mystery.

Travel in Laos in the late 1970s is not easy. Neither is communication. Two elderly people heading out from Vientiane to the north face many challenges, but these two have long experience of the newly established socialist society that they fought for throughout decades and they are talented "fixers." They make the trip, arrive in the north, and begin following the clues that they have.

This is a time when Vietnam (at long last) has just invaded Cambodia to overthrow the Pol Pot regime. China, Pol Pot's ally, has, in turn, invaded Vietnam and, possibly, Laos, as well. Things are very confused in the north.

Coincidentally (or is it?), Siri's friend, the policeman Phosy, has been sent to the north to investigate the deaths of two headmen from two neighboring villages there. After Siri and his wife leave Vientiane, Siri's oldest friend, Civilai, the former government functionary and erstwhile spy, is also sent north to gather intelligence regarding the possible invasion by China. Soon enough, the entire Dr. Siri team, except for Nurse Dtui, is in the north, pursuing clues of various mysteries, which gradually coalesce into one single mystery. The mystery of human depravity.

These stories are such a joy to read. It's almost impossible to pick a favorite part, but, if pressed, I would probably say that my favorites are the scenes between Siri and Civilai as they sit on their favorite log by the Mekong having their lunch. Talking over the events of the day and the past and philosophizing about the state of affairs and the future of Laos - priceless! The humor is often laugh-out-loud funny.

Also, I have to say that I very much appreciate the way that Colin Cotterill weaves the troubled history of Southeast Asia into these stories, much as those weavers of the traditional fabrics at the heart of this mystery weave different strands and colors to make a whole picture.

Cotterill also is very skillful in giving us sketches of his characters so that, even if you haven't read the previous nine books in this series, you are not lost. You are able to follow along with the action and get the gist of the personalities involved. That being said, PLEASE read this series from the beginning and read the books in order. It will make the stories much more meaningful, and you don't want to miss a single minute or a single sentence of Dr. Siri and friends.

Six and a Half Deadly Sins starts as an interesting jaunt in the country for Siri and his wife. Before the end, the story turns really dark and dangerous and we are reminded of some of the sadder bits of history. In that regard, China, Siri says, "win(s) wars by sending in wave after wave of expendable militia until the enemy runs out of bullets. It's like Stalin said, 'One death is a tragedy. A million deaths is a statistic.'"

In Dr. Siri's world, any death is a tragedy and a mystery waiting to be solved.

Debra says

Clever title. You'll see once you read the book. Another fine mystery and adventures for Dr. Siri and his friends. I just love the humor and slice-of-life way of living in Laos. This series is one of my favorites.

Pat says

warning I love this series so this is a biased review.

Reading a Dr. Siri Paiboun novel is for me like visiting an old friend. The characters continue to age and evolve as Dr. Siri, his wife Madame Daeng and long time friend Civilai try to solve mysteries in the exotic location of communist Laos. These main characters are in their sixties and seventies and seem to muddle through all of the complexities of Laos as the government builds during the late 1970's. I have seen this series referred to as a 'cozy' mystery but I find it a bit more complex than that but it is certainly not in the thriller category. Also, the series is best understood if read from the beginning.

Wonderful!

Jennifer (JC-S) says

'It was all a little complicated.'

This is the tenth book in the Dr Siri series and it literally starts with a bang. A concrete public address system mysteriously explodes. Dr Siri Paiboun and Civilai Songsawat are retired, and bored. So when Dr Siri receives a package containing a severed finger in the hem of a traditional Lao skirt (or pha sin), it's a welcome mystery to investigate. The package, of course, contains neither a letter nor a return address which adds an additional challenge. Madame Daeng, Dr Siri's wife is also bored. Life hasn't been the same since an arsonist destroyed the noodle shop, and Madame Daeng knows a thing or two about traditional Lao skirts.

Dr Siri is convinced that someone is trying to send him a message, and with Madame Daeng and Civilai to assist him, he's determined to investigate. First, he needs to arrange a trip to the northern province where this particular pha sin was made. His old friend the judge may be able to help, if Dr Siri can help him first.

'Finally, the judge dismissed the students with the motto, "A good socialist is like a motorcar. At the pump of life, he is fitted with valuable information which he uses to complete his journey. And any information that is contradictory or anticommunist he allows to blow out of his exhaust pipe.'"

When Dr Siri tracks down the origin of the pha sin, he finds an answer in the form of another clue which sends him somewhere else. It's a gruesome scavenger hunt. Dr Siri and Civilai are both ill. And the northern Lao border is about to explode.

‘Good corruption was something perfected over decades. Siri knew it would be back.’

This book includes most of the characters I’ve come to know and love from earlier books in the series. There’s plenty of Dr Siri’s own special brand of humour, lots of commentary on the world, and those pesky challenges that can be a feature of advancing age. Madame Daeng plays a significant role in the war against drugs.

And the ending? Well, there’s a funeral

Jennifer Cameron-Smith
