



PULP CURRY

Website of writer Andrew Nette

Pulp, culture, crime, hardboiled and curried

Marking time in the City of Angels

I always find revisiting a city I've lived in after a long time away a bittersweet experience. In the mid-nineties I spent nearly six years in South East Asia, with my partner Angela Savage, mainly working as a journalist. This included a year living in Bangkok, the abbreviated Thai name for which, *Krung Thep*, literally means "City of Angels".

Happily, one of my favourite late night bar haunts, Check Inn 99, not only still exists, it appears to be undergoing a renaissance of sorts. They have jazz on a Sunday and a group of Bangkok-based crime writers recently held a well attended reading there.

Check Inn 99 is situated on Sukhumvit, just up from Nana Plaza and what is now a bustling Arab quarter, just next to a street stall that sells cheap Tasers and Viagra. The place sports great atmosphere, the best and hardest working Filipino house band in the city, and a historical lineage that goes right back to when Sukhumvit was a dirt road with rice paddies growing at the end of it. One of the new owners, Chris Catto-Smith, has been knocking around Asia for a while himself and is good for a story or two about the establishment. There's the one involving Bob Hope and Bing Crosby, another about Neil Davis, the famous Australian war cameraman who filed from a string of dangerous destinations only to die in September 1985, while filing a relatively minor Thai coup. But try as I might, I couldn't unearth reliable details about the fate of the dwarf doorman who worked at the establishment for many years.

I still love Bangkok, but as if to underscore the point about the changing face of the city, on my way out of town to the airport, the hotel driver tells me the long running hotel I've stayed in on many trips, The Federal on Sukhumvit Soi 11, is closing. The land has been bought and the new owner intends to build a large five star luxury hotel on it. And as for the story about Bob Hope and Bing Crosby, you'll just have to a visit Check Inn 99 and do some digging of your own. I'm not going to do all the work for you.

