

# SANDOKAN

*The Two Tigers*

**Emilio Salgari**

Translated by Nico Lorenzutti

# SANDOKAN

The Two Tigers

***Sandokan: The Two Tigers***

By Emilio Salgari

Original Title: *Le due tigri*

First published in Italian in 1904

Translated from the Italian by Nico Lorenzutti

ROH Press

First paperback edition

Copyright © 2007 by Nico Lorenzutti

All Rights Reserved

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or by any information storage retrieval system, without the written permission of the publisher.

For information address:

[info@rohpress.com](mailto:info@rohpress.com)

Visit our website at:

[www.rohpress.com](http://www.rohpress.com)

Cover design: Nico Lorenzutti

ISBN: 978-0-9782707-4-2

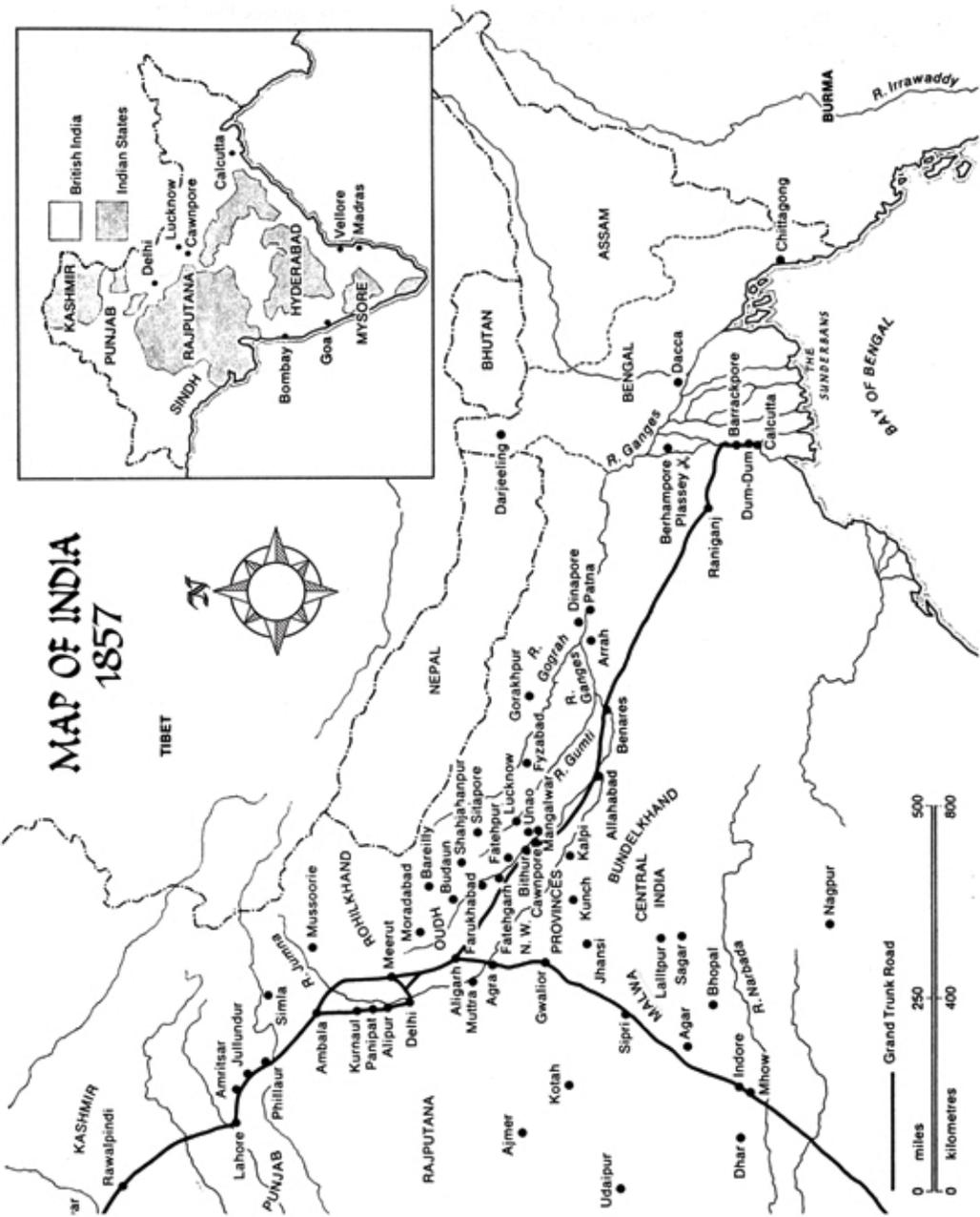
Printed in the United States of America

## Contents

Chapter 1: The <i>Marianna</i> .....	1
Chapter 2: Darma .....	9
Chapter 3: Tremal-Naik.....	16
Chapter 4: The Manti .....	24
Chapter 5: The Festival of Dharmaraja .....	33
Chapter 6: The Devadasi .....	40
Chapter 7: Surama's Tale.....	47
Chapter 8: Sati.....	54
Chapter 9: The Manti's confession.....	60
Chapter 10: A Terrible Battle.....	68
Chapter 11: In the Jungle .....	78
Chapter 12: The Rhinoceros Attacks .....	87
Chapter 13: The Man-Eater.....	94
Chapter 14: The First Tiger .....	103
Chapter 15: In the Sundarbans.....	110
Chapter 16: The Thugs.....	119
Chapter 17: Mysterious Signals.....	130
Chapter 18: The Cyclone .....	136
Chapter 19: The Devadasi Disappears.....	144
Chapter 20: The Tower of Barrekporre .....	152
Chapter 21: The Thugs' Betrayal .....	160
Chapter 22: Sirdar .....	168
Chapter 23: Rajmangal .....	177
Chapter 24: The Thug's Pagoda.....	183
Chapter 25: In the Thugs' Lair .....	191
Chapter 26: The Pirates Attack.....	199
Chapter 27: A Slaughter.....	207
Chapter 28: On Suyodhana's Trail .....	214
Chapter 29: The Indian Insurrection .....	221
Chapter 30: Spies .....	234
Chapter 31: Hunting the Tigers of Mompracem .....	244
Chapter 32: Towards Delhi.....	255
Chapter 33: The Delhi Massacre .....	264

# MAP OF INDIA 1857

TIBET



Grand Trunk Road



# Chapter 1

## *The Marianna*

On the morning of April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1857, the lighthouse keeper at Diamond Harbour signalled the presence of a small unknown vessel that had entered the Hugli during the night.

Judging by the extraordinary size of her sails, she appeared at first glance to be a Malay ship, however, a second look revealed she was no common prahu.

Her hull bore no outrigger to help her counter the wind and waves, and though she must have journeyed far, not a single atap had been erected over the deck to shelter her crew. High sterned and made of steel, she could carry three times as much as any wooden vessel.

Whatever her origin, she was a beautiful ship and with the wind astern could have outrun any steamship in the Anglo-Indian fleet. She was a true racer and, save for her sails, recalled the blockade runners of the American Civil War.

But the lighthouse keeper, had he been watching, would perhaps have been most astonished by her crew, for it was far too large for a vessel of that size.

It seemed as if every bellicose tribe of Malaysia was represented aboard that ship: dark sullen Malays, Bugis, Macassars, Battavians, Negritos from Mindanao, Dyak headhunters from the Bornean jungles, even a few Papuan warriors, their woolly hair adorned with white cockatoo feathers.

Though of different origin, each man was clad in a white knee-length sarong and a kabay, a large jacket well suited for life at sea.

Only two men, the commanders of the vessel, wore clothes of unmatched affluence.

One sat on a large red silk cushion, close to the tiller, his eyes on the water as the ship sailed past Diamond Harbour.

He was tall, handsome and well built, with bronze skin and thick black wavy hair that fell freely about his strong shoulders. He had a high forehead, thin lips, sparkling eyes and a magnificent beard that added to his noble bearing.

An observer could have mistaken him for a Malay prince dressed as he was in a large blue silk cloak embroidered with gold, white pants and long yellow leather boots. His white silk turban was adorned with a small feather, fixed in place by a diamond as large as a walnut.

His companion, leaning against the side, nervously folding and unfolding a letter, was a tall European with fine aristocratic features and cool blue eyes. Though he was only two years older than his friend, his black moustache had already begun to show signs of grey.

He was elegantly dressed, clad in a brown velvet jacket with gold buttons, a thick red silk sash, brocatelle pants and yellow leather boots with gold buckles. A large hat of Manila hemp adorned with small red silk tassels shielded him from the sun.

The ship was about to sail past the lighthouse and the signal tower, when the European, who until then had appeared oblivious to his surroundings, turned towards his companion.

“Sandokan,” he asked, “That’s the pilots’ station. Are we going to hire one?”

“I don’t want any strangers aboard my ship, Yanez,” replied the other, getting up and casting a glance at the building. “We’ll find our own way to Calcutta.”

“You’re right,” said Yanez, after a moment’s reflection, “The slightest indiscretion could arouse Suyodhana’s suspicions.”

“You’ve been here before, how long before we reach Calcutta?”

“We’ll be there before sundown,” replied Yanez. “The tide’s rising and the wind is still favourable.”

“I’m impatient to see Tremal-Naik again. Our poor friend! First his wife, now his daughter!”

“We’ll get her back from Suyodhana; the Tiger of India is no match for the Tiger of Malaysia.”

“Yes,” said Sandokan, his eyes flashing fiercely as a frown formed upon his brow. “We’ll rescue her, no matter the cost. We’ll set India ablaze if we have to. Do you think Tremal-Naik received our message?”

“A telegram always reaches its destination, Sandokan, there’s no need to fear.”

“Then he’ll be waiting for us?”

“I think it’d be best to let him know we’re making our way up the Hugli and that we’ll be in Calcutta by nightfall. He’ll send Kammamuri to meet us; should spare us the trouble of trying to find his house.”

“Is there a telegraph office somewhere along the river?”

“There’s one in Diamond Harbour.”

“At the pilots’ station we’ve just passed?”

“Yes, Sandokan.”

“Very well then, drop anchor; lower a launch and send someone to relay a message. Adding an extra half-hour to our journey won’t make much of a difference. Who knows, the Thugs may be spying on Tremal-Naik’s house.”

“I admire your caution, Sandokan.”

“Write him a message, my friend.”

Yanez tore a sheet of paper from a notebook, pulled a small pencil from his pocket and wrote:

From aboard the *Marianna*  
Mr. Tremal-Naik  
Durumtolah St, Calcutta

We’re sailing up the Hugli. Will arrive tonight. Send  
Kammamuri to meet us. Have him look for our flag.

Yanez de Gomera

“This should do,” he said, showing Sandokan the slip of paper.

“Excellent,” the latter replied, “better your signature than mine. My name may arouse suspicion among the British.”

The ship had come to a stop a half mile from Diamond Harbour. A launch, manned by five men was quickly lowered into the water.

Yanez summoned the helmsman and handed him the message and a pound sterling.

“Not a word about who we are,” he said, speaking in Portuguese. “If anyone asks after your captain, tell them I’m in command.”

The helmsman, a tall, well-built, handsome Dyak, quickly made his way back to the launch, gave the order to cast off and headed towards the pilots’ station.

He returned a half-hour later and announced that the dispatch had been sent.

“Did they ask any questions?” asked Yanez.

“Yes, Captain, but I didn’t say a word.”

“Excellent.”

The launch was quickly hoisted aboard, and the *Marianna* resumed her course, keeping to the centre of the river.

Sandokan had returned to his silk cushion and sat down once again, falling into thought; Yanez, leaning against the aft bulwark, had lit a cigarette and was scanning the shores.

Vast bamboo jungles towered over the river’s majestic banks, covering the swamp-filled Sundarbans, the favourite refuge of tigers, panthers, snakes and crocodiles. Swirls of aquatic birds circled above them but not a soul appeared among those enormous reeds.

Giant herons, large black storks, brown ibises and arghilah, sat perched upon the mangrove branches like rows of soldiers as they went about their morning grooming. Flocks of Brahmin ducks, cormorants and coots frolicked about cheerfully, plunging into the water whenever a school of rohi<sup>1</sup> drew near.

“A beautiful place for a hunt, but a bad place to live,” murmured Yanez, slowly beginning to take an interest in those shores. “They’re no

---

<sup>1</sup> A type of red carp

match for the majestic forests of Borneo. If this is what Suyodhana's Thugs call home, I do not envy them. Reeds, thorns, swamps, swamps, thorns, reeds. Nothing's changed along India's sacred river since my last visit. The British don't appear to be in any hurry to improve the lot of their poorest subjects."

As the *Marianna* continued her advance the scenery slowly began to change. Small groups of mud huts began to appear along the shores, their thatched roofs shaded by large neem and coconut trees. Each village was enclosed by a high wooden fence, probably to protect their inhabitants from crocodile attacks.

Yanez was studying one of those picturesque little places, when Sandokan drew up beside him and asked:

"Is this where the Thugs live?"

"Yes, little brother," replied Yanez.

"I wonder if that village is one of their lairs. See that tower over there? What do you think it is? An observation post?"

"It's a shelter for castaways," replied Yanez.

"Built by who?"

"The Anglo-Indian government. This river is a lot more dangerous than meets the eye, little brother. Enormous sandbanks abound throughout these waters and the current reshapes them continuously; there are more shipwrecks here than there are at sea. Those towers have saved many a poor wretch. Most castaways wouldn't stand a chance against the ferocious animals teeming along these shores. With a little caution they can make it through until the next steamboat comes by to replenish supplies."

"These shores are that dangerous?" asked Sandokan.

"They're infested with wild beasts; I wouldn't be surprised if there are some tigers spying on us from behind those mangroves as we speak. They're a lot more daring than the ones that inhabit our forests; they often dive into the water, attack small vessels, and drag off some poor sailor."

"And the authorities just leave them be?"

“British troops sweep the area from time to time, but they haven’t made much of a dent in the population. There are just too many of those beasts.”

“I have an idea, Yanez,” said Sandokan.

“What kind of idea?”

“I’ll tell you tonight, once we’ve met up with Tremal-Naik.”

The prahu was just then passing before the tower they had been discussing; it rose on the outskirts of a small swampy island, separated from the jungle by a narrow canal.

Though built of planks and bamboo, it was a solid construction almost six metres high. A rope ladder lead to an enclosure at the top. Signs written in French, German, English and Sanskrit advised castaways to ration the provisions in the tower, warning that the supply boat only called once a month.

It appeared empty. There were no castaways at that moment. Several pairs of marabou dozed on the rooftop; their heads nestled between their shoulders, their enormous beaks hidden among their feathers, probably digesting the remains of a corpse that had washed ashore.

The jungle stretched out around them, at times broken by vast grasslands dotted with pools of muddy water. As the afternoon progressed, groups of Molangos began to appear along those cholera-ridden shores, gathering salt from the swampy soil and tiny creeks. A poor tribe, most were little more than skin and bones, trembling with fever as they went about their work.

Every mile the prahu advanced brought a change in scenery along the water. Birds grew rarer and soon only kingfishers could be seen perched upon the reeds, filling the air with their monotonous cries. Boats had begun to appear, a sure sign the opulent capital of Bengal was not far off. Banghe, murpunky, sloops and grabs plied the river, loaded with commodities, as steamships cautiously manoeuvred along the shore.

Towards six, Sandokan and Yanez, now at the bow, spotted Fort William’s imposing ramparts and the tall spires of ancient pagodas peering through the evening mist.

Bungalows and attractive villas, the architecture a mixture of British and Indian design, began to appear in great number along the right bank, their small graceful gardens shaded by groves of coconut and banana trees.

Sandokan ordered Mompracem's flag - a red banner emblazoned with the head of a roaring tiger - hoisted up the mainmast, had the four large firelocks on the bow and the stern stowed out of sight then sent most of the crew below deck.

"Shouldn't Kammamuri have been here by now?" he asked Yanez.

The Portuguese was standing by his side, calmly smoking a cigarette, watching the ships crisscross the river, when suddenly he stretched out an arm towards the right bank and exclaimed:

"That's him now. See that small launch flying Mompracem's flag on its stern?"

Sandokan's eyes had followed Yanez' arm and came to rest upon a small but elegant fylt-sciarra. She was a sleek little vessel with an elephant bust carved into her bow. She was manned by six oarsmen and one helmsman; a red flag emblazoned with the head of a tiger flew from her stern.

She advanced rapidly, deftly making her way through the grabs and sloops crowding the river, heading towards the prahu, which had immediately come to a halt.

"Can you see him?" Yanez asked gleefully.

"The Tiger of Malaysia's eyes haven't weakened too much with age," replied Sandokan. "Our friend is at the tiller. Have the ladder lowered. We'll finally learn how Suyodhana kidnapped Tremal-Naik's daughter."

Within minutes the fylt-sciarra had closed the gap and drawn up beside the ladder hanging over the prahu's port side. While the oarsmen were pulling in their oars and securing the launch to the ship's side, the helmsman scrambled up the ladder with the agility of a monkey and jumped onto the deck.

"Captain Sandokan! Señor Yanez! How happy I am to see you again!" he exclaimed excitedly.

The man that had uttered those words was a tall handsome Indian around thirty or thirty-two years of age with noble almost refined features and deep bronze skin. He was dressed in white, a pair of earrings adorning his ears.

Sandokan pushed away the hand the Indian offered and drew the newcomer towards him saying:

“Embrace me, my brave Maratha.”

“Sir! I.” exclaimed the Indian, stifling a sob, his face pale with emotion.

Yanez, calmer, and more restrained, gave him a vigorous handshake and said, “This is worth as much as an embrace.”

“How’s Tremal-Naik?” Sandokan asked anxiously.

“Ah! Sir!” said the Maratha, stifling a sob. “I fear my master may be going mad! The wretches have taken their revenge!”

“You’ll tell us the full story,” said Yanez. “Where can we drop anchor?”

“Not here, Señor Yanez,” said the Maratha. “The Thugs are watching our every move, the wretches must not learn of your arrival.”

“We’ll advance up the river until you tell us to stop.”

“Best to sail past Fort William and drop anchor in front of the Strand. My crew will guide us in.”

“When can we see Tremal-Naik?” Sandokan asked impatiently.

“After midnight, once the city’s asleep. We have to be careful.”

“Can I trust your men?”

“They’re all able seamen.”

“Have them come aboard, give them command of the prahu, then come below. I want to know all that’s happened.”

The Maratha summoned his men with a whistle, issued his orders then followed Sandokan and Yanez into the main cabin.

## Chapter 2

### Darma

The *Marianna* was a magnificent ship, unrivalled in comfort and design; Sandokan had spared no expense to make her worthy of the name she bore.

The room the men had entered occupied most of the stern. It was papered with red Chinese silk embroidered with flowers of gold thread. An eclectic collection of weaponry adorned the walls: Malay krises with serpentine blades, wide-bladed Dyak parangs and kampilangs; pistols and rifles inlaid with mother-of-pearl, well-crafted Indian carbines, and steel-barrelled blunderbusses, once the weapons of choice of Bugis and Moro pirates.

White silk divans lined the room, an ebony table inlaid with mother-of-pearl stood in the center, a large Venetian lamp hung from the ceiling, casting its soft light upon the three old friends.

Yanez took a bottle from a shelf, filled three glasses with a topaz-coloured liquid then turned to the Maratha who had taken a seat beside Sandokan and said:

“You can speak freely now, no one can hear us. I doubt there are any Thugs swimming along the bottom of the river.”

“I wouldn’t put it past those devils,” sighed the Maratha.

“They won’t be around for much longer, my good Kammamuri,” said Sandokan. “The Tiger of Malaysia set sail from Mompracem to declare war upon the Tiger of India. Now tell us about the kidnapping. Spare no detail.”

“It’s been twenty-four days, sir, since little Darma was taken by Suyodhana’s men. For twenty-four days my master has been at his wit’s

end, mourning his loss without a moment's respite. If your telegram hadn't arrived to announce you'd set sail, he'd have gone mad by now."

"Did he fear we wouldn't have come to help?" asked Yanez.

"There was always the chance you were employed in some ambitious enterprise."

"Times have changed. The pirates of Malaysia have been at rest for quite a while. The glory days of Labuan and Sarawak have long passed."

"Tell us everything, Kammamuri," said Sandokan. "How was Darma taken?"

"With a diabolical sleight of hand, a brilliant example of Suyodhana's infernal genius. When Miss Ada died giving birth to Darma, my poor master was devastated. His daughter became his life; he kept a constant eye on her, afraid the Thugs would harm her to exact their revenge.

"Rumours soon reached our ears. The Thugs, it was said, after having disbanded for a few years to escape the just reprisals of Captain MacPherson's sepoy, had returned to the vast caves beneath the island of Rajmangal. As sacrifices to Kali increased, Suyodhana planned to procure another Guardian of the Temple of the East.

"Those rumours made my master's heart race. He feared those wretches, who had imprisoned his wife for so many years, were making plans to abduct his daughter.

"Unfortunately, his fears were soon confirmed. Well aware of the Thugs' cunning, we had taken great precautions, so that they could not get into the young girl's room.

"We'd put metal bars on her window, reinforced the door with armour plating, and carefully examined the walls to ensure they did not conceal any secret passages.

"Every night I slept in the hall outside the room, along with Darma our pet tiger, and Punthy, a fierce black dog, two brave beasts that had helped us battle the Thugs in the jungle, as you know.

"We spent six anxious months in constant vigilance, but there was never a sign of the Thugs. Then one morning Tremal-Naik received a telegram from Chandernagor. It was signed by a friend, a former rajah

deposed in the last insurgency, now living in exile in the small French colony.

“What did the telegram say?” asked Sandokan and Yanez in unison, not missing a single word of the Maratha’s story.

“Just six words: ‘Come. Must speak to you. Mucdar’”

“My master was great friends with the former prince; the rajah had granted him many favours upon our return to India. Believing the prince was in danger, he left immediately after giving strict orders to keep Darma well guarded.

“Nothing suspicious happened during the day, no signs that Kali’s devotees were planning to abduct the daughter of the former Guardian of the Temple of the East.

“Shortly after nightfall, I received a telegram from Chandernagor that bore my master’s signature. I still remember every word:

“‘Take Darma and leave immediately, she’s in great danger, our enemies are about to strike.’

“Frightened, I immediately went to get Darma and her nurse and set off for the station. I’d received the dispatch at 6:34 and there was a train for Chandernagor and Houghy at 7:28.

“I found an empty compartment; however, minutes before the train was about to leave, two Brahmins got in and sat down across from me. Two stern, imposing men with long white beards, they would have reassured even the most suspicious man.

“We set off without incident, but an hour later, as we passed Sirampur station, the tragedy began to unfold.

“It seemed innocent at first. One of the two Brahmins’ suitcases had fallen. It opened and a small crystal globe filled with flowers fell out and shattered on the floor. The petals scattered about the compartment, but the Brahmins did not bother to pick them up. The two immediately pulled out handkerchiefs and covered their mouths and noses.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Sandokan, taking great interest in that strange story. “Continue, Kammamuri.”

“What happened next,” continued the Maratha, his voice starting to tremble, “I do not know. I felt drowsy, my eyes grew heavy then all

went black. I awoke in the dark, silence reigned throughout the compartment. The train had stopped, but I could hear a whistling sound off in the distance.

“I jumped to my feet and called for Darma’s nurse, but no one replied. I leapt towards the door, it was locked.

“Almost mad with fear, I smashed through the window with my fist, slicing my hand, opened the door and rushed out.

“The train had come to stop on a dead track, no one was around.

“I spotted some lanterns off in the distance and what appeared to be a station. I started to run, yelling: Darma! Ketty! Help! They’ve taken her! The Thugs! The Thugs!

“I was stopped by a few policemen and by some of the station’s employees. At first they thought I was mad, so great was my fear, it took me an hour to convince them otherwise and relate what had happened.

“I wasn’t anywhere near Chandernagor, I was at Houghy station, twenty miles or so further north. No one had noticed me when the train stopped at the platform, so I had been left in the compartment until I awoke.

“The policemen at the station made prompt inquiries, but to no avail. In the morning I left for Chandernagor to inform Tremal-Naik of the disappearance of Darma and her nurse. He had already left, and I learned that his friend had not sent the telegram. The one I received was also a fake.”

“Clever!” exclaimed Yanez. “Who would have thought the Thugs could have come up with such a plan?”

“Continue, Kammamuri,” said Sandokan.

The Maratha dried two tears and resumed his tale, his voice broken by sobs:

“I’ll never be able to fully describe my master’s pain when he learned what had happened. It’s a miracle he did not go mad.

“Working with the French authorities in Chandernagor, the police continued their investigation. They soon discovered that two dispatches had been sent by an Indian. But the clerks at the telegraph office in Chandernagor remembered little, only that the man could barely speak

French. We also learned that the two Brahmins had gotten off at the train station, helping what appeared to be a very ill woman. One carried a small child in his arms. The next day the nurse was found dead in a grove of banana trees, a black silk scarf wrapped tightly about her neck. The Thugs had strangled her!”

“Wretches!” exclaimed Yanez, clenching his fists.

“That doesn’t prove it was Suyodhana’s Thugs that kidnapped little Darma,” observed Sandokan. “It could have been common bandits that...”

“No, sir,” said the Maratha, interrupting him. “Suyodhana’s Thugs committed the crime, a week later my master found an arrow in his room that must’ve been fired from the street, a Nagi had been carved into the arrowhead, a snake woman, the emblem of the Kali sect.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Sandokan, a frown forming on his brow.

“And,” continued Kammamuri, “one morning we found a note tacked to our door, it bore the Thugs’ emblem, two crossed daggers and an S.”

“Suyodhana’s insignia?” asked Yanez.

“Yes,” replied the Maratha.

“And the British police didn’t find anything?”

“They continued their investigations for a few more weeks then dropped the case. It appears they do not wish to stir up any problems with the Thugs.”

“Did they send an expedition into the Sundarbans?” asked Sandokan.

“No, they claimed not to have enough men to ensure success.”

“Doesn’t the Governor of Bengal have soldiers at his disposal?” asked Sandokan.

“The Anglo-Indian government is too busy to worry about the Thugs. There’s a rebellion spreading that could sweep the British out of India.”

“A rebellion?” asked Yanez.

“And it’s getting worse with each passing day, sir. Sepoy regiments have mutinied in several places, Meerut, Delhi, Lucknow, Cawnpore. They’ve shot their officers and flocked to the banners of Tantia Topi and the Rani of Janshi.”

“Well,” said Sandokan, getting up and pacing about the table excitedly, “since neither the police, nor the Bengali government can be bothered to deal with the Thugs, the task falls to us, wouldn’t you agree, Yanez?”

“We have fifty men, fifty pirates, handpicked from the bravest warriors on Mompracem. We’ve got a good supply of weapons, a ship that can stand against the British fleet and a few excess million at our disposal. I’d say we have enough to challenge the Thugs and eliminate Suyodhana once and for all.”

“The Tiger of India against the Tiger of Malaysia! Should be fun.”

He drained his glass, remained silent for a moment, then turned about, fixed his eyes upon the Maratha and asked:

“Is it true the Thugs have returned to the caverns of Rajmangal?”

“Yes,” replied Kammamuri.

“Then little Darma must’ve been taken there.”

“Most certainly, Captain.”

“Could you still find your way around those caverns?”

“Yes, Captain. It’s been awhile, but I still remember every inch of those tunnels. I was a prisoner there for six months.”

“Yes, I recall you mentioning a network of caverns and tunnels.”

“A vast network, sir, that stretches beneath the entire island.”

“Beneath... Then we could drown those wretches in one shot!”

“What about Darma?”

“We’ll rescue her before we destroy their lair, my good Kammamuri. How does one get into those caverns?”

“There’s a secret entrance in a banyan tree.”

“Very well, we’ll pay a little visit to the Sundarbans,” said Sandokan. “My dear Suyodhana, prepare to receive Tremal-Naik and the Tiger of Malaysia.”

They heard a chain creak followed by a splash. Someone shouted a few orders and the ship came to an abrupt halt.

“They’ve dropped anchor,” said Yanez. “Let’s get a look at where we are.”

Kammamuri and the Portuguese quickly drained their glasses and the three went back up on deck.

Night had fallen several hours earlier, cloaking the pagodas of the Black Town and the domes, bell towers, and grandiose palaces of the White Town. Numerous lamps sparkled along the Strand, jetties, and squares.

That section of the river was more than a kilometre wide; an infinite number of steamships and sailing vessels from all parts of the world rocked at anchor, the light from their lanterns reflecting upon the waters.

The *Marianna* had dropped anchor near the furthest bastions of Fort William, its solemn mass looming imposingly in the darkness.

Once assured the ship was securely anchored, Sandokan had the sails lowered and ordered a launch put in the water.

“It’s almost midnight,” he said, addressing Kammamuri. “Can we go see Tremal-Naik?”

“Yes, but I’d advise you to wear less conspicuous clothing. My master and I are certain Suyodhana’s men are watching our every move.”

“We’ll dress like Indians,” replied Sandokan.

“Better to dress like sudras,” said Kammamuri.

“What’s that?”

“Servants, sir.”

“An excellent idea. There’s no shortage of clothing aboard; you’ll help us put together the perfect disguise. The Tiger of India is proving to be a clever adversary; we’ll have to outsmart him. Let the campaign begin! Come, Yanez.”

## Chapter 3

### Tremal-Naik

Half an hour later, the *Marianna's* whaleboat was making her way down the river, carrying Sandokan, Yanez, Kammamuri and six Malay pirates.

Dressed in dhotis<sup>2</sup> and brown dugbabs<sup>3</sup>, the prahu's commanders could easily have been mistaken for Indian servants. As a precaution, they had each grabbed their krises and hidden a pair of long-barrelled pistols in the folds of their capes.

The lights along the jetties and squares having been extinguished, the city was cloaked in darkness, save for the white, green and red glow of ships' lanterns upon the black waters of the river.

The whaleboat flew among the ships, grabs, sloops and steamboats crowded along the banks, then headed towards Fort William's southern ramparts and docked before a dark deserted clearing.

"It won't be long now," said Kammamuri. "Durumtolah Street isn't far from here."

"You live in a bungalow?" asked Yanez.

"No, in an old Indian palace that belonged to the late Captain MacPherson. My master inherited it when Miss Ada passed away."

"Lead the way," said Sandokan. He disembarked, turned towards the Malays and said, "Wait for us here."

"Yes, Captain," replied the helmsman.

Kammamuri had set off, making his way across the vast clearing. Sandokan and Yanez followed, each resting a hand on the butt of their pistols, ready to draw them out at the first sign of trouble.

---

<sup>2</sup> A large rectangular piece of cloth worn about the waist

<sup>3</sup> A cape made from coarse cloth

The clearing was deserted or at least appeared to be, the darkness made it impossible to distinguish their surroundings.

A few minutes later they arrived at Durumtolah Street and came to a stop before an old Indian palace, it was a square building with three terraces capped by a small dome.

Kammamuri pulled out a key and inserted it into the lock. He was about to open the door, when Sandokan, whose vision was sharper than his companions', spotted a shadow moving away from one of the columns beneath a small verandah. It took off in a flash and disappeared into the darkness.

He was about to pursue the fugitive, then held back, fearing a trap.

"Did you see that man?" he asked Kammamuri and Yanez.

"Where?" the Portuguese and the Maratha asked in unison.

"He was hiding behind one of those columns. You were right, Kammamuri, the Thugs are keeping an eye on the house. We've just had proof. It matters little, it's too dark for the spy to have seen our faces, and even if he had, he doesn't know who we are."

Kammamuri opened the door, and once the three had entered, shut it without a sound. He made his way up a dimly lit marble stairway and led the prahu's commanders into a small but elegant drawing room.

A blue crystal lamp hung from the ceiling, casting its soft light upon a floor inlaid with red, black and yellow stones. A table and a set of bamboo chairs stood in the centre.

They had just entered, when the door opened and a man rushed to embrace Sandokan and Yanez.

"My friends, my brave friends! How I thank you for having come. You'll rescue my Darma, won't you?"

The newcomer was a handsome Bengali Indian, about thirty-five or thirty-six years old, well built, with fine energetic features, light brown skin and bright black eyes that blazed with fire.

He was dressed in the manner of modern, well-to-do Indians, who have abandoned the dhoti and dugbah for the latest Anglo-Indian fashions: a white cloth jacket, a thick embroidered sash, white pants and a small embroidered turban.

Sandokan and Yanez returned the Indian's embrace.

"There's no need to fear, Tremal-Naik," the Tiger said warmly. "We've left Mompracem in good hands; we're ready to battle Suyodhana and his bandits for as long as it takes."

"My Darma!" sobbed the Indian, his voice heavy with agony. He covered his eyes, attempting to restrain his tears.

"We'll find her, my friend," said Sandokan. "You remember what we did to James Brooke. The White Rajah was no less powerful, the Sultans of Borneo trembled at the thought of him, yet we knocked him from his throne. Suyodhana's days are numbered; it won't be long before Darma's playing happily by your side."

"Yes," said Tremal-Naik, "The two of you are my only hope. No one else can destroy those bloodthirsty wretches. I've lost my wife; I'll go mad if I lose my daughter. My poor Ada! After having fought for so long to make her my bride, to see our daughter in the hands of those monsters..."

"There's no need to fear, Tremal-Naik," said Yanez, deeply moved by the Indian's pain. "Now is not the time for tears, we've got to act, form a plan, there's no time to waste."

"Tell me, my good friend; are you certain the Thugs have returned to their old lair on Rajmangal?"

"Positive," replied the Indian.

"And Suyodhana's there as well?"

"He must be."

"Then wouldn't little Darma have been taken there?" asked Sandokan.

"It's probable, but I'm not sure. However, I'd wager she was kidnapped to succeed her mother as Guardian of the Sacred Temple."

"Is she in danger?"

"None whatsoever, the Guardian of the Temple of the East is precious to Kali; they venerate her as they do the goddess herself."

"Then no one would dare harm her?"

"Not even Suyodhana," replied Tremal-Naik.

"How old is Darma?"

"Almost four."

“And they venerate her like a goddess!?” exclaimed Yanez.

“She’s the daughter of the Guardian of the Temple of the East. Ada served Kali for seven years,” said Tremal-Naik, stifling a sob.

“Little brother,” said Yanez, turning toward Sandokan, “you talked of a plan.”

“Yes, and I’ve worked out the details,” replied the Tiger of Malaysia. “However, before we act, we must be absolutely certain the Thugs have returned to their island.”

“How can we find out?”

“We’ll capture a Thug and force him to confess. There must be a few of them hanging about Calcutta.”

“Quite a few, actually,” said Tremal-Naik.

“Well, then, it shouldn’t be hard to capture one.”

“And then?” asked Yanez.

“If they have returned to their old lair, we’ll set off on a hunting expedition in the Sundarbans. Kammamuri said those swamps were teeming with tigers. We’ll kill ourselves a few, a little practice before the main event, all the while advancing towards Rajmangal and gathering whatever information we can. Do you still hunt from time to time, Tremal-Naik?”

“It’s in my blood,” replied the Indian. “But why a hunting expedition?”

“To fool Suyodhana. Why would he suspect hunters? Not a uniform among us. The jungles are full of wildlife, nothing could be more natural. The Thugs won’t be alarmed by our presence. What do you think, Yanez?”

“It appears there are no limits to the Tiger of Malaysia’s imagination.”

“We’re dealing with a clever opponent; we’ll have to outmanoeuvre him. Are you familiar with those swamps, Tremal-Naik?”

“Kammamuri and I know the area well. We’ve explored every canal and island.”

“How deep are the waters?”

“Deep enough for your prahu. There’s a good roadstead at Rajmatla. The *Marianna* could shelter there if need be.”

“How far is it from the Thugs’ lair?”

“About twenty miles.”

“Excellent,” said Sandokan. “Aside from Kammamuri, how many more loyal servants do you have?”

“A couple more.”

Sandokan reached into his jacket and drew out a large stack of banknotes.

“Have one of them hire two elephants and guides. Tell him there’s no need to haggle.”

“But... I,” said the Indian.

“The Tiger of Malaysia has diamonds enough to blanket all the rajahs and maharajahs of India,” replied Sandokan with a smile. Then he sighed and added sadly: “Neither I nor Yanez have any children. What am I going to do with all the riches I’ve accumulated throughout these last fifteen years? Fate’s been cruel, taking my Marianna...”

The formidable pirate shot to his feet. An intense, indescribable pain had shaken the proud features of the man that had once spread terror throughout the Malay Archipelago. He paced round the room three times, lips parted, a frown upon his brow, hands clutching his heart, eyes blazing with pain.

“Sandokan, little brother,” said Yanez, gently placing a hand on his friend’s shoulder.

The pirate halted, a sob dying on his lips.

“I’ll never forget the Pearl of Labuan!” he sobbed, wiping away, almost in anger, two tears forming beneath his thick lashes. “Never! Never! I loved her more than life itself! Fate has been too cruel!”

“Sandokan!” repeated Yanez.

Tremal-Naik had drawn near the Tiger of Malaysia. His face bathed in tears, the hunter embraced his friend.

“Our wives are dead,” said the Indian, his pain no less intense than Sandokan’s.

Off in a corner, Kammamuri was drying his eyes; Yanez too appeared to be deeply moved.

When, after several minutes, the two men parted, the Tiger of Malaysia's face, wracked with pain just minutes ago, had grown calm once again.

"Once we're sure Suyodhana is hiding there," he said, "we'll head for the Sundarbans. Can you get the elephants tomorrow?"

"It should be possible," said Tremal-Naik.

"We'll remain in Calcutta until we capture a Thug. You should come back to the ship with us. You'll be safer aboard our prahu than in your palace."

"The Thugs are watching this place. We shouldn't travel together. I'll sneak out late tomorrow night."

"We'll await you. Time to go, Yanez; it's already two in the morning."

"Why don't you rest here?" asked Tremal-Naik.

"We don't want to create any suspicions," replied Sandokan. "If a Thug spotted us leaving tomorrow, he could follow us back to the *Marianna*. This darkness will help us hide our tracks; if we're spotted, we'll row off into the night until it's safe to head back to our ship. Goodnight, Tremal-Naik, we'll send word tomorrow."

"When are you planning to set sail?"

"As soon as you find us some elephants. Make sure you're not followed. Take whatever precautions are necessary."

"I know how to fool those spies. Do you want Kammamuri to accompany you?"

"There's no need, we're armed and the jetty is nearby."

They embraced once again then Sandokan and Yanez followed Kammamuri out and down the steps.

"Keep your guard up," said the Maratha as he opened the door.

"There's no need to worry," replied Sandokan. "We won't let ourselves be taken by surprise."

Once outside, the two pirates drew their pistols and loaded them.

"Keep your eyes open, Yanez," said Sandokan.

"They're open, little brother, but I confess I can't see much further than the tip of my nose. Feels like I've been dropped into a barrel of tar. What a beautiful night for an ambush."

They stopped in the middle of the street and listened for a couple of minutes, then reassured by the silence, they headed towards the Maidan in front of Fort William.

They kept away from the houses lining the street, Yanez training his eyes to the right, Sandokan to the left.

They stopped every fifteen or twenty paces, looked over their shoulders and listened. Someone was following them, perhaps the very man Sandokan had spotted running off as Kammamuri opened the door to the palace.

They reached the end of the street without incident and stepped onto the clearing where it was not as dark.

“The river is just over there,” said Sandokan.

“I can hear it,” replied Yanez.

They quickened their pace and had almost reached the middle of the clearing when something sharp sent them sprawling to the ground.

“Ah! The wretches!” shouted Sandokan. “Steel wire!”

Several men sprung up from behind the tall grass and rushed towards the pirates. A sharp hiss sliced through the air.

“Don’t get up, Sandokan! Nooses!” yelled Yanez.

Two pistol shots thundered in rapid succession.

Sandokan had fired immediately, just as a lead ball struck him between the shoulders. One of his attackers fell, crying out as he hit the ground. His companions scattered, quickly disappearing into the night.

A sentry yelled out from atop the fort’s ramparts: “Who goes there?”

Then all fell silent.

Fearing a second attack, Sandokan and Yanez did not move.

“They’re gone,” said the Portuguese, after a few minutes had passed. “So much for the fearless Thugs. They ran off like rabbits at the first sound of gunfire.”

“The trap was well set,” replied Sandokan. “If I hadn’t fired my pistols, they would’ve strangled us. Catching us off guard with a steel cable, well done.”

“Let’s see if that scoundrel is really dead.”

“He isn’t moving.”

“It may be a trick.”

They stood up and looked around, keeping an arm raised to protect against a sudden noose. They made their way towards the man lying among the grass and knelt to examine him. His face was bathed in blood.

“He got a bullet in the head,” said Sandokan.

“Think he’s a Thug?”

“If he is, there’ll be a tattoo on his chest. We’ll take him to the launch to make sure.”

“Shh!”

A whistle had sounded off in the distance; another had replied from Durumtolah Street.

“My dear Yanez,” said Sandokan, “Best we get out of here immediately. We’ll have to find another opportunity to admire the Thugs’ tattoo work.”

They jumped to their feet, leapt over the steel wire and quickly headed towards the river as a third whistle sounded in the darkness. The launch was anchored in the same place, half the crew stood on the jetty, rifles drawn and levelled.

“Captain,” said the helmsman, at the sight of Sandokan, “was that you that fired?”

“Yes, Rangary.”

“I thought as much. We were about to come to assist you.”

“There was no need,” replied Sandokan. “Did anyone come to examine the launch?”

“No, sir.”

“All aboard, my Tigers. It’s already late.”

He ordered the stern lantern lit and the whaleboat quickly rowed off.

Seconds later, a small gonga manned by two men pulled out from behind a sloop near the jetty and silently set off after them.