

*Pisces Moon:*  
*The Dark Arts of Empire*  
Douglas Valentine  
Orgeon: TrineDay, 2023, \$24.95  
www.TrineDay.com

### **Robin Ramsay**

**T**his is a very striking and curious piece of work. It recounts a journey Valentine took in 1991 to Thailand and Vietnam to interview three retired CIA officers living there. They had been part of CIA ops in the region in the 1960s and 70s, and thus knew about CIA involvement in the drugs industry – the subject of the book Valentine was then researching.<sup>1</sup> However the CIA interviews take up a very small portion of the book. They are embedded in part travelogue and part account of US – and chiefly CIA – involvement in South East Asia. I don't read travelogues and have nothing to compare Valentine's with. However as a radical, spook-wise American visitor to two countries which had been partially destroyed by US imperialism less 20 years before his visit, Valentine's encounter with these societies must be close to unique.

During the trip Valentine was taking copious notes. For example, his journey takes him through London and he describes the journey out to Heathrow airport. He gives us this.

I slung my bags over my shoulders, the straps cutting into muscle and bone, got to Parson's Green without further incident. Bought a ticket to Heathrow. Had to transfer at Earl's Court. I was in a maze of tunnels and lost time trying to find where my train arrived. I was huffing and puffing when I finally got there. It was still early morning and a young man was playing a lovely tune on a flute. I didn't see a hat or would have put money in it. Was he practicing? A bird that simply must sing?

A woman's voice came over the PA system with an announcement that playing music in the Tube was prohibited. The flutist stopped for a few seconds, looked around innocently, then started up again. The three other people waiting for the train all smiled.

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<sup>1</sup> Reviewed at  
<<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/article/issue/48/the-strength-of-the-wolf/>>.

People confined together assume an equal distance between themselves, like birds on a wire. A girl with a backpack; an empty-handed young man smoking a cigarette; and a handsome young man in a tailored dark overcoat who made eye contact and approached me. Said his name was James, that he was a barrister from "up north" there to greet his girlfriend, who was coming down from Scotland to visit him. "You must be a Sagi," he said cheerfully. Meaning Sagittarian. "How'd you know?" I smiled. "Why, we're the world's travelers."

James was born 16 December 1968. Such a friendly young man.

Which is nicely written – Valentine does write well – but I don't need this. It also introduces another theme in the book: astrology. Valentine takes it seriously – as do some non-western societies – and the book is punctuated with extracts from the horoscope he had done before he left on his trip.

I embarked for London in February 1991 as the sun was about to enter Pisces, the astrological sign of the twelfth and final house of the zodiac. The twelfth is the house of secrets and dreams. Pisces is symbolized by two fish swimming in opposite directions and rules everything below the surface – deception, espionage, foreign things, prisons and religion. According to my astrologer friend Helen Poole, my leaving and returning during a Pisces moon, and traveling throughout the sun sign of Pisces, was pure synchronicity. So I carried on my journey a daily horoscope she prepared for me and which I refer to, along with some poems, when it's relevant to my story. (p. 8)<sup>2</sup>

I had trouble with some of this book. At its heart is an account of tracking down and interviewing three CIA men in Thailand. *En passant* he describes and quotes from similar previous interviews. The narrative around these three men involves the politics and geography of Thailand and Vietnam, places I know nothing about. To do the book justice, I should have read it with maps and histories of both countries beside me. But I didn't and some of the time I had no idea where the narrative had taken me, nor the significance of the people he was commenting on. These historical sections are often dense and difficult. For example this is on pp. 156/7:

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<sup>2</sup> Astrology is a puzzle. There have been two statistical studies of star signs and occupations which showed significant correlations. The first was by Michel Gauquelin. See <<https://www.astrology-and-science.com/g-hist2.htm>>. Gauquelin's statistics were reworked by H J Eysenck in the 1970s and he got the same results. See <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00224545.1978.9924119>>.

The fascists, however, controlled only Vientiane and cities along the Mekong in the Panhandle. Worse, in 1959 the North Vietnamese army began sending soldiers into South Vietnam through the Panhandle, along the so-called Ho Chi Minh Trail. Desperate for allies, the CIA turned to Vang Pao. As his case officer Ralph Johnson had reported to CIA headquarters, Vang Pao was willing – in exchange for free passage in the opium trade – to send Hmong commandoes into China and North Vietnam, as well as into battle against the Pathet Lao in the Laotian Panhandle, where NVA (North Vietnamese Army) regulars were then starting to infiltrate into Central Vietnam.

Thus in 1959, the head of the CIA's Far East Division, Desmond Fitzgerald (who had been an army liaison to the Chinese 6th Army in Burma in WW2) assigned Bill Lair and his Thai PARU the job of organizing the Hmong for combat operations. While Lair prepared for his new job, the CIA station in Vientiane – following the old king's death and the ascent of his son, Savang Vatthana, who did not possess the same amount of shakti/shiva "good luck" as his dad – staged a coup on 25 December 1959. A military junta under fascist Colonel Phoumi Nosavan took charge of the government. Under the guidance of his crazy CIA case officer, Jack Hasey, Phoumi Nosavan and his clique took control of the government and installed five different puppet prime ministers over the next 18 tumultuous months.

And there's this on p. 172:

Upon Vint Lawrence's return, Burke was assigned to Sayaburi, a base on the Mekong River halfway from Vientiane to Houei Sai. Sayaburi was under the jurisdiction of Native American CIA officer Louis O'Jibway in Chiang Khong, Thailand. The Sayaburi base was reinforced by a team of Thai PARU under CIA officer Arthur Elmore at Ban Bo Suak on Thailand's Nan River. Like Landry and Lair at Udorn, O'Jibway ran ops into Laos out of Thailand.

But Valentine meets his three CIA targets, and two of them talk to him. And there's the puzzle. After his book on Operation Phoenix,<sup>3</sup> why would any retired CIA officer do so? Did they simply not care and wanted their part in the

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<sup>3</sup> Douglas Valentine, *The Phoenix Programme: America's Use of Terror in Vietnam*. See <<https://openroadmedia.com/forbidden-bookshelf>>.

This was reviewed by Dr. T. P. Wilkinson in *Lobster* 68 at <<https://tinyurl.com/bp5h49xa>> or <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/article/issue/68/the-phoenix-program-americas-use-of-terror-in-vietnam-by-douglas-valentine/>>.

operations recorded? Why did William Colby, later Director of the CIA, who ran Phoenix, talk to Valentine about it on-the-record and pass him on to other CIA officers? Valentine doesn't know. Did Colby have an agenda? If so, it is not apparent.

Valentine is a big figure in this field: he has interviewed hundreds of former CIA officers in the last 40 years or so, and his books are landmarks. But this was not for me. I don't know enough to evaluate the history sections and wasn't really interested in the travelogue though Vietnam and Thailand in 1991, which is at least half of the book.

But there are other reviews on-line and Valentine has done a long interview about his work, the book and its background. Read that if you've got as far as this.

<<https://whowhatwhy.org/justice/the-cia-up-close-and-personal/>>