

THE CHINESE BELL MURDERS



Robert van Gulik
CRIMES OF CLASSIC INGENUITY

Judge Dee spent the rest of the morning writing for the higher authorities a detailed report on the murder in Half Moon Street, proposing the extreme penalty for the criminal. Since all capital sentences had to be endorsed by the Throne it would take several weeks before Hwang San could be executed.

Back in his private office he had Sergeant Hoong, Tao Gan, Ma Joong and Chiao Tai called in. When they had respectfully greeted the judge he addressed them:

“Today I shall tell the four of you the entire story of the case Liang *versus* Lin. Have fresh tea brought in and be seated comfortably! It is a long story. You will hear,” he began, “a long story of foul murders and ruthless violence, and you will often wonder how August Heaven could ever allow such cruel injustice!”

Also by Robert van Gulik in Sphere Books:

THE CHINESE GOLD MURDERS

THE CHINESE BELL MURDERS

THREE CASES SOLVED BY JUDGE DEE



A Chinese detective story
suggested by three original ancient Chinese plots

by

ROBERT VAN GULIK

*With fifteen plates
drawn by the author in Chinese style*



SPHERE BOOKS LIMITED

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Published by the Penguin Group
27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ, England
Viking Penguin Inc., 40 West 23rd Street, New York, New York 10010, USA
Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia
Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 2801 John Street, Markham, Ontario, Canada L3R 1B4
Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd, 182-190 Wairau Road, Auckland 10, New Zealand
Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England

First published in Great Britain by Michael Joseph Ltd 1958
Published by Sphere Books Ltd 1988

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Made and printed in Great Britain by
Richard Clay Ltd, Bungay, Suffolk

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PREFACE

The Chinese Bell Murders is the first 'Judge Dee Mystery' to appear in England. Another volume of the series, *The Chinese Maze Murders*, was published in Japanese (Kodansha Cy., Tokyo, 1951), in Chinese (Nanyang Press, Singapore, 1953), and in English (W. van Hoeve, The Hague, 1956).

Each 'Judge Dee Mystery' is based upon three original old Chinese plots, rewritten as one continuous story, centring round Judge Dee, one of the most famous ancient Chinese master-detectives who lived in the seventh century A.D.

The aim of the series is to present Chinese-style detective novels that give the Chinese as they were wont to describe themselves in their own crime literature—which already flourished in China many centuries ago. This is deemed all the more timely since an unfortunate nineteenth-century Western tradition of depraved, opium-smoking Mandarins with long pigtails still lingers on in our detective literature. It is hoped that the reader will find those Mandarins not less attractive in their genuine garb—without opium pipe and pigtail, but with a staunch devotion to duty, shrewd reasoning, and deep psychological insight.

The scene of *The Chinese Bell Murders* is laid in Poo-yang, an imaginary city in Kiangsu Province; a map will be found in the endpapers. Information on crime, detection and court procedure in ancient China, and on the Chinese sources utilised, is given in the Postscript.

ROBERT VAN GULIK

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

It should be noted that in China the surname - here printed in capitals - precedes the personal name

Main Characters

DEE Jen-djeh, newly appointed magistrate of Poo-yang, a town district in Kiangsu Province. Referred to as 'Judge Dee' or 'the judge.'

HOONG Liang, Judge Dee's trusted adviser and Sergeant of the tribunal. Referred to as 'Sergeant Hoong' or 'the sergeant.'

MA Joong	}	the three lieutenants of Judge Dee.
CHIAO Tai		
TAO Gan		

Persons connected with 'The Rape Murder in Half Moon Street'

HSIAO Foo-han, a butcher, father of the murdered girl. Referred to as 'Butcher Hsiao.'

PURE JADE, his daughter, victim of the rape murder.

LOONG, a tailor living opposite Butcher Hsiao.

WANG Hsien-djoong, a Candidate of Literature.

YANG Poo, his friend.

GAO, warden of the quarter where the murder occurred.

HWANG San, a vagabond.

Persons connected with 'The Secret of the Buddhist Temple'

'Spiritual Virtue,' abbot of the Temple of Boundless Mercy.

'Complete Enlightenment,' former abbot of the same temple.

BAO, a retired General.

WAN, a retired judge of the Provincial Court.

LING, master of the Guild of Goldsmiths.

WEN, master of the Guild of Carpenters.

Persons connected with 'The Mysterious Skeleton'

Mrs LIANG, *née* OU-YANG, widow of a wealthy Cantonese merchant.

LIANG Hoong, her son, killed by brigands.

LIANG Ko-fa, her grandson.

LIN Fan, a wealthy merchant from Canton.

Others

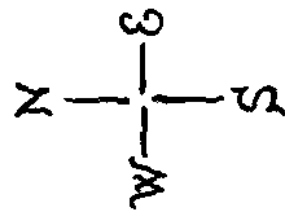
SHENG Pa, counsellor of the Beggars' Guild.

PAN, magistrate of the district Woo-ye.

LO, magistrate of the district Chin-hwa.

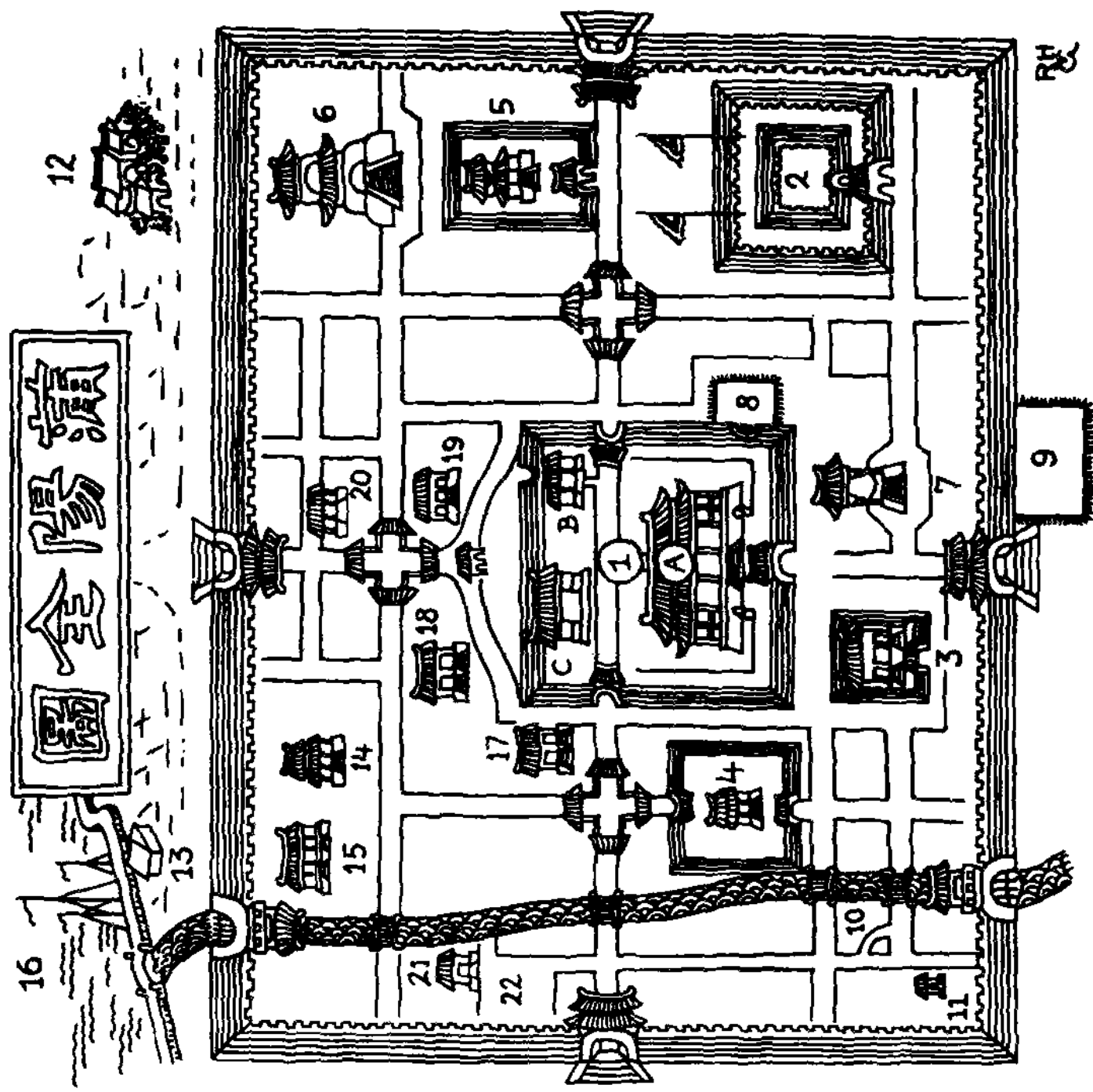
APRICOT, a prostitute of Chin-hwa.

BLUE JADE, her sister.



SKETCH MAP OF POO-YANG

- 1 The Tribunal:
 - (a) Court Hall
 - (b) Private Residence
 - (c) Reception Hall
- 2 Garrison Headquarters
- 3 Temple of the City God
- 4 Temple of Confucius
- 5 Temple of the War God
- 6 Drum Tower
- 7 Bell Tower
- 8 Stockade
- 9 Execution Ground
- 10 Half Moon Street
- 11 Mrs Liang's house
- 12 Temple of Boundless Mercy
- 13 Lin Fan's farm
- 14 Temple of Transcendental Wisdom
- 15 Lin Fan's mansion
- 16 The Canal
- 17 General Bao's house
- 18 Judge Wan's house
- 19 Guildmaster Ling's house
- 20 Guildmaster Hwang's house
- 21 Kingfisher Restaurant
- 22 Fishmarket



I quote the poem from memory, because I do not have that gavel any more. The horrifying experience I had this summer, about two months ago, made me abandon once and for all my criminological researches, and dispose of my entire collection of objects connected with gory misdeeds of the past. I have now transferred my interest to the collecting of celadon porcelain, and find this sedate hobby eminently suited to my fundamentally peace-loving disposition.

However, there is still one thing I must do before I can really settle down to a tranquil life. I must rid myself of all those haunting memories that today still come to disturb my sleep. To free myself of that recurring nightmare I must disclose the strange secrets that were revealed to me in so weird a manner, then and then only shall I be able to relegate to oblivion for ever the horrible experience that shocked me so deeply and brought me to the verge of insanity.

On this exceptionally fine autumn morning, sitting in my elegant garden pavilion and admiring the grace of my two favourite concubines as they tend the chrysanthemums with their slender hands—in these serene surroundings I at last dare to think back to what happened that fateful day.

It was late in the afternoon on the ninth day of the 8th moon—for ever that date shall remain engraved on my memory. It had been extremely hot at midday and later the weather became ever more sultry. I felt depressed and restless, and finally decided to go out in my palanquin. When my bearers asked me where to, on the spur of the moment I told them to take me to Liu's curio shop.

This shop that bears the lofty name of 'The Golden Dragon,' stands opposite the Temple of Confucius. Liu, the owner, is a greedy rascal, but he certainly knows his trade and often found me interesting curios relating to the history of crime and detection. I used to spend many a happy hour in his well-stocked shop.