



Bangkok 8

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John Burdett was trained as a lawyer and worked for a firm in Hong Kong before turning to writing. His first novel, *A Personal History of Thirst* (1996) drew on his legal training for a crime drama about British law and social class. His second, *The Last Six Million Seconds* (1997) was a murder mystery about an honest Hong Kong cop on a corrupt police force seeking to solve a grisly triple murder. *Bangkok 8* is similar to the second work, but the location moves to the seamy world of drugs and prostitution in Bangkok.

Sonchai Jitpleecheep is a detective with the Bangkok 8 police district. The detective is a product of the Vietnam War era, the child of a Thai prostitute and an unknown American soldier. He is also a devout Buddhist and one of the few honest policemen on a force in which corruption is a way of life. On orders from the district's police colonel, Sonchai and his partner and best friend Pichai follow a black American serviceman and the serviceman's exotic half-black, half-hill tribe girlfriend. The serviceman dies a gruesome death from snakes in his car. Pichai and Sonchai investigate and one of the snakes fatally bites Pichai. Sonchai vows to unravel the mystery of the strange snake attack and avenge his friend. His investigation leads him to uncover plots to smuggle drugs and jade, to become involved with a female American FBI agent, and to probe the involvement of a powerful, sadistic American businessman.

Bangkok 8 is a fascinating blend of western murder mystery conventions and meditations on Thai Buddhism and popular culture. Although some of the conversations that supposedly take place in Thai are difficult to imagine in that language, Burdett has clearly done extensive research on Thai customs and everyday life. In Sonchai, he has created an appealing hero, and the unexpected twists in plot will satisfy any mystery enthusiast.

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