



Photo by Maggie Lee

The Coffin

Feature 35mm

Running time: TBC

Budget

TBC

Producer

Pantham THONGSANG

Production Company

tifa

Partner Attached

Spicy Apple Films, Singapore

HAF Goals

Co-producers, Funds

■ Introduction ■

Set in a land where donating coffins to the underprivileged is considered an act of merit-making and where some go through death rituals while being alive as a way of cheating death, *The Coffin* is a supernatural thriller that tells the bizarre events that happen to a young man after he laid in a coffin for one night. It is about a man's search for inner peace and courage to forgive. Thrilling, mysterious and ultimately moving, it's also a tale about the beauty of life and death, and the space and memory we're left with – six feet under.

■ Director ■

Ekachai UEKRONGTHAM has achieved phenomenal success for his debut feature *Beautiful Boxer* (2004), which he directed, wrote and co-produced. Based on the true story of Thailand's famed transvestite kickboxer, it has garnered 12 international and local awards to date including Best Feature Film awards from Milan, Brussels, Montreal and Torino. After its international premiere at Berlin IFF, the film has been invited to more than 100 film festivals and sold to more than 30 countries around the world.

Uekrongtham has also headed Creative & Development Unit of GMM Pictures, the film arm of Thailand's largest entertainment conglomerate GMM Grammy Public Company, and the Singapore headquarter of Sir Cameron Mackintosh, international producer of *Les Misérables* and *Miss Saigon*.

Before embarking on his film career, Uekrongtham was the founding artistic director of ACTION Theatre, one of Singapore's premier professional theatre companies. He is best known for staging *Chang & Eng*, the story of the original Siamese twins. He has directed and produced plays and musicals in Singapore, China, America, Malaysia and Thailand.

A recipient of the Singapore Youth Award and the Culture Award presented by the JCCI Foundation in Singapore, Uekrongtham was named one of the 20 Leaders of the New Millennium for Society & Culture by Asiaweek.

■ Producer ■

Pantham THONGSANG studied Film at the Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University. Subsequently, he went on to study Film, Television and Video at the Extension Program of the University of California, Los Angeles, with a grant from the Asian Cultural Council (Rockefeller Foundation).

Thongsang has worked with Grammy Entertainment since 1986 in many capacities. In 1995, he helped set up Grammy's first film company, Grammy Film. While his main focus is on production, he is experienced in other fields of the film business such as administration, marketing and distribution.

He was line producer for *The Red Bike Story* (1996), executive producer of Jira Maligool's acclaimed *Mekong Full Moon Party* (2002) and producer for *February* (2003). Recently, Thongsang set up a new production company; TIFA company Ltd. TIFA was co-producer of *Tropical Malady*, which won Jury Prize at Cannes 2004.

In 2004, Thongsang directed his first film, *The Judgment* (I-Fak) which became one of the most controversial films of the year in Thailand.

■ Production Company ■

tifa is short for *Thai Independent Filmmakers Alliance*. As the name implies, we work with independent Thai filmmakers, helping them materialize their projects in an environment that promotes the utilization of their full potential. The company handles a wide range of projects from artistic breakthroughs such as the Cannes Special Jury Prize winner *Tropical Malady* (2004) to highly mainstream commercial projects. Based in Bangkok, we deal with investors, producers and film funds from around the world. Its mission is to make it possible for talented Thai filmmakers to produce quality works for the world audience.

■ Synopsis ■

Chris, a Thai-Chinese living in Sydney has just completed his degree in Furniture Design. When Chris was 5, he had a near-

death experience of which he hardly remembers. Neither does he remember much of his mother, a Thai lady who left him and Anthony, his property tycoon Dad more than 15 years ago.

Anthony has never told Chris much about his wife either. He prefers to share with his son his successful strategies for land acquisition and numerous plans for property development across the Asia Pacific region. Chris never understands his father's insatiable need for so much land and wealth.

On his 21st birthday, Chris tells his Dad he wants to take a break by visiting Thailand and becoming a monk there for a few months. Shocked and infuriated, Anthony prohibits his son from doing so. Chris flies off to Bangkok the next day. In Bangkok, Chris gets in touch with Jake, his Australian school-mate who's been living there for the past five years. That night, Jake organizes a party for Chris to meet up with some locals at his posh house. At midnight, to everyone's surprise, Jake brings out a coffin.

He announces that anyone whose body fits snugly in it will have to lie in the coffin for a night. Everyone is game, especially after Jake tells them in all seriousness about a Thai belief that lying in a coffin could extend one's life. The coffin doesn't fit anyone in the party... except Chris.

As the coffin is nailed shut, Chris is reminded of his near-death experience. Suddenly he's overwhelmed by claustrophobia. As he gasps for breath, he feels the coffin being jolted several times. Then there's silence. Through the darkness, he sees a woman dressed in white with the bottom half of her dress soaked in blood. Her face is covered in tears. Chris is shaking.

He can no longer see nor breathe.

Chris doesn't know how long he's been inside the coffin before he's woken up by a loud noise. Someone is trying to open the coffin lid. One by one, the nails come out. When the coffin lid is opened, Chris sees the nicest blue sky.

A young boy and the same woman Chris saw earlier are walking towards a distant temple in the mountain. Chris runs after them but he can't seem to catch up. By the time he reaches them, he only sees the boy. The lady is nowhere in sight. When Chris finally confronts the boy, he sees the deepest fear in the boy's eyes and feels the sharpest pain in his own heart.

He then feels his body being jolted upward by some unknown

force several times. When he opens his eyes, he is surrounded by doctors. They have been resuscitating him when heart stopped after the coffin was opened. Chris looks across the room and sees the same woman in white. She's now holding the boy in her arms. Chris tries to get up but the doctors restrain him.

When he looks again, both the woman and the boy are no longer there.

When Chris is out of the hospital, he sets out to find out more about the coffin he's laid in, the two people he met and the temple he saw. Unknown to him, he will be awakening in the same coffin for the next few days – every time he drifts to sleep. And each time, the lid will open and deposit him in increasingly terrifying scenarios that bring him closer to the truths he's searching for.

■ Director's Statement ■

Death is beautiful.

A friend of mine told me this a long time ago. I thought he was morbid.

How could death be beautiful? To him and his family perhaps. They used to run a very successful family business selling coffins in Bangkok's Chinatown.

Every time I visited his shop, I was terrified to even go near one of his merchandise. One day, he asked me if I wanted to try sleeping in one – just for fun. I balked at the idea but I kept imagining what it would be like...

Lately, I've become fascinated by stories related to coffins in Thailand. A few people I know actually went through death rituals at Thai temples when they're still alive – as a way of cheating death. I've also heard of people who have bought coffins for themselves by installments. There's also a well-known Thai custom of donating coffins to the underprivileged as a way of making merits on the donors' birthdays.

These stories coupled with my recent attempts to find inner peace for myself have led me to try and understand the beauty of life... and death. We are all driven by needs and wants – our own and sometimes others'. I still don't think I want to lie in a coffin for fun but my perspectives have changed.

Yes, death could be beautiful.

And I'm not being morbid.

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