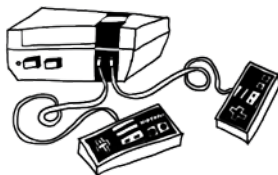


# THAI-RIFFIC!

OLIVER PHOMMAVANH loves to make people laugh, whether writing humour for kids or on stage as a stand-up comedian. He also shares his passion for writing with the kids he teaches at a primary school in Western Sydney.

As a comedian, Oliver has appeared on national TV and radio. He's a die-hard Nintendo fan, lives in Sydney and cheers for the Wests Tigers!

*Thai-riffic!* is his first book.





Puffin Books

OLIVER PHOMMAVANH

# THA-RIFIC!



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To Mum and Dad,  
for their love and patience  
and delicious chicken curries for the soul.

And to my sister Anna,  
for getting a real job and letting me  
explore my cHEwY, creative side.





# THAI-RIFFIC!

## MENU

### ENTRÉES

*Tantalise your taste buds with these tasty Thai snacks.*

- |   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>FLYER ATTACK</b>   | <b>3</b>  |
| A humiliating and tacky photo, perfect for sharing with others.   |           |
| <b>MEETING MR WINFREE</b>   | <b>27</b> |
| Marinated mad teacher wrapped inside a wacky class pastry.        |           |
| <b>BULK TO SCHOOL</b>   | <b>38</b> |
| Trolleys of toilet paper with generous lashings of embarrassment. |           |



## THAI-RIFFIC!

### MAIN DISHES

*The very best of Thai cuisine, with a twist!*

- CURRIED AWAY (HOT)** 51  
A selection of curries with famous homemade chilli sauce that guarantees to set your meal on fire!
- MOZZIE WHISPERER** 74  
Soft noodles with a full whack of flavour. You'll have trouble sleeping after this!
- SOAKED! (COOL)** 87  
Thai troublemakers marinated in scented water before being dipped in mud.
- WORLD RECORDS DAY:** 108  
A thick soup filled with screams, donuts and Tic Tacs.

### À LA CLASS

*Try our blackboard specials. They'll leave you speechless!*

- STICKY NOTES** 127  
Class stirred and fried by cranky relief teacher, on a bed of sticky notes.
- THAI-TOWN** 135  
A packed bowl with layers of Thai silly names, served by a weary waitress.
- THE CRITIC** 147  
Worried parents sweating over the words of a crispy and crusty critic.





## THAI-RIFFIC!

### DESSERT

*Finish your banquet with a sweet sensation.*

#### THAI FOR A DAY

171

We've thrown in the freshest Thai treats, karaoke, takraw, dancing, loads of Thai fruit and a dash of tuktuk.

*Ask about our trendy 'Life's Thai-riffic!' T-shirts (available for \$25 each, or FREE if you complete our curry challenge).*



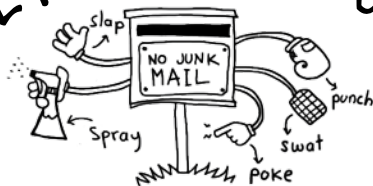


# ENTRÉES





# FLYER ATTACK



Same same, but different. It's what Thai people say when they're talking about something similar, like a fake watch or copied DVD. It feels and looks the same but it's not the real thing. I know how that fake watch feels. I'm a fake Aussie. I was made in Thailand. People can spot it straight away. I sound like an Aussie but I smell like Thai food. I live in Australia but my house is a Thai restaurant.

Dad reckons it's no ordinary Thai restaurant. It's *Thai-riffic!* More like Thai-lame, especially with the exclamation mark! If the name doesn't make you spew, the black and neon-orange sign will. It's bright enough to be seen from space. Mum, Dad and my little brother, Kitchai, are planted outside, with necks raised and mouths open, as if they've been zapped by an alien freeze ray.

Dad waves me over. 'Come here, Albert!'

I drag myself away from the air con and step outside to face the miserable heat. The sign's screaming at me and it's making my headache worse.

Dad grins. 'Check this out.' He flicks on a switch and a moving image appears below the sign. A smiling bald man is rubbing his round tummy. It's over-overkill.

Kitchai jumps up and tries to touch the man's bottom. 'It's cool.'

My little brother thinks everything is cool.

'It's all going to help our business,' Dad says. 'We've had the old sign for ten years.'

My parents have gone cashew nuts over our tenth anniversary. New sign. New menus. Why didn't they change the name? Now *that* would be a reason to celebrate. In primary school, people used to call me Bow-Thai. It was an annoying joke, something I stopped laughing at in year two. They'd bow with hands together and say the Thai greeting, sawatdee, with a smile. And that was just the teachers. I felt like a walking billboard for my parents. I hope nicknames get erased when you start high school, especially ones you didn't choose.

Dad pulls down his chef's hat tightly. He has an elephant's head, wide and chunky. And like an elephant, he never forgets anything. That includes the hundreds of Thai recipes and the thousands of times I've gotten in trouble.

Dad sneaks a look across the road at the Wok N Roll Chinese restaurant. It still has ‘grand opening’ painted on the windows, even though it’s been opened for a month. He spies on them through our front window. I wish it was an Italian pizzeria or hamburger place. Then I’d be the one drooling between the blinds.

Kitchai sticks his tongue out. ‘Take that, Suck N Roll.’

‘It shouldn’t matter,’ Mum says. ‘We’re Thai and they’re Chinese. No worries.’

‘Yes worries,’ Dad says. ‘They’re a nice new restaurant with nice new flyer.’ He’s stuck theirs up on our fridge, so he can throw magnetic darts at it. Dad puffs out his chest. ‘Now we have new flyers and menus, and they look much better. We’ll let Fairfield know Thai-riffic! is still number one!’

‘We sure are,’ I say. ‘We’re on top of the list of silly restaurant names.’ Wok N Roll is a close second.

‘Who’s going to deliver the flyers?’ Mum says.

‘Albert and Kitchai of course.’ Dad grabs me as I attempt to disappear. ‘We’ll save on delivery costs.’

‘I’m not doing it for free,’ I say. ‘Do we look like slaves?’

Mum wipes her sweaty hands on her apron that looks like a kindy painting of a green spotty butterfly. She’s been chopping and dicing vegetables all afternoon. ‘You already get pocket money.’

‘That’s different.’ Ten dollars a week is not enough anyway. It gets eaten up with chips and lollies.

Kitchai, his tongue wagging out, claps his hands. ‘C’mon, it’ll be fun, like a game.’

I’m *so* glad we won’t be at the same school any more.

Dad laughs. ‘Okay, ten dollars.’

‘Fifty bucks.’

‘What?’ He slaps my back. ‘Are you crazy?’

‘You’re right,’ I say. ‘Make it a hundred.’

‘Twenty-five dollars,’ Dad says.

‘Help me, Mum,’ I moan. ‘You’re good at haggling.’

‘Twenty dollars,’ Mum says.

‘That’s not a good deal,’ I yell.

‘It is for me.’

‘Twenty-five dollars,’ Dad grins. ‘Deal or no deal.’

I make a sound like a ticking clock. ‘Twenty-eight dollars and seventy-five cents.’

‘Whua?’ Dad says.

‘Do you want to round it up to twenty-nine bucks?’

‘Okay, okay. You get paid when you deliver all the flyers,’ Dad says.

I shake Dad’s hand. ‘It’s just around the block, right?’

Dad squeezes hard. ‘It’s easy work.’

It’s easy money. I’ll be laughing all the way to my piggy bank.

Mum rolls up her sleeve and glances at her watch.



‘Come on, time to get ready.’ She steps back inside. ‘Tables, boys. Knives, forks and . . .’

‘Menus, I know,’ I wail behind her. Mum and Dad have us trained like sheepdogs. We live above the restaurant so they can just holler from downstairs for help. We have to serve and clean up when times are really busy. Luckily, it never gets packed nowadays.

Dad taps me on the shoulder. ‘Don’t forget to use our new menus.’

‘Yeah, yeah.’ The new menus are in their box, beside Grandad’s shrine on the counter. Mum says he’s blessed them for good luck. The menus are thicker than ten of our old ones. Each one is covered in smooth, soft leather with ‘Life’s Thai-riffic!’ emblazoned across it in gold writing. Dad’s really splashed out for these. The first two pages are a history of Thai-riffic!

I let out a massive yawn. People are here to eat, not to read a story. I skip the text and peer at a large photo at the bottom of the page. I’ve never seen this one before. It’s a picture of Thai-riffic! with our own ‘grand opening’ banner hanging off the sign. Dad’s goofy grin hasn’t changed. Mum looks younger when her hair’s not tied up, showing more of her shiny, platter face. Sandwiched between my parents is a little kid bowing in his nappies. His buggy eyes almost pop out like its 3D.

Oh my Buddha. It’s me!

I squirm around with embarrassment. The photo belongs in a box marked UFO (Unbelievable Family Objects), DO NOT OPEN. Maybe no one will realise.

‘Ha-ha! You look so funny,’ Kitchai says. ‘I can’t believe Dad made you do that.’

‘I couldn’t speak back then. I would have said no.’ I run and slide into the kitchen, clutching the menu. ‘Muuuuuummmmm.’ She’s near the freezer, labelling plastic containers.

‘Why am I in the menu?’ I say.

‘Because you’re special,’ Mum says. ‘Tonight’s special, served with tropical fried rice.’ She swallows her laugh, scribbling some Thai on a container. ‘That’s a cute idea.’

Dad’s standing in front of the sink and lets the water run over a wok. ‘Thai-riffic! is more than a restaurant, it’s a story.’

‘It’s a horror movie,’ I say. ‘You have to get rid of these menus.’

‘But you’ll be famous! Your friends will love it.’

‘I won’t *have* any if they see this,’ I say.

Dad switches on the CD player and Thai music blasts from the speakers. He waves his hands around as he preheats the stove. Mum starts tapping with the drum beat as a knife bounces around on the table. I’m surprised there haven’t been any accidents. Are Mum

and Dad training for *Dancing with Their Scars*? They're a cooking and dancing disaster waiting to happen.

Dad turns the volume down. 'Better get dressed,' he says to Mum. They swap roles every night. It's her turn to play waitress tonight.

Mum brushes spices from her apron and takes it off. 'There's a better photo of you on the flyer,' she whispers.

'The flyer?!' I escape the kitchen and run to the counter. There's a stack of flyers next to the toothpicks. I'm older in this photo. It's from last year's Harmony Day celebrations at school. I'm bowing in my traditional Thai costume. Underneath my blue jacket is a 'Life's Thai-riffic!' T-shirt.

I'll be handing out these flyers, with my face and address on them. They're a permission note to tease me for life.

Why can't I be the same same as everyone else?

