

AH LING: BROTHER TO FU MANCHU

by Rick Lai

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The main villain of Philip Pullman's Sally Lockhart trilogy (1) is Ah Ling, alias Hendrik Van Eeden. His father was Dutch, and his Chinese mother was the daughter of a pirate, Ling Chi. Ah Ling was a heavysset man with a European appearance. Only his eyes displayed an Asian ancestry. When Ah Ling first appeared in *The Ruby in the Smoke* (1985), he was leading a Chinese tong, the Fan Lin Society, in 1872. This organization, more commonly known as the Seven Blessings, engaged in opium smuggling and piracy. After Sally Lockhart shot him in the spine, Ah Ling was paralyzed. Slowly building an organization in Europe, Ah Ling returned in 1881 in order to enact a complex plan of revenge against Sally during the events of *The Tiger in the Well* (1990). The scheme ultimately backfired against Ah Ling and resulted in his death by drowning. The antecedents of this formidable master criminal are very reminiscent of the origin story created for Fu Manchu by Philip José Farmer in the genealogical section of *Doc Savage: His Apocalyptic Life* (1973, revised in 1975).

Sax Rohmer, the creator of Fu Manchu, was very vague about the circumstances surrounding the birth of the diabolical genius. There was merely a suggestion in *The Insidious Fu Manchu* (1913, chap. 27) that the sinister savant had been born near a graveyard in the Chinese province of Kiangsu. Farmer asserted that Fu's mother was Ling Ju Hai, the daughter of a prominent Chinese merchant and a Manchurian woman. During the Opium War (1839-42), Ling Ju Hai and her father were faced with execution by the ruler of Annam (modern-day Vietnam). They were rescued by an intrepid British adventurer, Sir William Clayton. Ling Ju Hai and Sir William had an affair which resulted in the birth of the man known as Fu Manchu in 1840 (2). When Ling Ju Hai's father learned that she was pregnant, he arranged for her to be spirited away from Sir William. The outraged merchant then dispatched assassins to murder Sir William. All of these pursuers were defeated by Sir William in a spectacular battle on a Chinese junk. For several years, Sir William searched vainly for Ling Ju Hai. In 1845, he gave up his search and married Maida van Kortrijn, the daughter of a Dutch merchant (3).

Both Fu Manchu and Ah Ling have a mother with the family name of Ling. On the surface, it would seem doubtful that the victimized merchant depicted by Farmer could be Ling Chi the pirate. It should be noted that Ah Ling was ostensibly Hendrik Van Eeden, a merchant employed by the British firm of Lockhart and Selby, Shipping Agents. Like his grandson, Ling Chi could have been leading a secret existence as a pirate and smuggler (4). The employment of assassins by Ling Ju Hai's father suggests that he had strong ties to the underworld. The usage of a junk by these killers also implies that they were pirates. Ling Chi could easily be the father of Ling Ju Hai. When Ling Chi discovered that his daughter was pregnant, he could have quickly arranged a marriage to hide the illegitimacy of his grandson. Ling Ju Hai could have been forced to marry a Dutchman named Van Eeden. Sir William's later marriage to Maida indicates that the adventurer may have been searching for Ling Ju Hai among the Dutch business community. Probably Sir William heard rumors that Ling was coerced into wedding a Dutchman, but was unable to unearth the bridegroom's identity. About a year after the birth of her first son, Ling gave birth to a child by her Dutch husband. This second child

was christened Hendrik. At the age of thirty-one, Hendrik under the alias of Ah Ling would encounter Sally Lockhart.

Philip Pullman portrayed Hendrik as possessing “Chinese eyes.” This statement is not elaborated upon any further. Possibly Hendrik has green eyes like Fu Manchu.

The Fan Lin Society resembled the Si-Fan, the vast confederation of secret societies assembled by Fu Manchu. The Fan Lin Society was also called the Seven Blessings, and the Si-Fan was led by a Council of Seven. Through their grandfather, both the sons of Ling Ju Hai must have been granted membership in this tong. Hendrik became its leader. Upon his half-brother’s death, Fu must have inherited the mantle of power. The Fan Lin Society was used by Fu as the stepping stone to fashion the larger alliance that became the Si-Fan.

Both Ah Ling and Fu Manchu have pet monkeys. Ah Ling’s simian was a female named Miranda. Fu owned a male marmoset called Peko. Miranda came into Ah Ling’s possession after he became paralyzed (5). Miranda was trained to perform certain duties for her immobile master. It became apparent that Miranda would soon perish from old age. Prior to his death, Ah Ling was hoping to train a child to replace Miranda.

Fu Manchu must have assisted in the medical care provided to his brother. Based on references in *The Island of Fu Manchu* (1941, chap. 34), it is clear that Fu had substantial medical knowledge as early as 1880 (6). It was probably Fu who trained Miranda to obey his brother’s commands. When Miranda’s lifespan was reaching its end, Fu must have trained Peko to become Miranda’s replacement. Since Miranda was proving difficult to control, Ah Ling rejected Fu Manchu’s proposed successor in favor of his scheme to utilize a child. Consequently, Fu Manchu kept Peko as his own pet. The existence of a connection between Ah Ling and Fu Manchu explains the latter’s fondness for Peko. The marmoset always reminded him of his late lamented brother.

NOTES

1. The trilogy consists of *The Ruby in the Smoke*, *The Shadow in the North* (1986), and *The Tiger in the Well*. Sally Lockhart briefly participated in the events of Pullman’s *The Tin Princess* (1994) which also features Jim Taylor, her assistant, in a much larger role.
2. In “Fu Manchu Vs. Cthulhu,” I theorized that Sir William was not really the father. My premise was that Ling Ju Hai also had an affair with Dirk Struan from James Clavell’s *Tai-Pan* (1966). Struan was the father of Fu Manchu.
3. Details about Maida can be found in Philip Jose Farmer’s *Tarzan Alive* (1972).
4. In the 2006 television adaptation of *The Ruby in the Smoke*, Ling Chi was described as a “businessman” who could be viewed as a “pirate.” The novel just depicted him as a pirate.
5. The spinal injury suffered by Ah Ling recalls Farmer’s theory that Fu Manchu (as Hanoi Shan) once had his spine seriously damaged.
6. Fu Manchu supposedly went to Haiti in that year to research the cataleptic drugs that formed the basis for the zombie legend.