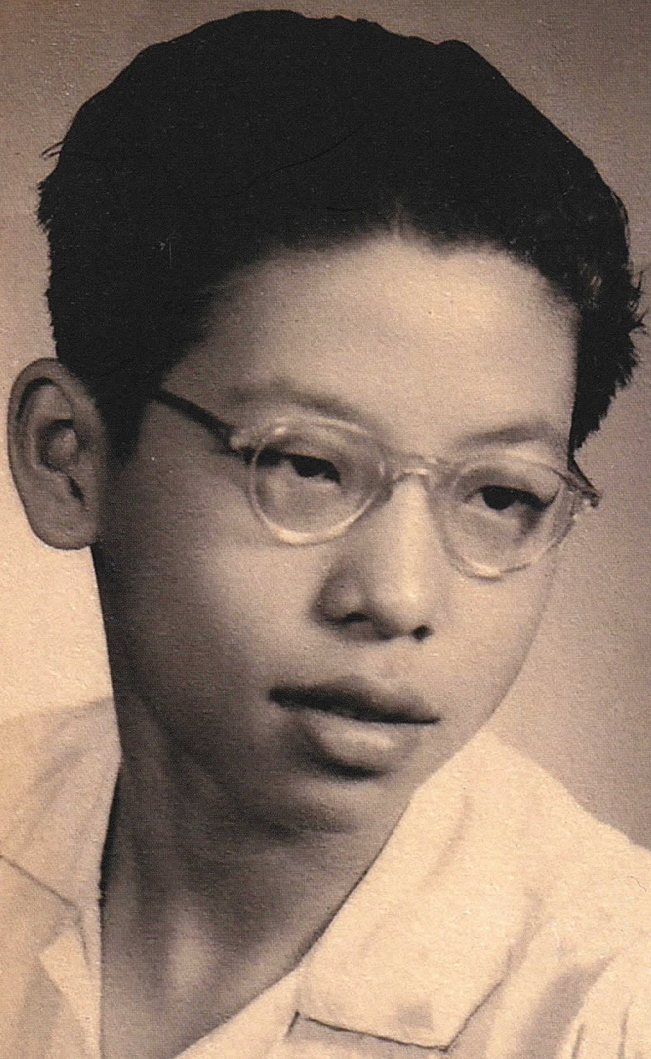


Kee Thuan Chye

LIM KIT SIANG

MALAYSIAN FIRST

Volume One: None But the Bold





"Meticulous research brings Kit Siang biography to life."

- Chan Kok Leong, *Malaysian Insight*

Lib
RM 80.00

"To understand the man, the party and what they stand for, this is an ideal read. For the first time, we get some awareness and intricacies of backroom politics, and these come from those who have either been involved directly or watched them in close quarters."

- R Nadeswaran, *Malaysiakini*

"Meticulously researched and brimming with exclusive information.... Although many have written about the DAP stalwart in the past, I believe that this might be the most definitive account of Lim Kit Siang and the life he has lived so far."

- Deidre Nair, *The Rocket*

"Author Kee Thuan Chye's biography humanises the much maligned politician and tells the story of a man with a dream for the country he calls home.... Kee is as fine a writer as they come. It is not merely that this book avoids being ponderous, as might be expected, even forgiven, of a hefty biography, but that it is nearly always pleasurable to read, sentence by sentence, the details are granular and vivid."

- Elena Koshy, *New Straits Times*

"The book about the DAP veteran narrates the most unlikely actions of a stoic politician who has always appeared emotionless in public."

- K Parkaran, *Free Malaysia Today*

"A very interesting, informative and revealing book that I would recommend to anybody interested in filling in the gaps in their knowledge and understanding of the events and people who have made a positive and lasting contribution to the development of Malaysia.... A compelling read.... A story that should have been told long ago."

- P M Sivalingam, *former newspaper editor*

"It's a mistake, a real mistake NOT to read the book. I find it hard to put down. It was so engaging.... and gave us insights into his struggle, his sacrifices, his pain, his convictions.... As I turned each page, I was in awe and admiration of this truly Anak Malaysia.... Kee Thuan Chye has done a great favour for this and future generations of Malaysians with this book - a gift that's Malaysian First."

- Lim Kean Liang

"Regardless of whether you support Lim Kit Siang or not, if you care for Malaysia and want to see a better version of what we have today, this book is a must-read."

- *Malaysiana LCMS*

The author and publisher acknowledge and thank the following for giving permission to use their photographs in this book:

Allan Goh (AG)
Chian Xiao Ling (CXL)
Chin Nyok Soo (CNS)
Democratic Action Party Headquarters (DAP)
High School Batu Pahat Alumni Facebook page (HSBPA)
Irene Mary Chang (IMC)
Jeremy Keith (JK)
K. Gurunathan (KG)
K. Siladass (KS)
Kwong Wah Jit Poh (KWJP)
Liew Ah Kim (LAK)
Lim Hui Ying (LHY)
Lim Jin Siew (LJS)
Pauline Fan (PF)
Penang Democratic Action Party (PENANG DAP)
Robert Ang (RA)
Sim Tong Him (STH)
Tan Tik Seng (TTS)
Wong Hang Yoke (WHY)

Photos credited to KTC were taken by the author.
Cover portrait by courtesy of Tan Tik Seng

First published October 2021
Reprinted November 2021

Published by
Landmark Books Pte Ltd

Copyright © 2021 Kee Thuan Chye

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any format by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

ISBN 978-981-18-2203-2



LIM KIT SIANG MALAYSIAN FIRST

Volume One: None But the Bold

KEE THUAN CHYE

PUSTAKA PERDANA



1013209



◊ LANDMARK ◊ BOOKS ◊





*This book is dedicated to
my wife, Lim Choy Wan,
and my children,
Soraya Sunitra Kee Xiang Yin
and Jebat Arjuna Kee Jia Liang*





CONTENTS

Preface 9

Acknowledgements 10

Introduction 13

Chapter 1	SENSE OF FAMILY	21
Chapter 2	PRECOCIOUS YOUTH	28
Chapter 3	REBELLIOUS ON PRINCIPLE	36
Chapter 4	BOY TO MAN	47
Chapter 5	SINGAPORE STORIES	55
Chapter 6	THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY	62
Chapter 7	BY FORCE OF DESTINY	71
Chapter 8	K. S. PHONE HOME	78
Chapter 9	DARING DARE	89
Chapter 10	A MAN FOR ALL RACES	98
Chapter 11	DAY OF THE UNDERDOG	106
Chapter 12	THE HORROR, THE HORROR	116
Chapter 13	'ARE YOU LOOKING FOR ME?'	127
Chapter 14	PREPARED TO GO TO JAIL	137
Chapter 15	TESTING TIME	145
Chapter 16	FOUR TO FEAR	154
Chapter 17	GAMES PEOPLE PLAY	166
Chapter 18	'GREAT DICTATOR'	177
Chapter 19	DOG BARKING AT A MOUNTAIN	186
Chapter 20	BOLD UNDER PRESSURE	197
Chapter 21	DEAR FATHER	207
Chapter 22	A LOT MORE HELL TO PAY	218
Chapter 23	THE STUDENT DOTH PROTEST TOO MUCH	228



Chapter 24	BODY BLOWS AND SIAMESE KICKS 236
Chapter 25	NO ENTRY TO OWN COUNTRY 248
Chapter 26	GANG ATTACK 257
Chapter 27	UNFORGIVABLE 269
Chapter 28	SILVER LINING 282
Chapter 29	THE SCANDAL OF SCANDALS 289
Chapter 30	APPOINTMENT WITH DEATH 294
Chapter 31	HIS FINEST HOUR 306
Chapter 32	TOMB RAIDERS 316
Chapter 33	WALK ON, BLISTERS AND ALL 324
Chapter 34	A MEAN SEASON 336
Chapter 35	ASSAULT ON THE CROWN JEWEL 347
Chapter 36	'WIN PENANG FIRST' 357
Chapter 37	HOLIER THAN THOU 366
Chapter 38	HEAVYWEIGHT CONSEQUENCES 375
Chapter 39	THE YEAR OF ACTING DANGEROUSLY 387



PREFACE

The idea of writing a biography of Lim Kit Siang came to me several years ago, but it wasn't till the beginning of 2020 that I started working on it by getting part of the research done and interviewing a host of people who know him as a friend, comrade or loved one, even political opponents.

I had no idea then what a massive undertaking the project would be. It was only after I had written numerous chapters that I realised it would take more than one volume to do justice to Mr Lim's life and work.

Now that the first volume is done, I'm looking forward to tackling the next one. It has been an edifying mission for me so far because I have learnt much from everyone I interviewed, and derived immense pleasure from writing Mr Lim's story. I'm sure I will experience more pleasure and learning when I set about crafting the next volume.

Above all, I have learned an amazing lot from Mr Lim himself. I'm grateful to him for generously giving me time for interviews and spending countless hours being "victimised" (his word) by me. There will be more questioning and grilling to come, I can assure him!

I cannot emphasise enough that this project is a totally independent one. It is not a commissioned job. Mr Lim has not asserted himself in any way in regard to the form and content of this biography. Neither he nor I would have wanted it any other way.

Kee Thuan Chye

August 2021

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my special thanks to the following people who have helped facilitate my work on this book:

The ever-efficient Foo Yueh Chuan who, apart from fixing all my many appointments with Mr Lim Kit Siang, saw to my requests for contacts and information and a myriad other things;

Dr Eng Seng Chai who could produce magic when it counted;

Lim Hui Ying who helped me make connections with key people and provided valuable photos of her paternal grandparents and her father's siblings;

Teresa Kok Suh Sim who provided moral support and assorted assistance;

K.H.K., B.K.L., Andrew Lim Tatt Keong J.P., Wong Kok Wye, Pooi Weng Keong, Lim Eng Chong, Choong Sim Poey, Chong See Ming and Allen Yee Woon Khee without whose generous sponsorship the project would not have been able to get off the ground;

Loshni Nair for assisting me with research and promptly responding to my requests to get things done;

Jebat Arjuna Kee Jia Liang, my son, for enthusiastically transcribing the many interviews I conducted;

Goh Eck Kheng of Landmark Books for agreeing to publish the book.

I would also like to express my deep gratitude and appreciation to those named below who generously gave me their time to be interviewed extensively, some for more than one session: Chia Kwang Chye, Chin Nyok Soo, Chong Eng, Chong Siew Chiang, Chow Kon Yeow, Dyana Sofya Mohd Daud, Fong Kui Lun, Allan Goh, Gooi Hock Seng, Gooi Seong Kin, K. Gurunathan, Ho Lai Chee, Evelyn Ho, Jagdeep Singh Deo, Koh Tsu Koon, Teresa Kok Suh Sim, M. Kulasegaran, Kwok Mei Leng, Lai Keun Ban, Lee Kak Hoi, Lee Kaw, Liew Ah Kim, Liew Chin Tong, Lim Bok Ee, Lim

Bok Sze, Lim Guan Choon, Lim Guan Eng, Lim Hock Seng, Peter H. L. Lim, Lim Hui Ming, Lim Hui Ying, Ronnie Liu Tian Khiew, Anthony Loke Siew Fook, Mohd Ridzuan bin Asit, Musa Hitam, R. Nadeswaran, Neo Yok Tee, Ngeh Koo Ham, Ngoi Thiam Woh, K. Parkaran, Pek Teck Soon, Phee Boon Poh, Pooi Weng Keong, P. Ramasamy, R. Ravindren, K. Siladass, Thomas Su Keong Siong, Tan Kok Wai, Tan Tik Seng, Ting Chek Ming, Veera Pandiyan, Wong Hang Yoke, Wong Kah Woh and Vincent Wu Him Ven.

I'm also grateful to the following for answering my questions over the phone or e-mail: Robert Ang Kwee Teng, Irene Mary Chang Oi Ling, Hew Kuan Yau, Lee Lam Thye, Lim Jin Siew, Michael Ong Hung Choon, Sim Tong Him, Tjoa Hock Guan and Wong Swee Teck.

I also wish to thank all those who contributed photographs used in this book.

It takes a community to build a biography. I'm thankful and happy to have had the help of a community comprising all the people I've mentioned above. Through meeting them, I've also made some friends. That is the most heartening part of the entire experience.



INTRODUCTION

Serve to Lead

The change of federal government was something I had not expected in my lifetime. You work your soul out to bring about the change of government, but I did not really expect it to take place. Even on the morning of May 9. When it took place, that was a real historic change. I think for Malaysia, when you look back at it, it marks an important date. What happens after is a separate matter.

– Lim Kit Siang, in an interview with the author on January 17, 2021

On May 10, 2018, the day after the Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition had created history by astonishingly defeating the incumbent Barisan Nasional (BN) at Malaysia's 14th general election, a 77-year-old man in collared T-shirt, shorts and sandals was spotted in the SS2 area of Petaling Jaya, Selangor, at around 8 pm buying newspapers. The person who saw him couldn't believe his luck at this chance meeting, and promptly asked to take a photograph together.

He recognised the man as Lim Kit Siang, the doyen of the Democratic Action Party (DAP), one of the component parties of the victorious PH, and was bemused that on this momentous evening, as Malaysians waited anxiously for a new prime minister to be sworn in, this political legend was going around a Petaling Jaya suburb casually dressed and casually doing mundane things, like "what ordinary uncles do". Why wasn't he at a gathering with his coalition colleagues, celebrating in a big way?

Kit, as he was commonly called, would have chuckled at that thought. He was not one for fireworks and fanfare although there was no doubt he was a happy man at that moment. The fireworks he associated more with, figuratively speaking, were those he generated as a speaker at election hustings or as an Opposition member of Parliament fiercely probing government scandals or defending the interests of voiceless Malaysians.

For that, he was the bane of BN, especially Umno (United Malays National Organisation), the biggest component in the coalition that had hitherto been in government for 61 years.

In the late 1970s, an Umno top gun, Ghazali Shafie, became so annoyed by Kit's doggedness at raising issues, he told the DAP leader in open Parliament that if he didn't like what was happening in the country, he should just pack his bags and leave. Rather than take umbrage at that disparaging remark, Kit shot back a fitting retort that annoyed Ghazali even more, "I am a Malaysian, I speak on behalf of Malaysians, and if you don't like it, you can get out of the country instead."

Kit was ever fearless. And even after the BN Government took punitive action by detaining him without trial not just once but twice, for committing no crime other than standing up for fellow Malaysians, he was not cowed or embittered.

He remained grounded, prepared to take things as they came, good or bad. Like always, he went about like a workhorse who was focused on the work and the process more than on the outcome.

So on that May 10 night, even though PH's surprise victory marked Kit's greatest achievement after more than five decades of dedicating his life to building up the DAP and speaking up relentlessly not only for minorities but indeed anyone at all who deplored bad governance, he would be relishing the moment in his quiet, private way.

He would not be at the National Palace when Mahathir Mohamad of Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (Bersatu), another PH component party, would be sworn in as prime minister by the King, nor at the celebratory press conference that would be held afterwards. But he would be exulting with Mahathir in spirit, and he would continue to give his full support to PH whenever it was needed.

This, however, would not include being part of Mahathir's

administration. Kit told his son, Lim Guan Eng, secretary-general of the DAP and therefore the party's chief executive, not to include him in the DAP allotment for Cabinet positions.

As Kit would later explain: "I felt I had done my part. That's that. I'd already brought about the processes of political change and advancement. It's for the new generation to take over. We have younger people in the party who are qualified and can shoulder the responsibilities ahead."

Allan Goh Chay Foo, a friend of Kit's since primary school days, thinks it was "a very smart move". If Kit were to be in the Cabinet, he opines, Umno would definitely spread false allegations that the Government would be controlled by him and his Chinese-dominated DAP, and that they would destroy the majority Malay race and their religion, Islam.

In fact, just the presence of the DAP in the PH Government was already enough to spur Umno and other Malay groups to frighten the Malays into thinking that their special privileges would be taken away and Islam would be relegated from its position as the country's main religion.

In any case, Kit's wish was respected, and PH proceeded to set up a government that promised "a new Malaysia" and an abundance of reforms. It pledged it would be inclusive and serve the interests of all Malaysians, regardless of their background.

At the same time, contrary to what Umno and other groups were alleging, Kit looked forward to the realisation of his life-long Malaysian Dream – the forging of a united and inclusive nation in which every citizen regardless of their race or religion would have the opportunity to achieve success and prosperity.

This was what had mattered most to him ever since he entered politics in 1966 – in fact even much earlier, while he was still at secondary school.

In 1957, when he was 16 and the country (then known as Malaya) had just attained independence from British colonial rule, he acknowledged in an editorial for his class magazine, called *The Light*, that the birth of the new nation was "made possible only through the united efforts of the various communities".

He called on "the youths of today" to prepare to "serve to lead", invoking a military motto that advocates that a person must first be

a servant – to the people or the country – before they could lead.

He highlighted the need for everyone to bear in mind that “co-operation between the different races is of paramount importance, working on a common basis that we are imbued with the spirit of tolerance, cooperation and loyalty”.

“So let us ‘live and let live,” he exhorted, “in fraternity and harmony.”

Tolerance and cooperation between the different races, living in fraternity and harmony – that was what Kit truly believed in. But unfortunately for him and his dream, the PH Government did not survive its full term of five years. It lasted only 22 months, and was generally seen as a disappointment for being ineffectual in controlling the national agenda and failing to shape a new national narrative that would define the aspirations of the “new Malaysia” and spell out how every Malaysian could benefit from it.

It was also seen to be inept at solving the bread-and-butter woes of the lower-income groups, slow in instituting the major reforms it had promised, and clueless about reducing racial and religious tension. In fact, the polarisation of races became ironically worse.

Even so, the PH Government did not fall because it was democratically rejected. It was instead undone by treachery from within.

In late February 2020, a faction pulled out of PH and joined forces with political foes to form a new “backdoor government”. They betrayed the people’s mandate by helping to bring back into government, without going through fresh elections, the BN parties that had been rejected on May 9, 2018.

When the betrayal happened, Kit felt “very dejected, disillusioned and depressed”. It was another low in his political career of ups and downs, perhaps the biggest political setback he had experienced in all his five decades of struggle.

But he took it in his usual stoic stride. On March 1, 2020, the day the new Perikatan Nasional (PN) Government was installed, he was back up on his feet, exhorting in an exchange of WhatsApp messages with me: “We have to rise above our depression. We must continue to pursue the Malaysian Dream!”

He was not out for the count. His spirit was still unyielding. More strongly than ever, he now felt that all the races in the country needed to be convinced that Malaysia could only succeed if they

rejected being polarised, stopped feeling they were being threatened by one another, and agreed to work together to bring about a better society and a “top world-class nation”.

Even though he had seen his life achievement crumble with the fall of the PH Government, he was committed to finding a way to get this done. This, he declared in an interview with me on February 4, 2021, is “the last battle”.

Where does he get this never-give-up spirit from?

Perhaps from his life’s guiding motto: “Whatever comes, do your best to deal with it”.

Perhaps from what he went through during his fledgling time in politics, as has been observed by Tan Tik Seng and Pek Teck Soon, Kit’s two closest friends who have maintained regular contact with him since they were schoolmates.

“During Kit’s early political days, you should have seen the way he used to run from one place to another recruiting people for the party,” Tik Seng recalls.

Teck Soon elaborates: “I used to tell him that all that running was leading to nothing. He told me, ‘I’m disappointed in you.’ I said, ‘But it’s true, where does it lead to? Like that time, whole day, whole night, you talked to five chaps. If you could have convinced at least one, that would have been an achievement. But at the end of it, nobody bothered, you couldn’t even convince one chap.’”

It was indeed an uphill task for Kit then because few people wanted to join the DAP. It was a party in the Opposition, and it had little track record and hardly any money. Members even had to chip in their own money to keep the party afloat. Nonetheless, Kit believed in the DAP and what it stood for, and he slogged like hell to bring in new members.

In 1969, when the May 13 racial riots broke out, he was detained without trial under the Internal Security Act (ISA) although he had not been involved in the riots. One and a half years of his life was taken away from him, but he came out with a stronger resolve to carry on his party’s struggle.

In 1987, he was detained again under the ISA, this time together with Guan Eng and more than 100 others, in what was another instance of political persecution. Father and son were the first to be arrested and the last to be released – after 18 months. It was thus

arranged to punish Kit in more ways than one.

It's interesting to note that the prime minister then who signed their detention papers was none other than Mahathir Mohamad, who had been Kit's political nemesis ever since the 1970s. This was the same Mahathir who would put aside his differences with Kit 30 years later and lead PH to electoral victory in 2018.

Obviously, Mahathir didn't succeed in making Kit break during the 1987 detention. What nearly did break him, however, was the conviction and sentencing of Guan Eng to 18 months' jail in 1998 while he was defending a 15-year-old victim of statutory rape allegedly committed by a state chief minister.

It grated on Kit's sense of justice that Guan Eng was being harshly and unduly punished for his effort to help someone. The person who should have faced trial was the alleged rapist, but he was apparently being protected because he was from the ruling party. Moreover, the court's decision would bar Guan Eng from standing for public office for five years, thus hurting his prospects for political advancement and temporarily depriving the DAP of a young, dynamic leader.

Kit was hit so hard by the whole event that he fell into a prolonged state of sorrow and depression. He was to admit publicly many years later that the time Guan Eng spent in Kajang Prison was "the worst period" of his life.

So how does he keep going? How does he put aside these painful and life-crushing experiences? How does he reconcile with the other trials and tribulations that come with being the leader of an Opposition party that is constantly being harassed and labelled as an enemy of the state, with being betrayed countless times by party comrades close to his heart? How does he tolerate the slander of political opponents who brand him "anti-Malay" and "anti-Muslim"? How does he get over the insult of being called a "running dog" and a "traitor" to his race by detractors who find fault with the DAP?

How does he continue to maintain a positive attitude after all the incarceration, defeats, betrayals and vilification he has suffered?

Is it from the tenacity he developed in himself as he pursued his arduous political journey? Is it from the wisdom he acquired through all his suffering? What gives him the will, the strength and the energy to bounce back from despair and keep on fighting?

At the base of it all, what makes Lim Kit Siang Lim Kit Siang?

*I am a Malaysian, first and last...
I am proud to be a Chinese, but a Malaysian first of all.*

*~ Lim Kit Siang, June 2011
Interview with The Nut Graph*





SENSE OF FAMILY

Early in the morning of February 20, 1941, as Tiu Kau Nee went into labour, her husband, Lim Poh San, was in a village a few miles outside of Batu Pahat, Johor, plying his trade of castrating pigs and poultry. She was about to have her fifth child, at home, in their rented dwelling on the higher floor of a two-storey shophouse. One child was given away when she and Poh San were still living in China, before they immigrated to Malaya. Of the other three children, two were at school while the third was playing outside in the hall, oblivious to the impending arrival of a new sibling.

When Poh San returned home on his bicycle that afternoon, after a day of fruitful work, he was greeted by the midwife who had helped with the birth of his child. She told him it was a boy. He took the news with hardly a hint of a smile and proceeded to the bedroom where Kau Nee was breastfeeding the baby. He touched the baby and held his hand, and told her they would call him Kit Siang.

They would have had no inkling then that this boy born in the sleepy town of Batu Pahat would one day become a political firebrand and a hero to many as well as a scourge to others.

Believers of the Chinese zodiac, however, might have felt that Kit's destiny was already inherent in his horoscope.

Born in the Year of the Snake, he exhibited some of the characteristics attributed to this animal sign. Snakes are said to be intelligent and wise, hardworking and thorough, driven by lofty ideals and determined to achieve their goals. Being deep thinkers

*“Meticulous research brings
Kit Siang biography to life.”*

- Chan Kok Leong, Malaysian Insight

Lim Kit Siang, doyen of the Democratic Action Party (DAP), is a much misunderstood and little-known man. To some, he is a scourge because his political opponents falsely proclaim him to be anti-Malay and anti-Islam. To his supporters, he is the heroic fighter for democracy and a country for all Malaysians, regardless of race or religion, a visionary who has dedicated his life to pursuing his dream of a multiracial, multilingual and multicultural Malaysia. By and large, however, the public see only the demon, not the man; the icon, not the human being.

Kee Thuan Chye's biography of Lim Kit Siang humanises him. Full of drama, humour and heart – and cheeky asides – it tells the story of the outspoken politician and the private family man. It recounts the battles he has lost and won, the betrayals he has suffered and the sacrifices he has made, and explores the deep bond he shares with his family, friends and comrades. Above all, it gives an insightful understanding of what makes Lim Kit Siang Lim Kit Siang.

RM 80

ISBN 978-981-18-2203-2



9 789811 822032 >

◊LANDM△RK◊BOOKS◊

