

SENGKANG SNOOPERS

THE SECRET OF THE TIGER'S DEN



PETER TAN

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Written by
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*For LC and MĴ,
and in memory of MW*

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SNOOPERS MEET AGAIN

“**H**urry, Su Yang!” shouted Su Lin to her little brother from the living room, her arms akimbo. “We’ll miss the cable car if we don’t leave **NOW!**”

“Okay, okay!” said Su Yang, coming out of his bedroom. He was dragging a huge backpack and two big sports bags that were almost bursting at the seams. “I just hope I haven’t forgotten anything!”

“Didi! Are you planning on bringing the whole house?” Su Lin exclaimed. She was a slim and pretty girl, with a determined face.

“Oh my goodness, Su Yang, do you really need so many things?” Mrs Lee said, eyes opening wide. “You’re only going to Sentosa for a week, not to Europe for a month!”

“But I must be prepared!” Su Yang said, his face as red as a ripe tomato from carrying the heavy bags.

He was thin like his sister but a head shorter, and had a pleasant and expressive face.

Su Lin rolled her eyes and sighed. She blamed Su Yang's overpacking on the Cub Scouts. Ever since he became one, he has been spouting the Scout motto "Be prepared" until the whole family was sick of it. When their parents took them shopping in Malaysia the previous weekend, he had even wanted to bring the long kitchen knife "for when anyone tries to rob us". Fortunately, their father put his foot down.

"I hope you packed the kitchen knife," said Su Lin, sarcastically.

"You think I should?" asked Su Yang seriously.

Mr Lee smiled at his kids. He loved them more than anything in the world, but was rather relieved they were going for a week's holiday with their friends. At last, he and Mrs Lee could have some peace and quiet at home.

"Anyway," Su Lin said, "we must hurry because I can't wait to see the other Snoopers."

"Me too! I miss Zizi and Bus!" said Su Yang. "And of course, Kuning!" Grunting, he hoisted the heavy backpack on his tiny shoulders and teetered backwards from the weight.

"Come," said Mr Lee, taking the backpack from Su Yang and shaking his head. Was he ever like that as a child? he wondered.

"Thanks, Papa!"

"Papa's worried that you will grow up stunted—not that you aren't already," said Su Lin.

Su Yang stuck his tongue out at her.

Su Lin laughed good-naturedly. She loved teasing her younger brother, especially when he reacted like this.



“Quick, slowcoach, we don’t want to miss the cable car!” she exclaimed.

“No need to worry about that, Su Lin. The cable cars come frequently,” Mrs Lee said. “But you are right—we don’t want to keep your friends and their parents waiting.”

When they were zipping down the Central Expressway in their car, Mrs Lee turned to the children in the backseat. “It was very nice of Zizi’s parents to ask you to stay in Sentosa. So thank them properly later.”

“Duh!” said Su Lin. It was the third time their mother had reminded them that morning.

“You know I don’t like you using that word,” her mother said. She was always very proper with her language because she was a school principal and a former English teacher.

Su Yang knocked his knee against his sister’s as a way to say, “Ha!” Su Lin stuck out her tongue at him.

“But it’s a proper word, Mummy, duh!” she wanted to say to her mother, but decided it was better not to. Instead, she just said, “Okay, Mummy.”

Turning to Su Yang, she said, “I hope we have another adventure like the one we had on Ubin Island!”

“That was exciting, but I don’t think I am ready for another adventure,” said Su Yang, a studious boy who loved peace and quiet, and disliked the outdoors. He was talking about the adventure the Snoopers had when they foiled a gang of drug smugglers on Pulau Ubin.

The best thing about their Ubin escapade was becoming friends with Zizi and Bus. And, of course, Kuning.

The four friends had rescued the yellow-naped Amazon parrot from certain death, but Kuning more than paid back the favour by saving them from the dastardly smugglers!

What was more, Zizi convinced her parents to keep her as a pet—on the condition that the parrot behaved and kept out of their way. Kuning quickly learnt to be quiet and behave when Zizi’s parents were at home. Yellow-naped Amazons are among the most intelligent birds, able to imitate human voices and all kinds of sounds. Their sharp and powerful claws make them a formidable enemy, as Kuning had shown.

Following their adventure, the gang decided to call themselves the Sengkang Snoopers, after the town where Su Lin, Su Yang and Zizi lived.

Bus, who was from neighbouring Malaysia, had said, "I can see the Sengkang flats from my house, and if that's good enough for you, it is for me too!"

Mr Lee, who was an engineer with the subway, said as he weaved among the traffic, "I'm not sure I want you kids getting into another dangerous caper." He shuddered as he recalled what a close shave it had been for the children on Pulau Ubin.

"Yes, best you enjoy the beach and theme parks on Sentosa and not poke your noses into anything," added Mrs Lee. "You know the saying, 'Fools rush in where angels fear to tread'. Especially you, Su Lin."

"I'm not a fool, Mummy!" protested Su Lin. But she had to admit that she tended to rush into things before thinking properly. It had been, after all, her idea to check out the hermit's hut in Ubin Island that led to their marvellous adventure.

"I will make sure jiejie doesn't!" said Su Yang. Su Lin kicked her brother's foot and glared at him. He grinned at her cheekily. "We'll have the quietest holiday ever!"

Little did he know how wrong he was.

"And you, Su Lin, promise to take care of your didi," said her mother, turning to face her daughter.

"Of course, I will!" Su Lin said.

They were looking forward to staying in Sentosa, the holiday island. Zizi's parents were doctors and were organising an important international medical conference at a hotel there. Since they had to stay at the hotel, they suggested that the Snoopers came along too.

Finally, the Lees arrived at the cable car station on Mount Faber. It was like a busy market, thronging with hundreds of excited tourists. Right away, Su Lin and Su Yang spotted Bus and Zizi at the entrance. Kuning was perched on Zizi's shoulder, and did not seem to like the hubbub and the curious attention of the people around her at all!

Mr Lee dropped off Su Lin, Su Yang and Mrs Lee and went in search of parking. "Don't forget to finish your homework!" he shouted as they alighted.

Su Lin and Su Yang exchanged looks: Parents! They had been forced to bring their holiday homework along.

At the entrance, the Snoopers squealed with delight, hugging one another excitedly. Kuning squawked a welcome to Su Lin and Su Yang, and bobbed up and down in delight.

"Hello, hello!" she said, which made everybody laugh. She was the cutest bird ever!

Mrs Lee and Bus' mother thanked Zizi's parents, Dr Maslan and Dr Nazirah, again. Mrs Selvaraj, a sales assistant by day and janitor by night, had brought Bus all the way from Malaysia.

Bus burst out laughing when he saw how much luggage Su Yang had and said, "Thanks for packing for us too, Su Yang."

He gave the rest a wink. Bus was big for his age, with a round, cheerful face and a rounder body. He was almost as tall as the adults around him and looked like a friendly bear. His name was actually Basulingam, but everyone called him Bus.

"I think Su Yang's planning to move to Sentosa permanently," said Zizi, grinning. Zizi was a slender girl with big, intelligent eyes who wore a tudung and spectacles. She was whip-smart and usually serious, but could be cheeky at times, like she was now.

"There, I told you!" Mrs Lee cried. So she made Su Yang take only what he could squeeze into one bag.

Su Yang sighed. There was no way to say no to a school principal or his mother, and Mrs Lee was both. "Don't come running to me if you need anything in an emergency," he told the rest. It was hard to "be prepared" if you weren't allowed to!



Mrs Lee then got a call from Mr Lee, who said that he couldn't find a parking spot. So goodbyes were said, and the Snoopers followed Zizi's parents in through the crowd.

Inside, they waited for Dr Maslan to come back with the cable car tickets. "Uh-oh," said Su Lin, pointing to a sign.

PETS ARE NOT ALLOWED IN THE CABLE CARS, it read.

"Why don't you let her fly across!" said Bus.

"That's a great idea," said Zizi. "Then Kuning can also enjoy the view! Well, Kuning, it looks like you have to go in the box for now."

She opened the small dog carrier that her mother had converted into a bird cage. It had a crossbar for Kuning to perch on, a tiny tray of bird seeds and a mini drip water bottle.

"Good thing she's not a dog, otherwise she would have to swim across!" said Su Lin, and everyone laughed.

Dr Maslan came back, and Bus immediately handed him some dollar bills for his ticket. His mother had told him to pay as much for the holiday as he could, so Bus had spent the last few weeks earning money helping out at the kopitiam back home.

"No, Bus," Dr Maslan said, pushing the cash back to Bus. "This is my treat." Dr Maslan and his wife had invited the children to join Zizi and felt it was only proper that they pay. He also knew that Bus' family was poor and could ill afford a holiday in Sentosa.

Bus, Su Lin and Su Yang thanked Zizi's parents, and the group settled into the long, winding queue, right behind a couple who looked like they were tourists. When the man turned round and saw Kuning, he said in halting English, "Oh, what pretty parrot!"

"Thank you!" Zizi said, very pleased.

But Kuning was not pleased at all. In fact, she raised the yellow feathers on the back of her neck and gave a low growl. Zizi knew that was Kuning's unfriendly stance.

"Kuning!" Zizi scolded, puzzled by her pet's unwelcoming behaviour.

Kuning stepped farther away from the man to the other end of the crossbar, but kept her guard up.

The man smiled. He was tall and appeared strong, and had a neatly trimmed moustache. The woman next to him was wearing a red hat with a broad brim and big, round sunglasses. She looked away from the children and said something sharply

to the man in Japanese. She only came up to his shoulders and had a stern look on her face.

The man replied in a reassuring voice, but she scowled and turned away. The Snoopers thought her very unpleasant.

“I have macaw in Japan,” the man said as he reached for Kuning’s head. “Hello, bird-bird.”

Kuning drew back her body and squawked angrily. Then she tried to peck the man’s fingers! Luckily, the man drew his hand back in time. He looked quite shocked.

“Kuning!” scolded Zizi again. Kuning unhappily folded her feathers close to her body.

“Is okay,” the man said. “Maybe don’t like strangers.” The woman smirked an “I told you so” but he ignored her.

“I’m so sorry! She doesn’t normally do that!” said Zizi.

“Is okay,” the man said again.

His companion said something to him in a harsh tone. The man sighed and then said to Zizi, “Have good day!” He nodded to Zizi’s parents, who smiled back at him, and then he turned back to face the front of the queue.

“What a strange woman!” Su Lin whispered to Zizi.

Zizi nodded and said, “I would have liked to ask him more about his macaw but she looked very cross when he spoke to us. And I wonder why Kuning didn’t take to him.”

In any case, they soon reached the head of the queue. The man and woman entered the cable car in front, which meant that the Snoopers and Zizi’s parents had the next cabin all to themselves. Zizi opened the dog carrier, pointed to the top of their cable car and commanded, “Go up there, Kuning.” Kuning flapped her beautiful and powerful green wings and landed gently on the roof.

“She understands you perfectly, Zizi!” marvelled Su Yang.

“She’s a genius,” Zizi said, beaming proudly at her clever parrot. “I taught her to go where I point and she understood immediately!”

Kuning cooed from her perch, knowing that they were talking about her. All the other waiting passengers pointed at her too, so she strutted back and forth showing off.

The kids scrambled into the cabin. It edged forward, the doors hissed shut, and with a lurch they were away!

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OVER THE SEA BY CABLE CAR

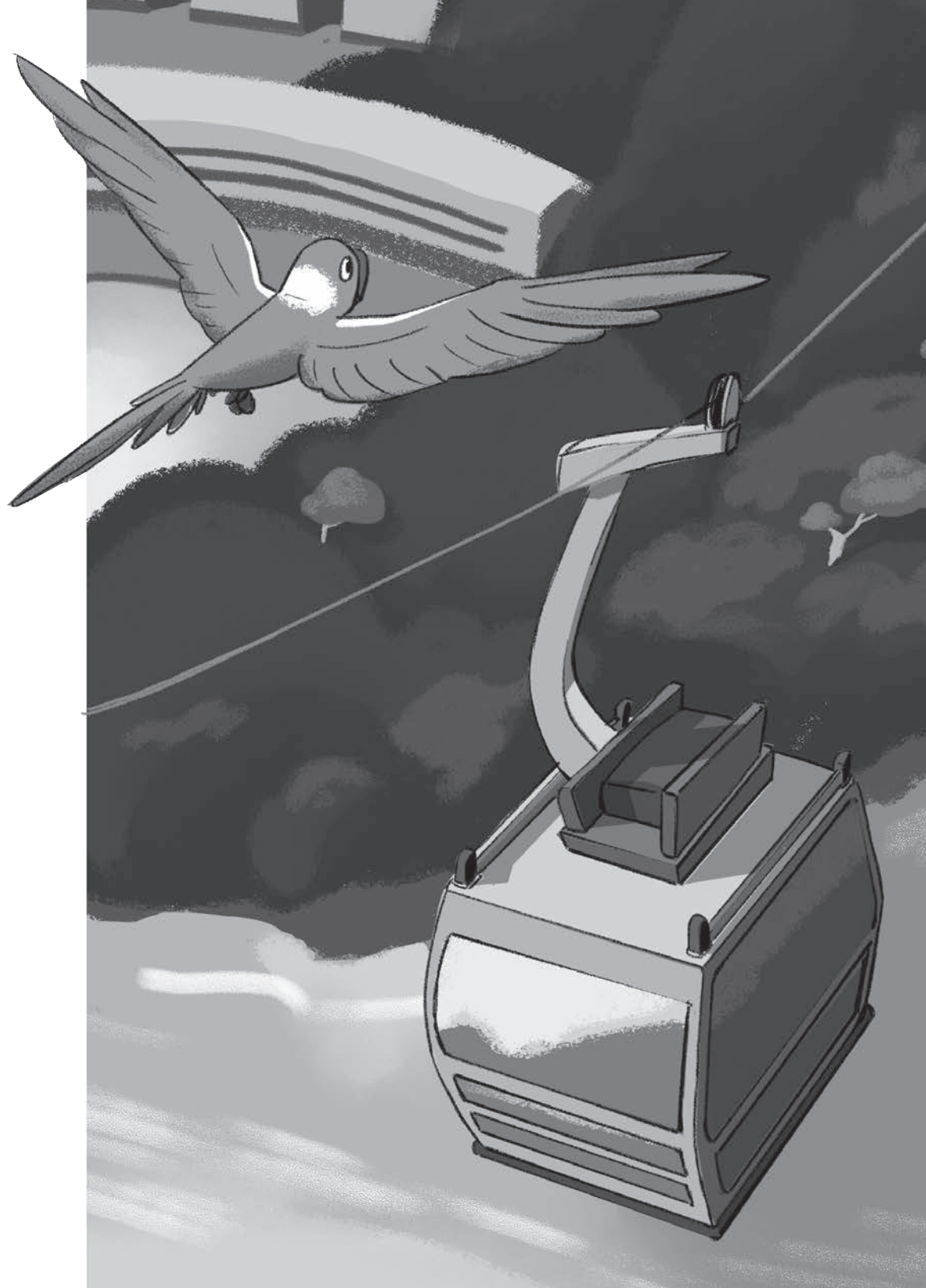
“**W**HEEEEE!” the children screamed as the cabin swung like a pendulum in a grandfather clock.

The green forested slopes of Mount Faber dropped away farther and farther below them. “It’s so scary!” said Su Yang, clinging on tightly to the railing that ran round the cabin. He was afraid of heights!

“Look how beautiful it is!” said Zizi, surveying the splendid view going by below. Everyone agreed!

They soon came to the midway station at the top of the HarbourFront skyscraper, where more passengers were waiting to take the cable car. Then they were hanging over the narrow sea between the mainland and Sentosa Island.

“That must be the port!” said Bus, pointing to his left, where gigantic cranes were loading containers onto two ships.



“Su Yang, your eyes are closed. How are you going to see anything?” Su Lin exclaimed.

Her brother opened one eye slightly—it wasn’t so bad after all. “The people look like insects from here,” he said, gingerly peering out the window.

“And that’s VivoCity,” said Zizi, pointing to the roof of a sprawling shopping centre. “It’s gigantic! No wonder we got lost in it last time.”

Zizi’s mother pointed out the green seaside fringe that was Labrador Park, and the weirdly bent towers of a condominium called Reflections at Keppel Bay.

The sky was clear and deep blue without a single cloud. It was unusual for December, which is the northeast monsoon season.

“That’s Sentosa!” said Bus excitedly, as they came closer to the long and narrow island across the grey-green sea. “I’ve never been there before.”

“There’s Universal Studios!” said Su Lin. “I want to go there!”

“Isn’t it very expensive?” Bus said.

“Don’t worry,” said Dr Nazirah. “I gave Zizi money to buy tickets for everyone!”

“Yay!” the Snoopers cheered.

“And that’s Fort Siloso,” said Zizi’s mother.

The fort sat atop a forested hill on the western end of Sentosa. Buildings strung along the ridge clustered round two clearings.

“We studied it in history, Mak,” Zizi said. “The British built it to defend Singapore but it didn’t work, unfortunately.”

“Can we also go there, please, Auntie?” asked Bus excitedly. He loved guns and battleships and tanks.

“Of course. In fact, it’s right next to our hotel.”

“Did people die there during the war?” asked Su Yang.

“Su Yang!” exclaimed Su Lin. It was just like her little brother to be so morbid.

“I am afraid so,” said Dr Nazirah. “You will learn more at the museum there.”

“I am not sure I want to go there, then!” shuddered Su Yang. “What if there are ghosts haunting the place?”

“But that was so long ago!” his sister said. “Don’t be such a namby-pamby, didi.”

Zizi and Bus laughed. Bus’ brother and sister were much older than him so they had nothing to quarrel over. Zizi was an only child, and always wondered what it would be like to love—and fight with—a brother or sister. The little tiffs between Su Lin and Su Yang were always amusing.

A lone angler was knee-deep in the sea at the base of the fort, his fishing line shimmering in the sunlight when he cast it. A sampan with a fisherman rocked on the water as a massive cruise ship created a bow wave on its way to the cruise centre.

“I hope Kuning is okay,” said Bus. They had forgotten about her! They all looked up through the glass roof of the cabin, but Kuning was not there.

“She’s flying above us!” said Su Lin, who spotted the green parrot with its yellow nape and tiny red markings on its wings happily following behind their cable car. “Isn’t she beautiful?”

“Kuning!” Zizi shouted through the window slits on the sides of the cable car.

“Squawk!” replied Kuning and circled the cabin several times.

“Let’s see who can spot the most things on this map,” said Su Lin, who was holding a map of Sentosa. So they competed at identifying the attractions that passed below them. Zizi won, of course.

There were so many fun things to do and see in Sentosa. It was going to be such an exciting holiday!

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CHAPTER 3

EXPLORING FORT SILOSO

Their hotel rooms were located on the tenth storey and were just amazing!

The girls had a gorgeous sea view of the tiny and pretty green-clad Sisters’ Islands. Farther away were other islands where orange flames flared from the towering chimneys of oil refineries. They looked down to see tiny figures swimming, kayaking and playing volleyball on the white, sandy Siloso Beach.

The boys had a mountain view and their window faced thickly forested slopes with Fort Siloso perched at the summit.

The first thing Bus did was fling himself onto one of the two beds. “Wheel!” he shouted with glee.

Fwwup! The mattress groaned as Bus bounced up halfway to the ceiling!

“What a fantastic bed!” he said, grinning as the other three laughed. He loved the smell of the clean sheets and the feel of the crisp linen.

“If you use it as a trampoline, it won’t be fantastic for long!” said Zizi and they laughed even harder.

“I am going to try that too,” said Su Yang, flopping onto the other bed. His slight frame bounced up even higher than Bus’. “Whoa!” he said as his heart skipped a beat when he landed.

They all laughed until their cheeks hurt. Even Kuning joined in, squawking merrily inside Zizi’s bag until they had to hush her. Pets were not allowed in the hotel!

“This is the first time I have ever stayed in such a grand hotel,” Bus said, lying spreadeagled on his back as he marvelled at the luxury of it all. In fact, this was only the second time Bus has stayed in a hotel as his widowed mother could not afford it. If they travelled at all, they would bunk with relatives or friends.

Bus went to check out the bathroom. “Hey, there’s a bathtub in here!” he shouted from inside. “I have never used one before!”

He emerged with an armful of toiletries. “Look at all the soaps and shampoos and toothbrushes

and stuff, guys! Do they give us new ones every day? I must take some home for my mother.”

Just then they heard an upset squawk. “Oh, we forgot about Kuning!” said Zizi. She had zipped Kuning inside her small bag and now the parrot was demanding to see what the commotion was about. Zizi let her out and said, “Sorry, sweetie!”

Kuning climbed out of the bag and totally ignored her.

“She’s angry with you,” said Su Yang.

“Oh, what a temper!” said Su Lin.

“Here, Kuning, have some nuts,” said Zizi, offering a peanut from a bag as a peace offering.

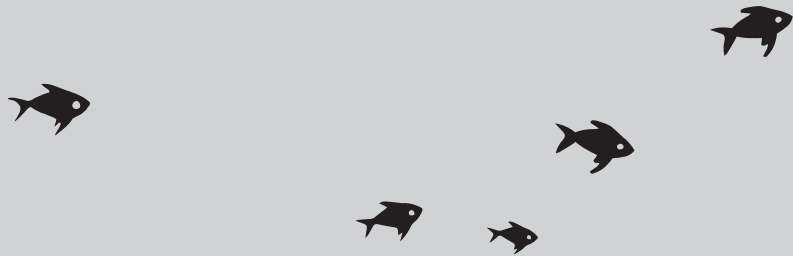
Appeased, Kuning took it with her beak and nibbled at it until it was all gone. Then she flew up to the wardrobe to inspect the place from above.






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CHARACTER BIOS



SU LIN is a spunky girl who is ever game for adventure. She is willing to break the rules, but that does not always end in the best results! She is a natural leader, though she sometimes rushes in before fully considering the consequences.

ZIZI is a smart, serious girl and the brains of the Snoopers. She is level-headed and believes in always being prepared—thus helping to get her and her fellow adventurers out of many sticky situations.

BUS is an easy-going boy who has the size—and the heart—of a big man. He’s happy-go-lucky, and is most so when he is with his friends or eating a bag of crackers (or chips or peanuts).

SU YANG is the younger brother of Su Lin and the “baby” of the group. He can sometimes be a bit of a namby-pamby and is not the keenest of adventurers. But he makes up for all that by being fiercely loyal and, when the situation calls for it, unexpectedly brave.

KUNING is Zizi’s yellow-naped Amazon parrot and the Snoopers’ favourite animal. Clever, playful and cute, she can imitate all sorts of sounds with her incredible voice. When her human friends are locked in a struggle against bad people, her powerful claws and beak become formidable weapons.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR



PETER TAN TARN HOW is an author, scriptwriter and award-winning playwright. He was a police inspector in the Singapore Police Force in National Service and a journalist with *The Straits Times*. Peter—much like the Sengkang Snoopers—loves adventures and can't help sniffing out fun mysteries to solve. He lives in Singapore with his wife and daughter.

BILLY YONG is an illustrator and character designer. Born and raised in Singapore, he received his art education at Concept Design Academy in Pasadena, California. He's often found either drawing, geeking over furniture with his wife, or swinging a sword in his dojo. He likes bubble tea but knows he shouldn't have it.

ALSO IN THE SERIES...



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“An exciting adventure set in Singapore's beautiful holiday island. I was fully immersed in the story, often picturing myself as part of the gang... I could not put the book down.”

— Jarel Kee, 10



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