

# SECRETS OF SINGAPORE



UNCOVERED BY

DANGER DAN & GADGET GIRL

ASSISTED BY  
LESLEY-ANNE & MONICA LIM

“Danger Dan and Gadget Girl have really outsmarted me this time. There are secrets of Singapore that I didn’t even know about! *Secrets of Singapore* is a comprehensive account of everything Singaporean—from history to politics to transport, education and food—and has fascinating details, interesting commentaries and humorous illustrations. It is a book that should be in every Singaporean kid’s collection.”

—Dr Cheah Yin Mee, partner and consultant, Learning Ventures, council member, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) Singapore

“I wish Danger Dan and Gadget Girl were around to help me with History back when I was in school. *Secrets of Singapore* will be a boon for those mugging for Social Studies, as it presents facts about the social and cultural history of Singapore in an interesting way, with memorable illustrations by James Tan.”

—Lim Cheng Tju, country editor for the  
*International Journal of Comic Art*

“An easy-to-read, interesting book that should appeal to any young reader who wants to find out more about Singapore’s history. It also contains many fun facts that are not commonly known.”

—Lee Siong Boon, History teacher

# **SECRETS OF SINGAPORE**



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written by  
**Lesley-Anne & Monica Lim**  
illustrated by  
**James Tan**



**E**

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Also by Monica Lim  
*The Good, the Bad and the PSLE*

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*For Ms Heng Siok Tian,  
who elicits music from even the quietest of instruments*



***Psst!* Hey, you there!** We're going to tell you a secret. More than one, actually. A long, long, long time ago, on this tiny island called Singapura...

**Hang on,** before we start, we should introduce ourselves! We're Danger Dan and Gadget Girl, Singapore's secret superhero duo. If you've read the thrilling Danger Dan series, you would know that we travelled back in time to save Singapore from some really nasty incidents. The Sinister Spyder (a very evil guy) had tried to mess up Singapore's history but we thwarted his plans! That was a close call, phew!

If not for that adventure, we wouldn't have thought much about Singapore's history. Gadget Girl comes from way, way in the future—the year 2135, to be exact. And I live for the present. I think only about what's happening now. Singapore's past wasn't exactly on our minds.



But because we had to save Singapore, we discovered some very interesting bits about our nation's past. That got us curious about it so we decided to do a little investigation—superhero style!

You wouldn't believe the treasure trove of information we found. For example, did you know:

- You could ride a train (not the MRT) in Singapore for just 21 cents
- Ghost stories used to be told on radio, and they were a big hit
- Tiger hunting was a sport in Singapore
- You could get your fortune told by a parrot

And you thought history was boring! So come with us on our journey to discover Singapore's past. We'll start at the very beginning—with a lion, a prince and a little tropical island.

As they say, the rest is history!

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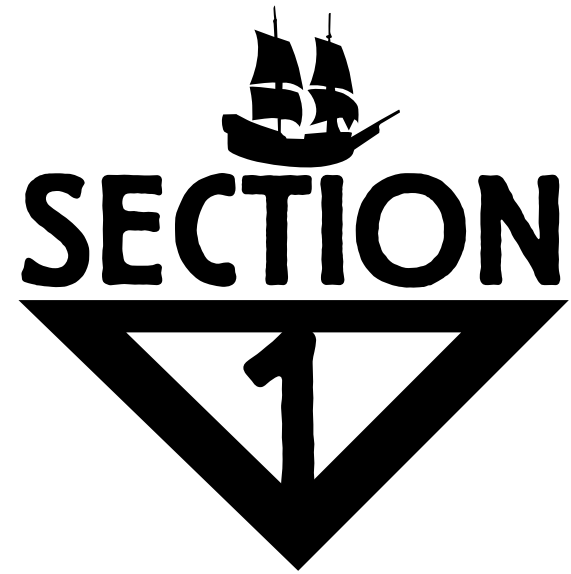
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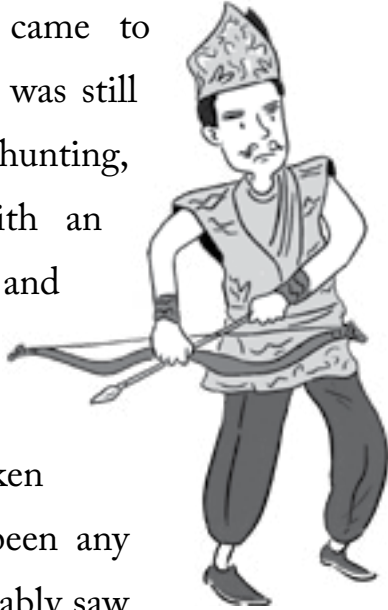
## **The Real Lion King**

### **Sang Nila Utama and the Kingdom of Temasek**

If you're like most people, you probably thought that before Raffles founded Singapore in 1819, it was just a sleepy fishing village. Well, you couldn't be more wrong!

According to historians, Sang Nila Utama, a

Prince of Sumatra, first came to Singapore in 1299 when it was still known as Temasek. While hunting, he spotted an animal with an orange body, a black head and a white chest. His Chief Minister said it was a lion, but he was clearly mistaken because there have never been any lions in Singapore. He probably saw a tiger but that, too, is puzzling because Sang Nila Utama would have been familiar with tigers. It's anyone's guess what he really saw!



Sang Nila Utama named the city “Singapura”, which means “Lion City” in Sanskrit. He ruled Singapura for 48 years and even had a palace built on top of today’s Fort Canning Hill. Fort Canning Hill was considered a holy and royal place in Hindu-Buddhist mythology, so maybe he built a palace there to show everyone that he was god-like!

Singapura in the 1300s was a mighty kingdom. It was a very important port for the trading ships that sailed past the Malacca Straits. And these weren't just ordinary ships! Some of them carried very important visitors from ancient Asian empires, such as Mongol envoys looking for elephants and ambassadors paying tribute to the grand Malay royal court at Fort Canning.

There were about 10,000 people living in Singapura then and the source of life in the city was a spring on Fort Canning Hill. The spring supplied fresh water for the people and ships that anchored in the harbour.

Sang Nila Utama died in 1347. Some believe that he was buried at the foot of Fort Canning Hill. Maybe if you go there at night, you'll catch a glimpse of his ghost.

***Just kidding!***

After Sang Nila Utama, Singapura was ruled in turn by five kings. But Singapura's glory didn't last long! It was overrun by invaders in 1398 and there was a mighty battle.

According to the *Malay Annals*, an ancient text of the Malay Golden Age, "blood flowed like a river". Singapura's last king, Iskandar Shah, fled to Melaka where he founded the Melaka Sultanate.

**I don't like the sight of blood either!**



For the next 300 years, Singapura continued to be an important port but after that, it was slowly forgotten. When Raffles showed up in 1819, it had become a small fishing village and the ancient kings of Temasek were only mystical folklore.

# He Came, He Saw, He Conquered

## Raffles and the Founding of Singapore

You probably know that it was Sir Stamford Raffles who founded Singapore. But how did it happen and why did he choose Singapore?

You see, back in the 1800s, much of the trade in the Malay Archipelago (that means the islands of Malaya and Indonesia) was controlled by the Dutch. They didn't want to share their power with any other Europeans and allowed other European ships to trade only in Batavia, Java.



This made the Dutch very rich! But it also made the other Europeans unhappy (because they wanted to be rich too).

## ***Ka-ching!***

The British, especially, were making a lot of money by trading with China and to do that, they had to sail past the Malay Archipelago. Having to stop at Batavia meant they had to pay high taxes to the Dutch. Nobody likes to share their money.

One man in particular was terribly upset that the Dutch had so much control in the area. His name was...you guessed it!

**SIR THOMAS STAMFORD RAFFLES**

Raffles was British and he was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Bencoolen in 1818. Even

though the British managed to have control of Bencoolen and Penang in the Malay Archipelago, Raffles wasn't satisfied. That's because those locations weren't all that great for traders in that area as compared to Melaka, which was controlled by the Dutch.



Raffles was a “take-charge” kind of guy, so he decided to explore the region in search of a new British settlement.

He boarded the ship *Indiana* with his assistant, Major William Farquhar, and set sail. On 29 January 1819, they landed on a little island that was mostly a jungle.

Let me guess—that's **Singapore!**



**Yes!** That was Singapore. There were around 1,000 people living on the island then, made up of Malays, Chinese and the orang laut (or sea gypsies).

The Malays lived in a village near the Singapore River headed by the Temenggong.

*Ooh, I met him!  
He called me a  
Boy Hero!*



The Chinese lived on the hills where they grew a plant called gambier. The orang laut lived on houseboats along the Singapore River and worked as fishermen and boatmen. Some sold fruit for a living.

Raffles was very pleased with Singapore for a few reasons:

- 1) Singapore's position was better than all the other Dutch and British ports—it could protect the ships better.
- 2) Having a port here meant the British wouldn't have to stop at Batavia.
- 3) There were no Dutch on the island.

He met with the Temenggong and asked if the British could be allowed to set up a port in Singapore. However, there was some bad news: the Temenggong was friendly but he told Raffles that Singapore was part of the Johor-Riau sultanate that was ruled by Sultan Abdul Rahman. Raffles would need the permission of the Sultan.

Unfortunately, Sultan Abdul Rahman would never have agreed because he was loyal to the Dutch.

But Raffles' ears perked up when the Temenggong told him the story of how Sultan Abdul Rahman wasn't the rightful heir to the throne.

## The Tale of Two Brothers

Tengku Hussein and Tengku Abdul Rahman were brothers. Tengku Hussein was older so he was supposed to be the next Sultan. However, when their father died, Tengku Hussein was



in Pahang getting married and only Tengku Abdul Rahman was present. The chiefs in Riau and the Dutch decided to make Tengku Abdul Rahman the new Sultan instead. There weren't any phones back then so Tengku Hussein only found out about it when he returned.

*What? I get married and this is my wedding present?*



Obviously, he was rather peeved but there was nothing he could do about it. Tengku Hussein, who should have been Sultan, was told to live quietly in Riau instead.

When Raffles heard the story, he rubbed his hands together with glee (or maybe he didn't. We're guessing).

The crafty guy that he was, Raffles conspired with the Temenggong to bring Tengku Hussein into Singapore from the Riau islands. They smuggled Tengku Hussein on a ship so that the Dutch wouldn't find out.

*Aha! I'm going to recognise Tengku Hussein as Sultan!*



When Tengku Hussein reached Singapore on 6 February 1819, Raffles recognised him as Sultan Hussein, the rightful Sultan of Singapore. Raffles, Sultan Hussein and the Temenggong signed a treaty that allowed the British to set up a trading settlement in Singapore in return for a yearly salary to Sultan Hussein and the Temenggong. The signing was held at the Padang, a large empty field. The historic event was witnessed by the orang laut, pirates and fishermen.

*So that's how Singapore became a British colony!*



**Not quite!** The signing of the treaty in 1819 didn't mean that the British controlled Singapore. Sultan Hussein only gave the British a piece of land on the southern part of Singapore to build a settlement. We'll talk about how Singapore became a British colony in the next chapter.



*Wait! You never said how the Dutch reacted when they found out about the treaty! Weren't they hopping mad?*

**Of course they were!** The Dutch were so upset they wrote a letter with lots of big words to Raffles' company—the British East India Company (EIC)—complaining about Raffles' behaviour. The EIC was angry with Raffles for being a troublemaker. The British government was also angry with

Raffles for spoiling their friendly relationship with the Dutch. Bet you didn't know the founding of Singapore made so many people lose their cool!

But Raffles was pretty stubborn. He was sure he had made the right decision and fought hard to keep Singapore. Though the Dutch were unhappy, they wanted to remain friends with the British and didn't want to start a war. So in 1824, the Dutch signed a treaty with the British, allowing them to keep Singapore.

# Cuppa Tea, Anyone?

## Colonial Singapore

After Raffles had signed the 1819 treaty with Sultan Hussein and the Temenggong, the real work began. He had to see to it that Singapore became the bustling port he had envisioned.

Raffles appointed his assistant, Farquhar, as the first British Resident of Singapore. He had a **Big Vision** for Singapore and before sailing back to Bencoolen, he told Farquhar to develop the British settlement in Singapore according to his plans.

However, Farquhar faced serious difficulties doing as Raffles had asked. He and his men needed to clear the jungle before they could build huts for themselves. To attract traders to Singapore, he had to make sure there was law and order, and enough food. He also had to think about defending the settlement. And as if he didn't have enough



headaches, the island was infested with rats and centipedes!

Raffles had decided that Singapore would be a

free port, meaning that traders would not have to pay taxes on the goods that they bought and sold here. He wanted Singapore to be more attractive to traders, who had to pay taxes to use the Dutch harbours. This did indeed make Singapore popular but it also meant that Farquhar could not collect money from traders using the port.

Without money, Farquhar could not carry out Raffles' plans. Out of desperation, he gave out licences for gambling dens and cockfighting, allowed the sale of opium and let slaves be traded in exchange for money.

To enforce law and order, Farquhar had a police force but there were very few police

**D-rats!**



officers and they were poorly paid. Since there were no Chinese police officers, the police were often unable to communicate with the Chinese. There was...**chaos!** The army was often called in to help the police maintain order.

Despite all these problems, by the end of 1820, Singapore's trade was booming. Traders flocked to Singapore, which transformed from a quiet fishing village to a busy town full of new settlers. And yes, Farquhar managed to get rid of the rats and centipedes!

However, when Raffles returned to Singapore in 1822, he thought Farquhar had done a poor job. He was shocked that there were gambling dens and slavery. He was also furious with Farquhar for allowing houses and warehouses to be built along the Singapore River, the area which Raffles had reserved for government buildings.

Farquhar argued that developing a business district was more important than having government

buildings. He also complained that Raffles left him to do all the work and did not understand his problems in setting up a settlement in Singapore. (Raffles had only visited Singapore once after the signing of the first treaty in 1819.)



The two men had a jolly big fight and Raffles fired Farquhar as British Resident in 1823. So much for their friendship! In his place, Raffles appointed John Crawfurd as the second British Resident of Singapore.

The British wanted control of the whole island so in August 1824, a second treaty was signed. Sultan Hussein and the Temenggong handed Singapore over to the British in exchange for more money. And THAT'S how Singapore became a British colony. This time, the British guy signing the treaty wasn't Raffles but Crawfurd.

So who was the real founder of Singapore? Was it Raffles the visionary? Crawfurd who signed the treaty? Or Farquhar who never got any credit?

*I guess it depends on how you look at it!*



## The Great Migration

The people who settled in Singapore were mostly from the Malay Archipelago, China and India. Europeans and Arabs came to Singapore as well. Many who came decided to migrate here, meaning they chose to make Singapore their home. Singapore was an attractive place to stay for many reasons:

- 1) It was a safe and peaceful country as compared to some neighbouring countries, which were experiencing war or turmoil.
- 2) It was a free port with a good location. Traders flocked to Singapore. People came here to trade and look for jobs.
- 3) The British allowed people to migrate here freely without needing special permission or papers.

Many of the early immigrants—the people who migrated here—lived near the Singapore River as that was where the action was (and therefore where most of the jobs were found). Singapore became a popular port for China to trade with Europe, India and the Malay Archipelago. So many ships came to trade that the Singapore River soon became very crowded and a new harbour had to be built in a different location (today's Keppel Harbour) (SEE PAGE 79).

These early immigrants were the ones who helped develop Singapore. They cleared the lands, built roads and buildings, and started businesses. Others found different jobs, such as fishing, farming or working in the government.



**"A very comprehensive and interesting recounting of Singapore's history from its earliest times, *Secrets of Singapore* is wonderfully written in a style that is exquisitely simple and appropriate for young readers."**

—Koh Boon Long, former MOE Deputy Director,  
National Education, and retired principal

**IN *SECRETS OF SINGAPORE*, DANGER DAN AND GADGET GIRL UNCOVER OUR NATION'S PAST, FROM THE TIME OF SANG NILA UTAMA IN 1299 TO INDEPENDENCE IN 1965.**



**BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE!**

**THEY ALSO INVESTIGATE INTRIGUING AREAS SELDOM FOUND IN HISTORY BOOKS (SHHH!), LIKE CINEMAS, AIRPORTS, SPORTS AND OF COURSE, FOOD! JOIN THE SUPERHERO DUO AS THEY UNEARTH FASCINATING FACTS LIKE:**

- **WHICH ANIMALS HAVE ESCAPED FROM THE SINGAPORE ZOO?**
- **HOW LONG WAS THE VERY FIRST MRT RIDE?**
- **WHERE CAN YOU SEE A TIGER CAR? (AND WHAT ON EARTH IS A TIGER CAR??)**



**THE ANSWERS TO THESE BURNING QUESTIONS AND MUCH MORE IN DANGER DAN AND GADGET GIRL'S GUIDE TO SINGAPORE'S PAST.**

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