



Farquhar 1819

Joshua Ip

Farquhar *Joshua Ip*
with illustrations by
Denise Nicole Yap

Farquhar

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Farquhar



Chapter 1: Introduction

The forgotten founding father gets a rotten account,
The other guy denounces him, word's gotten around,
Alters the plot and frowns on his profound decision-making,
His unsound risk-taking, calls it a mistake and makes
his reputation!

Major-General William Farquhar was an engineer,
A decorated veteran and a Madras Pioneer,
Yet all the Social Studies textbooks never set much store
By the First Resident and Commandant of Singapore.

They say he was incompetent when left to his devices:
Cockfighting and gambling, he devised a den of vices.
A laughing-stock in his sarong, dishevelled in his shambles
Before the wisdom and the grandeur of Sir Stamford Raffles.

Yet history is harsh—Farquhar was no slacker.
He was the man in charge, the “Rajah of Melaka”.
After the Brits marched in, victorious attackers,
He made a lodging place for traders, tailors, smiths and sailors.

He enlarged taxes, managed with no drama;
He was a major and he made it as a Nonya's Baba;
He spoke the language, with sanguine Asian flavour,
This Scot engaged people, the Big Mac of Malaya.

So why did they put an upstart in charge? Let one blackguard
at large?

This knave frames Farquhar, he manages his sabotage,
Look how he barged in and discharged him, see,
It baffles me how this menagerie becomes all named after
Raffles.

One man dropped by three times, the other laboured for
three years;

One man wrote notes, the other built roads, docks,
warehouses, piers;

Now one surname's become synonymous with the premier,
The other marks a Bugis alley that has disappeared.

Chapter 2: The early days (1791–95 Madras; 1795–1818 Melaka)

Farquhar:

I sign on at 17, an officer cadet.

The Madras Engineers, they say I ain't seen nothing yet.

I fight at Pondicherry, I learn to shoot and march,

At 21 years old, I take Melaka from the Dutch.

After 8 years, they make me Commandant of that old town.

I balance all the books and soon I turn the place around.

I live with Nonio Clement, French-Malay, but we don't marry.

We have six children, and a tiger, leopard, cassowary...

I live a semi-charmed life with my charming semi-wife.

My lung is stabbed through with a knife, but somehow

I survive;

A tiger springs and swipes my hat while safely home I ride;

A musket fires two shots at me that pass on each side.

In 1806, young clerk Thomas visits from Penang.

He's dumbstruck by the snippets of my knowledge of the land.

I share how management wants to blow up Melaka's fort.

I make the case against, and show him my ignored report.

(Months later one report wins this young clerk a major prize—the favour of Lord Minto. But the work looks plagiarised...)

I still blow up the fort like an obedient soldier should.

But like a thinking soldier, I leave untouched what I could.

Barely 5 years later, the young clerk who stole my thunder
Is now Lord Minto's spanking ranking new blue-eyed
boy wonder.

He taps me for my local knowledge, for a landing site
At Batavia, in Java—he wants to pick a fight.

We soldiers storm the beach amid the powder-smoke and fire.
Young Tom Raffles waits on the boat, while dreaming of
Empire.

Soon Lord Minto lands, the prime protagonist and plunderer.
Before you know it, the boy wonder, sir, is Java's governor.
For earning sea supremacy through the archipelago
For stealing coffee, pepper, cotton, sugar and tobacco.

Hardly months have passed—Java's been run into the ground.
Boy wonder neglects government while there's flowers to
be found.

They call him back to England to explain in black and white.
(Where he writes a local history and his friends make him
a knight.)

Chapter 3: Lost-and-founding [1818 Melaka; 1819 Singapore]

Narrator:

Napoleon has fallen, the European pandemonium
Is wholly done, restoring old Melaka to the Netherlands.
Resident and commandant, his service was abundant,
But William the incumbent was abruptly made redundant.

Farquhar:

Fifteen years I fixed and funded, now ho-llanded, and that's it?
"Sir, thank you very much, Melaka's going Dutch, now split!"

Raffles:

I found his unemployment an excuse for redeployment
To my purposes, usurp his oeuvre to keep my future buoyant.
Hastings tasked me here to grasp a port just or unjustly,
But Java's bust fresh in my past, nobody out here trusts me.
Melaka handed back behind his back, so he's the man
To back my play, this seasoned hand knows the land like
his backhand.

Farquhar:

Bannerman says, stay in port and on your best behaviour.
He doesn't dare to scare the Dutch or err against their favour.

Raffles:

He's jealous of the bright ideas of men hotter and braver.
Let's claim a dame was pirated, and now we got to save her!

Farquhar:

I sail down south to make entreaties to the local princelings.

Too late I find them sworn to Holland, long past

my convincings.

They send reports alleging my intention to explore

A British port set in the Carimons or Singapore.

Raffles:

We'll find a better place to meddle with each little legal letter,

Dominate the Sunda Strait, with weight far south of

the equator,

Banca or Semangka?

Farquhar:

Or maybe Pulau Karimun?

Raffles:

I want to rule from Bengkulu, that's too far north to carry on.

Farquhar:

The Dutch hold Riau. What we need is somewhere that they

haven't found.

Raffles:

Pulau Karimun, I see. Let's go down south and look around.

Farquhar:

After my trip, the Carimons have no deep-water harbour.
It's coral reefs from coast to coast, each landing will be harder.
But Captain Ross has found a spot that seems a friendly shore
The deeper harbour of the ancient city, Singapore.

Raffles:

That's under sway of old Johor, the Dutch got to them first.
But any chance the local ruler could be twice coerced?

Farquhar:

They've bribed the Johor Sultan—second-born son,
Abdul Rahman
But his big brother in the fraught succession lives in Bulan.
The younger claim is not as strong as long as long lives
Tengku Long.
I heard this from my old acquaintance, Singapore's own
Temenggong.

Raffles:

This island is desirable. Let's hire this admirable
Right royal if he's pliable. His claim is undeniable.
We need a deed and regent who will see financial reason:
Any Sultan who'll result in treaty and agreement.

Farquhar:

I've spoken to the Temenggong. This Tengku Long will sing
our song.

Raffles:

Let's find him some regalia and crown him
Sultan Hussein Shah!

Narrator:

6 February, Raffles and the newly minted Sultan
With Farquhar and the Temenggong sign papers that result in
A British port. The lease is short. Scant more than a
square mile.
But only ceremonial shot rang over this fair isle;
Some conquer with their cannon, some men steal at
point of sword
And some embark on larceny with nicely pointed words...



Chapter 4: Making it Happen [1819–22 Singapore]

Narrator:

Next morning, Raffles ups and leaves, and leaves behind some
broad intent,

One ship, some men, meagre supplies, and Farquhar
as Resident.

A rat-infested tent his home, he tries to keep the port afloat—
But letters fly as Raffles tries to micromanage by remote.

Farquhar:

Now we've signed the treaty, cut the ribbon, broken ground,
When it comes to building buildings, Stamford's nowhere
to be found.

He left no money, only orders, and one albatross:
If I can't tax the trade for public works, I'm at a loss!

Raffles:

It isn't necessary now to subject trade to duty,
The freedom of a free port, is its freest beauty.
You are a man of great report, you report to me,
So do your duty, you're a pro, not a newbie!

Farquhar:

That's all you offer me, my friend, you got to face the facts:
To fund bureaucracy somebody's got to pay the tax!
You may not understand the chaos that is going down,
You don't have a clue about the situation on the ground!

I sleep in a tent. I know what you meant. Your intent is clear.
Clear as the shore. Clear as my stores. Clear as your
absence here.

Out of sight and out of mind, we all know who you're fooling,
Writing your letters while cooling your rump in Bencoolen!

Raffles:

I swung the Sultan, I got your hand in.
I know your stand, but I know you're just a stand-in,
You're but one actor, I'm director and that's a fact,
Contracted construction worker, I'm the architect!
Quit fooling, I made my ruling, get the admin done,
I'm gonna sit here in Bencoolen and play badminton!

Farquhar:

We've got no food, only the fruit and fish from Orang Laut,
We've got a hundred sepoy who are itching to get out,
They're over-over-time because your detour was unplanned,
They want to go home to India, not to found a brand new land!
I cannot pay these immigrants to work with nail and hammer,
Raffles, you irritant, you've left me with a real dilemma!

Raffles:

Farquhar, how dare you question the expert,
For your necessary action, please revert.

Farquhar:

Sitting there in Bengkulu, so high and mighty,
What I have that you do not, is—guys who like me.
I'll call in all my favours from the roving Bugis traders,
They need no real estate, they travel where the freest trade is!

Traders:

Pack your junk, tack your sail, rig your brig.
The Rajah of Melaka's got a new gig,
A new community to trade with tax impunity,
No ambiguity, 'cos everything is duty-free!

Farquhar:

The only deal you see, you've gotta bring food for me.
Provisions by the load, your mission's on the road,
A few conditions that you meet, you'll hit the mother lode...

Traders:

Down by the tippy-tip of the Malay peninsula,
It's just a bitsy trip. Penang, they so insular,
Melaka's Dutch are out of touch, they will never budge,
Farquhar—such a name is worth much!

Farquhar:

So boys and girls, don't mess with me, I'll stake my claim
with urgency,
Major William Farquhar, in these Straits my name is currency!
By 1823 5,000 traders come to me,
Carpenters, labourers, all follow me across the sea,

From pok-pok-keh sellers to a towkay wannabe,
Melaka's great drought is Singapore's rain of plenty!

Dutch:

William—Farquhar, so damn—popular;
Stealing—passengers, kill him—massacre;
We can't allow this fellow to propel himself to stardom,
Let's sail a galleon down and hang him from the
starboard yardarm!

Farquhar:

The Dutch are angry and I only have a hundred troops,
One unseaworthy ship, I can't see how to fit this sloop,
One armed contingent is enough to put me to extortion,
Raffles, you had one job, can you sort out the reinforcements?

Raffles:

I'm sorry, I'll get back to you, I don't have much time for
this now,
I have to take long walks so I can claim I found Minangkabau,
Bencoolen might send you a ship, but as you know it's quite
a trip,
Reception's rather spotty in this long-distance relationship...

Farquhar:

I can't just wait for you, the payments can't be late for you,

I don't have time to carry out this long-distance debate

with you!

I'm here to make things happen, I'm the ground coordinator,

I'm going to make decisions now and then say sorry later!

Chapter 5: The Great Debate [1822 Singapore]

Narrator:

Sir Stamford Raffles reappears for just the third time in
three years.

He finds the isle developed far beyond his wildest hope
and fears.

Yet he discovers that the Resident left in command,
Has found success by boldly deviating from the Raffles Plan.
These men settle their differences in matters of the
fledgling state
By shuttling letters back and forth in roughly three rounds
of debate...

Raffles:

I left this place, so full of gentle natives—
Now this disgrace is what I have to deal with!
There are slaves being traded,
It's depraved that they're paraded,
Displayed for sale, it's base and craven,
human lives we have purveyed in!

Look around, man, in gambling dens they're scrambling,
They say you authorised this vice, oh Jesus Christ,
it's maddening,
Gaming and debauchery, they're wagering officially,
Trying their luck at *ban luck*, and chattering at *chap ji kee*!

This opium dystopia is gross and inappropriate,
The dope they smoke is odious, so why are you
condoning this?

See, the clouds are thicker, now you're licensing their liquor,
And you know that I'm a stickler for morality, go figure,
Colonial custodians and gentlemen Europeans
Shouldn't have let loose on booze, slaves, gambling,
and opium!

Farquhar:

You've got to get the context right, see, one thing at a time.
First, you know as well I do, slavery is a crime
In Europe. This is Asia. This is how they do things here.
We technically don't own the place, just leased it for
some years.
The Temenggong and Sultan keep their servants as
is parochial.
No Europeans partake in this. We leave it to the locals.

Next, I was left no moolah, boss, so how do I Majulah?
No food, no goods, no dollars, I'd be singing hallelujah
If when left to my devices, I didn't regulate these vices!
Instead I taxed them to the max to sate my budget crisis.
The price is paid to keep the peace, the licenses pay the police,
This gambling den has paid for traders ambling in, assembling
A semblance of order from the shambles that you left me in!

Now they smoke in the open. Did you know if I ban opium
I'd be brokering an opening for secret shady opium rings.
Penang ran with a gambling ban, the gangs went laughing to
the bank,
They grew their ranks and bribed every policeman that they
didn't shank.
With sleazy operators, take it easy, regulators,
If you crack down like dictators, they'll go poof and
see you later!

But most importantly to note, all of this was quote unquote
Submitted for perusal in advance for your approval
All this vice is by your ruling, you approved it
from Bencoolen,
Though you took six months to do it, well, I've got the files to
prove it!

Narrator:

Round 1 goes to Farquhar, he's got a point.
He made a lot of money, he does not disappoint.
But when Raffles looks lost, that's when he's gonna found you.
The town plan's the battle, it's time to go: Round 2!

Raffles:

I gave you a commission to leave the north bank blank
Who gave you permission to go out there and think-tank?
Space was held in covenant for me to build the government.
Now it's full of merchantmen, warehouses, and development!

You let them build this place just any old how,
and you made the town bigger than I told you was allowed!
You didn't align to the lines in my writing
On the piece of paper that I gave to you in 1819!

Farquhar:

Back then this was a jungle, look at what I have accomplished!
The south bank for warehouses, my friend, that's
pretty swampish.

I could tip a hill in it and set some men to filling it
But when I'm out there killing it, Stamford, who's billing it?
You wanted the che-ching, the bling, the markets and
the shops,

Well, the north bank of the river is where the buck stops.
You can't select where they erect I had to let it up.
You want to build a town, give good grounds to get it up.
The walls can be torn down, these buildings rebuilt,
But you can't start a city if you're piling on silt.
So save your etch-a-sketch for your artistic career,
But let me plan the land, I'm the damn engineer!

Narrator:

Round 2 goes to Farquhar, do we need a Round 3?
Raffles looks down, but it's not down to me.

Between rounds, FARQUHAR goes to a corner with NONIO CLEMENT, and RAFFLES goes back to a corner with SOPHIA RAFFLES.

Nonio:

How dare he sip his high tea here, and act so high and
mighty here,
Thirty days in three years, nobody's ever spied him here!
I believe that he believes that his ideals are heightier,
But I think he's an idler, he needs to wake up his idea!

Farquhar:

The people they depend on me, this office is a travesty.

Nonio:

You've got support, ball's in your court—the landlord is
an absentee!

Sophia:

Stamford, you've got to cool down,
You're the original, he's just the guy on the ground...

Raffles:

His claims are a stain on my reputation,
He gives me a migraine with every accusation,
It's weighing on my brain, I'm wracked with pain,
I'm going insane...

Sophia, what is this warm and wet sensation?

Sophia:

You're feverish, we can talk about this later;
You're burning, you're one degree north of the equator.
Cool down, slow down, maybe we can walk it out,
Have a cup of tea and later maybe we can talk it out...

Raffles: (*interrupting*)

I feel it rising, my temperature, my capital expenditure,
My creditors send messengers, they call me an embezzler,
My finances irregular, there's far too much to settle here,
Farquhar, Farquhar! I'll make of you a pensioner!

Farquhar: (*to Raffles*)

I'll make amends—for your plans and amendments
to your tenants. You can fly your flags and your pennants
from the walls, but these are the halls of my descendants.
Sir, under your pressure I'll bend but not buckle,
I will defend, I won't descend to your level.
Each woman and man depends on my level-
headedness to unmuck your much-meddled foibles!

Narrator:

Round 3, how's this go-getter gonna cut his losses?
Even better, he's writing a letter to his bosses...

Raffles: (*writing a note*)

Lord Hastings, make haste. Your Honour, Your Grace,
I'm making a complaint about the resident's—taste.
Conflating my directives and consorting with the natives,
Disloyal to the royals, oh, he's bawdy and libidinous,
It's positively criminal, he beds with aboriginals!
There's one of them, you've heard of her, the primitive they
call Nonio,
No wife for a white man, positively postcolonial.
He's jettisoned his uniform for the local sarong,
Which is why the village chiefs can make him sing their
same song.
He's maintaining shabbily for a man of Christianity
It's safe to say he doesn't wear the pants in his own family!

Narrator:

Can he say that? Can he do that? He just set this town alight.
Why did we assume this was ever a fair fight?

Raffles: (*to Farquhar*)

Your mistress is grounds for distrust and distress.
Its invidious to leave you in charge of this mess.
Authority is given to me to put you out of misery
You're fired. You see, you're going down in history.

Chapter 6: Epilogue

In '24, Raffles' *Fame* went up in flames and smoke
But Farquhar's name was what went down in books as
 puerile joke.

A funny footnote to the textbook praises of one man.
The editor writes history—Sophia Raffles held the pen.

Do we have room to tell his story, or is one enough?
Do we exalt the CEO and leave out all the staff?
Will claiming our mixed ancestry upturn the status quo?
Is our thinking stuck at CMI or is there room for O?

One founder, maybe two, a team, a village, makes a town.
And maybe in these names we've lost, there's something to
 be found.

So let's remember once again his service and his succour,
If we call Raffles father, then that makes our mother,
 Farquhar.

About the author

Joshua Ip is a poet, editor, and literary organiser. He has published four poetry collections and edited eight anthologies. He has won the Singapore Literature Prize, Golden Point Award, and received the Young Artist Award from the National Arts Council (Singapore) in 2017. He founded Sing Lit Station, an over-active literary charity that runs community initiatives including SingPoWriMo, Manuscript Bootcamp, poetry.sg and several workshop groups. www.joshuaip.com

About the illustrator

Denise Nicole Yap is a Singapore-based illustrator and designer. She graduated from School of the Arts, Singapore (SOTA) and later on from the School of Arts, Design, and Media (ADM). Since graduating, Denise has worked with a variety of clients, creating book covers, to wall murals, to comics and posters. She currently works full time with the creative studio Tell Your Children. Her drawings have vivid detail and strong ink work, bringing energy to each illustration. Her favourite pastime includes reading comics, drinking cappuccino, watching Youtube videos, analysing films she has never watched before, and hugging her two very round corgis. <https://www.behance.net/deniseardenise>

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