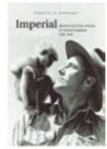


8 reads for March

In this monthly feature, The Straits Times lines up eight hot-off-the-press home-grown books for readers to dive into



Olivia Ho
Arts Correspondent



1
NON-FICTION
IMPERIAL CREATURES
By Timothy P. Barnard
NUS Press/
Paperback/
264 pages/\$38.52/Available at bit.ly/Imperial_Creatures

When Singapore was first colonised by the British, much of the island was untamed, including the wildlife. This would soon be irrevocably altered.

In this book, National University of Singapore (NUS) associate history professor Barnard charts the effect of imperialism on the island's fauna.

Animals were cherished as pets and even research assistants, as with the macaques of Botanic Gardens deputy director E.J.H. Corner, which he trained to climb trees and collect specimens.

But they were also abused for sport and routinely slaughtered, from a gory cage match between a bullock and a tigress to Colonel William Farquhar's violent reaction to a crocodile eating his dog – he had the river dammed and the trapped crocodile speared to death, whereupon he hung the 4.5m carcass from a fig tree along Bras Basah stream.

Barnard, 57, previously wrote *Nature's Colony* (2016) about the Botanic Gardens.

He turned his attention to the stories of animals, he says, because they enable one to approach Singapore's past "in a manner that makes it easier to comprehend how an outside force – British culture, administration and society – was able to enforce its power over a distant land".

He adds: "Much of the history of animals in Singapore during the colonial period is one in which they are monitored, regulated, slaughtered and ultimately controlled. This was a process that was violent, often in shocking ways."

"If we avoid understanding – or even describing – these actions, we lose much of what this past can teach us about imperialism."

"While this may create a sense of rage at times, I felt it was important that these stories be told so we can reflect on the effects of colonial rule in Singapore."



A black-and-white photograph of a Singaporean family participating in a popular colonial pastime – visiting the monkeys in the Singapore Botanic Gardens – is among the pictures in the book, *Imperial Creatures*. PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE



3
FICTION
IF WE DREAM TOO LONG
By Goh Poh Seng
NUS Press/
Paperback/
155 pages/\$23.54/
Available at bit.ly/Dream_GPS

Goh's 1972 work is often hailed as the first true Singaporean novel in English, though it was unenthusiastically reviewed upon its publication.

Dreamy, disaffected young clerk Kwang Meng struggles with his career, love and keeping his sense of self intact in the increasingly urbanised and materialistic Singapore of the 1960s.

The novel returns in a new edition for the first time in a decade, with an updated introduction by Nanyang Technological University professor Koh Tai Ann.



5
CHILDREN'S
PRINCESS INCOGNITO #2: NIGHTMARE AT THE MUSEUM
By Neil Humphreys
Marshall Cavendish/
Paperback/196 pages/\$16/
Available at bit.ly/Incognito_2

Humphreys continues the adventures of undercover princess Sabrina Valence, who has been exiled to a working-class town for the sake of her safety.

A school trip to the museum, which happens to have an exhibition on royal families, threatens to expose her secret.



7
CHILDREN'S
OUT & ABOUT IN SINGAPORE
By Melanie Lee,
Illustrated by William Sim
Marshall Cavendish/Hardcover/
64 pages/\$24.98/
Available at bit.ly/Out_SG

This picture book offers a rundown of what to do in Singapore, from visiting the Botanic Gardens to the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum.



2
NON-FICTION
THOMAS STAMFORD RAFFLES: SCHEMER OR REFORMER?
By Syed Hussein Alatas
NUS Press/Paperback/126 pages/
\$15 before GST/Available at bit.ly/schemer_reformer

The Bicentennial may be over, but the debate about Raffles' legacy continues unabated in books such as this, a revised edition of Alatas' 1971 work, which argued for a more critical appraisal of the colonial founder.

Alatas, who previously headed the Department of Malay Studies at the University of Singapore, examines Raffles' political philosophy and his motives behind colonising Singapore.

This edition comes with a new preface by the author's son, National University of Singapore sociology professor Syed Farid Alatas.

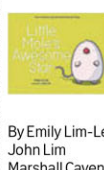


4
YOUNG ADULT
LION BOYS AND FAN GIRLS
By Pauline Loh
Epigram Books/
Paperback/
240 pages/\$18.08/
Available at bit.ly/Lion_PL

In her 2017 novel, *Lion Boy and Drummer Girl*, Loh imagined a world in which lion dancers were as wildly popular as K-pop stars.

In this sequel, up-and-coming dancer Prome takes over as the principal lion head of popular crew Lion Legends and decides to ban dating so the boys will focus on dancing.

Meanwhile, an anti-fan targets the Legends through cyber bullying and a garbage bomb.



6
CHILDREN'S
LITTLE MOLE'S AWESOME STAR
By Emily Lim-Leh, illustrated by John Lim
Marshall Cavendish/Hardcover/
36 pages/\$13.86/Available at bit.ly/Little_Mole

Little Mole has been told he will soon get a special star that will show him awesome stuff.

Impatient, he goes out to seek it, asking the squirrel, turtle and rabbit for help, but none of the stars they point him to is the right one.

Lim and Lim-Leh, who is the first author outside of North America to win three medals for children's books at the Independent Publisher Book Awards, are also behind *Little Godwit Finds His Wings*, another picture book featuring an adorable young creature.

The star-nosed mole, which has very poor eyesight, relies on a "star" of 22 fleshy feelers, five times more sensitive than human hands, to sense the world.

It is one of the world's fastest hunters and does so by bopping its star against the soil to find insects and worms.



8
THEATRE
DRAGONFLIES
By Stephanie Street
Epigram Books/
Paperback/
128 pages/\$14.87/
Available at bit.ly/Dragonflies_SS

In a near future where Brexit is in full effect and climate change is causing sea levels to rise globally, a family tries to stay together in an increasingly divided world.

After the death of his British wife, Singaporean lecturer Leslie Chen loses his right to live in England and has to move back to his birthplace with his stepdaughter Max.

There, they exist on sufferance, their lives intersecting with other migrants such as a Filipino domestic worker and a Bangladeshi electrical engineer.

This play, written by Britain-based Singaporean Street and produced by theatre company Pangdemonium, triumphed at the 2018 Life Theatre Awards with wins for Production of the Year, Best Original Script and Best Lighting.

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