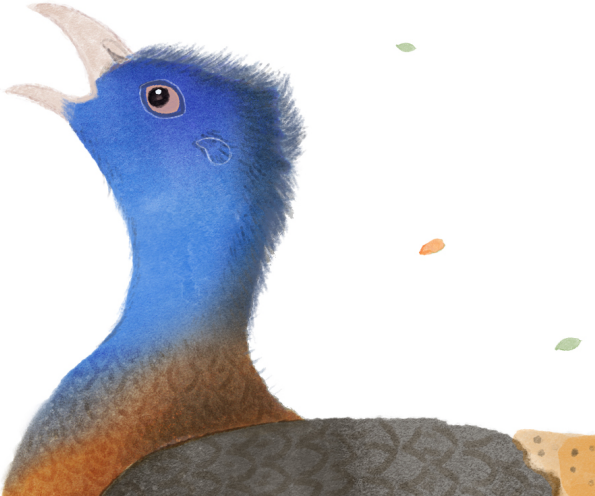
SG Bicentennial

Illustrated

A Tale Of Four Unlikely Friends

Tessa Foo
Adeline Foo



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A Tale Of Four Unlikely Friends

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Singapore

A Tale of Four Unlikely Friends

A magnificent pheasant performs an age-old ritual of a mating dance, but falls into a water trap, coming close to drowning. Will his booming call for help attract the attention of his friends? This book is populated by beautiful creatures and plants from The William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings.

About the Singapore Bicentennial e-book series

Take a quick dive into the different time periods in Singapore history, the stories and legacies of our different communities. Discover lesser-known histories of people, places and events. Each nugget offers a unique glimpse into the layered lives and histories of our people, going into topics as diverse as natural history, architecture and religious practices.

About the Singapore Bicentennial

The Singapore Bicentennial marks the 200th anniversary of the arrival of the British in Singapore, a turning point in our history. But our story starts way before that.

Travelling back in time to 700 years ago, the Singapore Bicentennial is an occasion for us to reflect on our extensive and textured history: how we have evolved, from a place with a geographically strategic location, into Singaporeans with a unique DNA.

This commemoration features a huge cast of contributors, as well as the regional and global developments that have shaped our lives and identities.

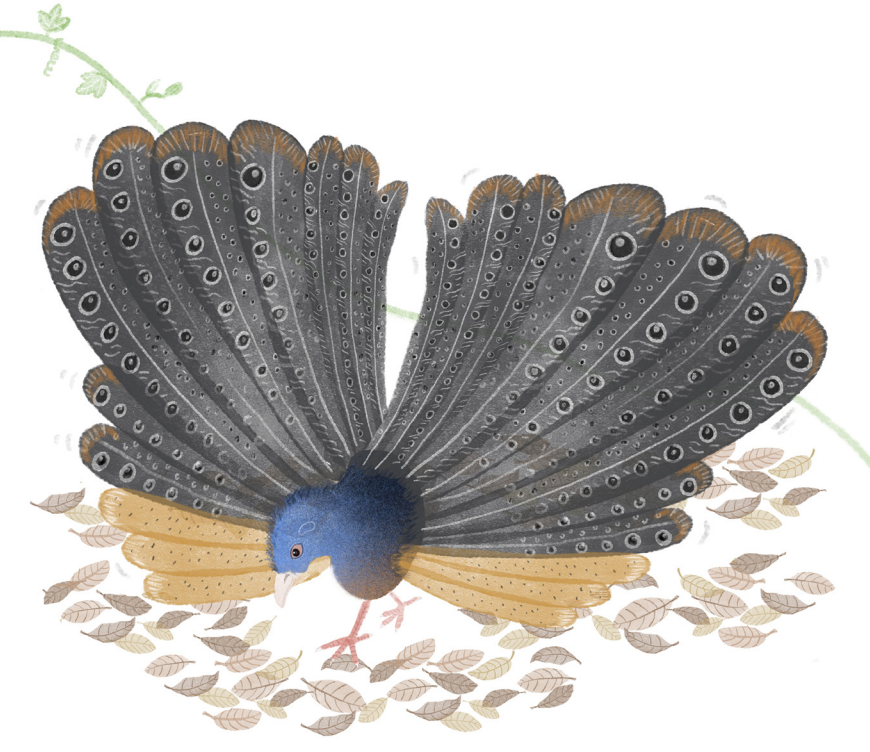
The earthy scent of the air; mud, fresh after rain;
water swirling around loose pebbles
in the stream.

In the dense canopy, birds chirp and twitter.

The trees talk in low whispers, playful fingers of
the wind chase through the softly rustling leaves.

A mating call echoes
throughout the forest.

He is a beautiful thing, the Great Argus.



He ruffles his magnificent black feathers,
strutting around proudly with a silver crown
of the tiniest and softest feathers.

It is breeding season. The pheasant stops. He likes
this spot, covered with leaves of brittle brown.

But he does not notice the water hole in the forest floor. The Argus clears a dancing ground, only for his feet to get entangled in thick green vines. He slips, slides and falls right into the hole!

The Argus cannot swim. He gurgles, drinking in and choking on the water. He gathers what is left of the air in his lungs, and with his booming voice, sends a desperate call for help.

"Help!"

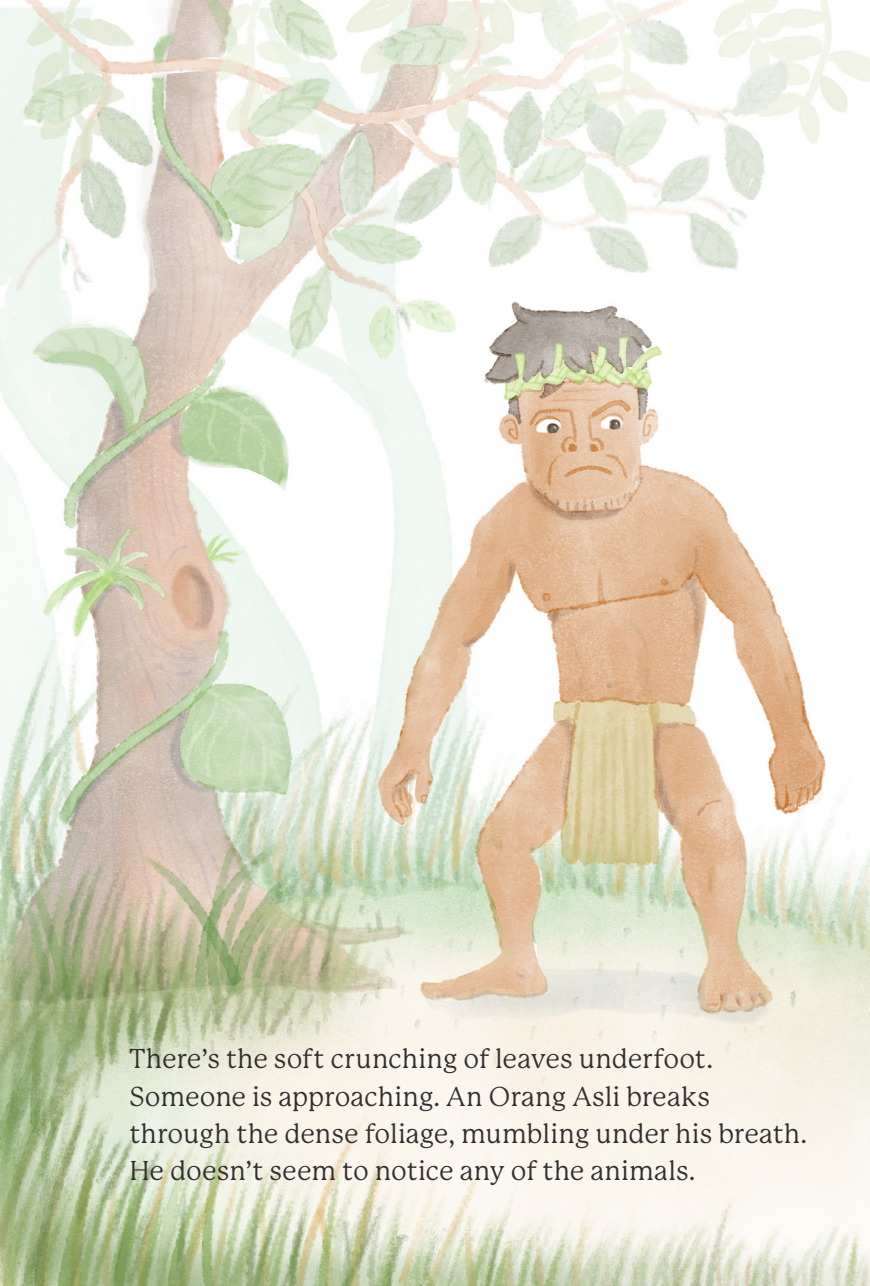
The White-Handed Gibbon is swinging
overhead when she hears the Argus' cry
for help. "Woop-woop, what do we have here?"
She peers into the hole, but seeing the Argus,
all muddy and drenched, she recoils.
"I don't want my white hands to be dirty,
find someone else," she calls.

But she doesn’t swing away. Instead, she uses her powerful arms to launch herself onto a tree branch, and waits there.

“Save me!”

The Argus half-screams, half-gurgles. Prevost’s Squirrel peeks down from his tree branch. “Hello?” He squints into the hole, and upon seeing the nearly-drowned Argus, he scampers down the tree.

“Oh no, oh no,” he paces. “I want to help, but I can’t swim. What can I do?”



There's the soft crunching of leaves underfoot. Someone is approaching. An Orang Asli breaks through the dense foliage, mumbling under his breath. He doesn't seem to notice any of the animals.

Prevost's Squirrel's eyes light up.
This is his chance!

He runs up to the water hole, and bounces up and down to catch the man's attention. He finally notices them.

But Orang Asli is hungry!
All he can think of is to eat the bird.
His eyes fill with a greedy gleam. “Uh-oh,”
Prevost’s Squirrel utters. Orang Asli takes a step
forward, his hands ready to grapple with the Argus.

Prevost's Squirrel darts back up the tree, perching next to White-Handed Gibbon. "This is not good."

Even the haughty Gibbon looks regretful,
“Woop-woop,” she replies, with a tinge of sadness.
“Is there anything we can do?”

Prevost's Squirrel looks urgently for anything they could use. His gaze snags upon a tiny anthill just next to the water hole.

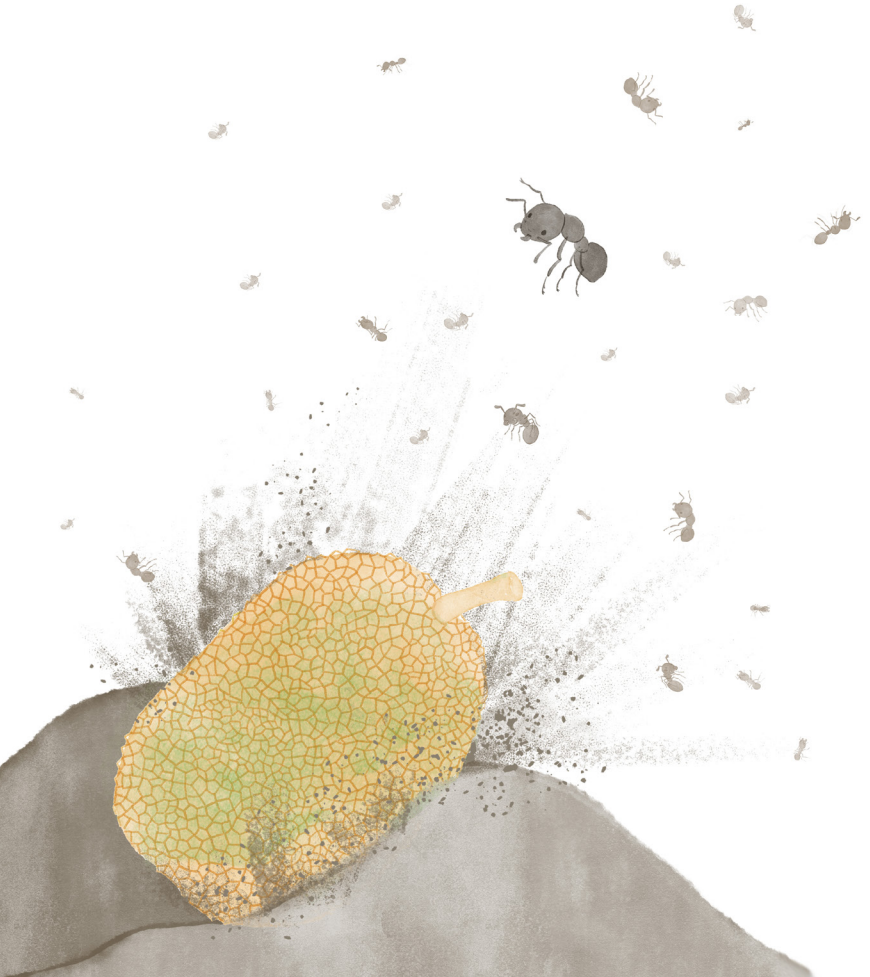
"There!"

Prevost's Squirrel exclaims. "Use that, Gibbon, drop something on it!"

White-Handed Gibbon sighs and looks around. She plucks a giant chempedak from a tree, hefting its weight in her hand. Her eyes dance as she drops it on the anthill.

The ants.

They explode out of the anthill in angry waves.



Orang Asli yelps as the ants climb up his legs and body.

Desperate to save himself, he jumps into the water,

shoving the Argus aside and out of the water hole.

The Argus flops onto the forest floor, muddy and drenched. His new friends go to him; the Argus coughs and splutters, but he is safe.

A wail comes from the water hole, interrupting the moment. The Argus, White-Handed Gibbon, and Prevost's Squirrel gather around the hole, looking in.

"Please, help me," Orang Asli sobs. The three lock eyes with their fourth friend—they seem to agree on something.

They sit down under the forest canopy, chase away the ants, and start feasting on the chempedak.

THE END

The animals and plants in this e-book are based on the illustrator's interpretation of William Farquhar's collection of natural history illustrations.

In all, Farquhar commissioned 477 drawings during his appointment as the British Resident and Commandant of Melaka from 1803 to 1818.

Enjoy the discovery of Farquhar's prized collection at the Goh Seng Choo Gallery housed in the National Museum of Singapore!

About the Authors

Tessa Foo and Adeline Yeo-Foo

Tessa has been reading since the age of four and writing since she was thirteen. This is her first published book. Adeline, her mother, has more books to her name (28 titles!), and is an author and an adjunct lecturer. After seeing the beautiful illustrations in the original William Farquhar collection, both mother and daughter were inspired to create this story.

About the Illustrator

Ben Lai

A multidisciplinary designer and illustrator, Ben is a picture book maker and an advocate of play. He draws inspiration from things that enable people to appreciate their relationships with our surroundings and people. His first picture book *I Can* was shortlisted for the Hedwig Anuar Children's Book Award 2018.

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