



Once Upon a Time in Malaysia

MURALE PILLAI

'A well-researched, evocative satire of historical Malacca at its peak before its fall.
It bears a surprising relevance and resemblance to the present.
Compelling reading. Brilliant.'

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Life in 16th-century Malacca—as it is in Malaysia today—was centred on power and politics, trade and commerce, rivalry and strife, race and religion, and war and peace. As the leading entrepot of the Nusantara, Malacca grew rich and prosperous. Then things took a familiar turn. The political ethos of the inward-looking and self-serving ruling elite had begun to change for the worse. Bent on enjoying the trappings of wealth and power, they ignored the needs and well-being of the *rakyat* and the State. At the same time, a resurgent Portugal, driven by science and ambition, was the superpower of the day. She could project power and dictate the course of history in most parts of the known world. Malacca was totally unprepared for the Portuguese 'Mission to Malacca' in 1509 led by Admiral de Sequeira. The subsequent ill-advised taking of some Portuguese as hostages and the retreat of de Sequeira's fleet led to Afonso de Albuquerque's ferocious invasion in 1511, which ends in a shattering defeat for Malacca, leaving in its wake an enduring sense of loss and a legacy of deep distrust for the 'other'. As a work of historical fiction, *Once Upon A Time In Malaysia* is a stark reminder that the more things change, the more they stay the same.



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