

## SYNOPSIS RAFFLES AND THE PRINCES

This feature film dramatises one of the least known episodes of British colonial history, the occupation of Java from 1811 to 1815, under the rule of a young man later to become famous as the founder of Singapore, Stamford Raffles. The dramatic events of the era prove a powerful influence on another, equally charismatic young man, Diponegoro, the Muslim prince who later becomes the leader of Java's first anti-colonial war. Both men are led to change their view of power over those four years, experiencing tragedy as well as enlightenment, and their struggles with themselves and others form the emotional underpinning of the narrative.

The prize is the island of Java, portrayed in all its beauty and cultural riches. Both Diponegoro and Raffles have a vision for the country. Raffles, imperialist, naturalist and statesman, sees it becoming a model colony, where the people have the same rights as British citizens. Diponegoro, warrior, mystic and future hero of Javanese liberation envisages it as a free Islamic society where differences will be tolerated, and the common people will share in the prosperity of the country. At first cordial, their relationship ended in disillusion and anger with tragic results.

The narrative shows how Raffles, ably supported by his beautiful, intelligent wife Olivia, begins his plan by making friends among the ruling elite, especially Nakatusuma, Diponegoro's uncle, and making adjustments to the economic system intended to favour the common people and diminish the prevalence of slavery.

But he runs up against the British Army who want to rule Java with an iron hand, headed by the violent and inflexible Colonel Gillespie (who suffers an unrequited passion for Olivia). A further obstacle is the attitude of his employers the East India company, who simply want to use the country as a source of money.

These constraints bear down heavily on Raffles, who in private life is a sensitive cultured man, very dependent on a few trusted friends and the scientific enquiries which feed his intellect. But he is also convinced that Java has everything to gain from British rule, indeed his self-respect is engaged in bringing that about. So he reacts with anger when the Javanese think otherwise. Suspecting that the Sultan of Yogyakarta, Diponegoro's grandfather, is intent on armed resistance to the British, he is incensed, and plans to depose him in favour of his son, Diponegoro's father.

Raffles' decision faces Diponegoro with a difficult moral choice. A traditionalist at heart he revolts against the idea of dethroning a legitimate ruler, but he disapproves of the Sultan's violent regime (he has had several of his opponents murdered) and tries to persuade him to resign.

When diplomatic overtures come to nothing, Raffles brings a 1000-strong British expeditionary force to Yogyakarta which decimates the defending forces and overthrows the Sultan. Gillespie's soldiers sack the court and steal its treasures: an action which horrifies Raffles but which he can do nothing to prevent.

A further setback hits Raffles when Olivia, who like him had learned to love the people and culture of Java, dies of a tropical disease. Heartbroken, he is too discouraged to resist when the East India Company recalls him to Britain in disgrace for failing to exploit the country.

However his spirits revive when, with the help of the English princess Charlotte, he wins popular acclaim with his book 'The History of Java', and is honoured with a knighthood from the King, after which he is able to depart again for South East Asia, with plans already in his head for the colonisation of Singapore.

For Diponegoro, the destruction of the Yogyakarta court has given his mind a new focus. Years ago he had heard in a dream that he would see the 'end of Java'. Now he realises that it is not the end of the country itself that is coming, but the end of an old regime that had compromised with foreign invaders to oppress the people. It is a realisation that will come to pass 15 years later, in the first nationalist revolt: the Java war against the Dutch, the traditional power in Indonesia, who took over once more when the British left.