To all the readers of Agent Zaiba who have followed her adventures across four books, thank you! You are all honorary Snow Leopard Detective Agency members for life. **– AS**

To the wonderful readers: best of luck in solving all the mysteries that lie ahead of you! **– DS**

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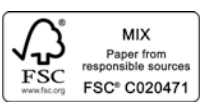
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ANNABELLE SAMI ILLUSTRATED BY DANIELA SOSA

Agent Zaiba INVESTIGATES



THE SMUGGLER'S SECRET

LITTLE TIGER
LONDON



1
SECRETS OF THE PAST

"Zaiba! Look!"

"I can't talk right now, Poppy. I'm on the verge of a great discovery!" Zaiba kept her gaze firmly fixed on the pieces of broken pottery in front of her as she searched for the last piece. As a successful detective, she knew it was important to be patient and methodical.

"But Zaiba – look at this." Poppy held up a cape of rainbow colours. "I've finished!"

Zaiba turned to her best friend who was sitting at the table next to her. The two of them were in their classroom, though it was now well after school hours. They were at their new favourite after-school activity: History Club!

Every member of the club had been given a project, to recreate something from the past. Poppy had chosen the history of fashion and immediately set to the task, channelling her love of clothes. She'd reworked some old items from her wardrobe into a ninteen-seventies rock-star cape with big, multicoloured stripes and a high, sequinned collar. It looked spot on!

Zaiba was very impressed. With all the sequins and Lycra, it had taken Poppy ages to transform her old clothes into something worthy of a rock star.

"Wow, Poppy! You're a genius. How did you make that?"

"Lots of hard work … and watching YouTube videos of some old TV show called *Top of the Pops*." Poppy's face gleamed with pride. "I had to get the style exactly right. It's called glam rock. All the glam rock stars in the 1970s had big hair, platform shoes and these bright costumes. I wish I could wear it, but it's a little small for me. I need a shorter model…" Poppy glanced hopefully at Zaiba's younger brother Ali who was sitting across from her at a large desk, studying a massive book with dusty pages. "Ali?" She held up the cape, glittering with sequins.

"I really think this would suit you."

Ali didn't even look up. "Not likely."

Zaiba and Poppy laughed. One of the benefits of the younger years being allowed to join History Club was that they could occasionally tease Ali! And as their teacher Ms Talbot said, "People of all ages can appreciate the past!"

Poppy peered at Zaiba's project. While Ali had chosen to study Ada Lovelace – "Basically the first computer programmer!" – Zaiba had chosen … teapots.

She scratched her head. "Remind me again why you picked this for your project, Zai."

"Aunt Fouzia has an amazing collection of antique teapots. You know she loves her chai!" Zaiba explained, sorting through the pieces of pottery. "She has ones from Pakistan, China and India. Tea has such an interesting history – tied in with so many different historical events. Did you know that the East India Trading Company exported its first order of tea to the UK in 1664? I found out about the company when I was doing my research. They were also responsible for a lot of looting, slavery





and violence across India and beyond. That's why it's important to read history from lots of different sources. Like when we talk to lots of different leads investigating a crime!" Poppy was an excellent detective's assistant.

"That is interesting," Poppy agreed. "Who knew teapots could lead to you learning all that?"

Zaiba nodded and went back to fiddling with the fragments of pottery that she'd glued back together. They were reddish-brown and had a logo stamped into the base, but Zaiba couldn't work out what it said until she found the last piece to fit the gap.

Poppy watched as Zaiba sorted through endless small shards of red ceramics until…

"There!" Zaiba beamed as she turned a small piece over and slid it into place. "Now I can finally see the logo."

It was a large, curly 'A' with the words *Admaston, 1820* underneath.

"Wow!" Zaiba breathed. "You can learn a lot from a logo. Admaston must be the place where this teapot was made all those years ago."

"Zaiba! Check this out!" a voice called from the other

side of the classroom.

It was Zaiba's cousin Mariam. Zaiba and Mariam hadn't always got on so well, but since Mariam had helped Zaiba and her team – officially known as the Snow Leopard Detective Agency – solve a mysterious poisoning case at their school summer fete, they'd become friends.

Mariam had chosen to work on filling out a family tree that already stretched back generations! But before Zaiba could check out her cousin's latest family discovery, Ms Talbot's voice rang out. "Fellow historians! Gather round! Do you remember I told you that an old sunken shipwreck was discovered off Chesil Bay on the south coast?"

There was excited chatter from the History Club as everyone gathered to sit on the carpet.

Ms Talbot paused to clear her throat. "I have some exciting news. The headteacher has agreed..." Ms Talbot left a short pause. Zaiba could hardly bear it any longer, the suspense was too much! "... that the History Club can take an expedition to Chesil Bay – next weekend!"

The class cheered and some of them even leaped to their feet!



"And there's more!" Ms Talbot glanced around, her face flushed with excitement. "Yesterday, divers recovered a priceless artefact from the wreckage! Its identity is being kept secret because it's so valuable. All we know is that the artefact originates from the Assam region of India." Her face turned serious. "Of course, it's important to return historical items to their place of origin … which is why this item will be returned to its rightful home very soon."

Zaiba raised her hand and wiggled it in her teacher's direction.

"Yes, Zaiba?"

"Where is the artefact now?" she asked. As a detective it was always important to gather all known information about a mystery – and the unnamed artefact was certainly mysterious.

Ms Talbot smiled. "It's being kept safely at a local museum in Chesil Bay until it's returned to India. But the museum is going to have a big reveal of what it is on Sunday – and the History Club are invited!"

Cheers rang out! This is what they'd all been waiting

for – to be some of the first people to lay eyes on a real-life detail from history.

"We still need to secure a couple of chaperones but I'm sure that won't be a problem." Ms Talbot's eyes glinted. "I'm also *very* excited that we will be going on a glass-bottom boat trip to see the shipwreck up close ourselves. So, fellow historians, I set you this challenge." Ms Talbot raised a finger in the air. "Who can discover what the mystery artefact is before the reveal on Sunday?"

Zaiba smiled and squeezed her hands together. Uncovering a mystery was the perfect challenge for her!



Dinnertime was abuzz with talk of the class trip.

"So, our mission is to find out what the mystery artefact is. *And* we get to go on a glass-bottom boat to look at the shipwreck – so I'm sure I'll find some clues there!" Zaiba mumbled through a mouth full of keema naan.

"That's very exciting, honey," said Jessica, Zaiba's

stepmum, pointing to her own mouth. “But I don’t need to see your dinner.”

Zaiba wiped the grease from her face with a unicorn-print paper napkin. “I’m sorry.” She’d always been told how important it was to be polite at the table, but the lamb and onion filling was delicious! “It’s just so exciting!”

A priceless artefact surely meant that crime could be just around the corner. Zaiba secretly imagined what it would be like if she personally was asked to guard the artefact. An agent’s job was varied – who knew what might happen?

“So, is this the Snow Leopard Detective Agency’s latest case?” Zaiba’s dad Hassan asked, looking from Zaiba to Ali. They nodded furiously.

“I can’t wait!” Ali announced happily. “Chesil Bay is on the Jurassic coast, which gets its name because of all the fossils there! I wonder how old the rock formations are…”

Zaiba could see the cogs in Ali’s head whirring, as he got ready to absorb lots of facts about fossils.

"Wait a minute," Hassan asked. "What's the name of the town again?"

"Chesil Bay," said Ali.

Hassan's face lit up! "Chesil Bay? That's where the famous cricket club is, isn't it?" He carried on talking without waiting for a reply. "The third oldest in the country. Queen Victoria even visited it in 1870! I'd love to go there myself..." He looked suddenly hopeful and leaned across the dining table. "Did your teacher mention anything about needing chaperones?"

"Yes!" Zaiba said. "Ms Talbot said for parents to ring if they were interested in coming." She went to her backpack where she'd carefully kept the permission slips for both her and Ali. She slid them across the table.

The History Club Outing to Chesil Bay

Conducted by Ms Loretta Talbot

Your child/ren is/are cordially invited to a historical exploration of beautiful Chesil Bay. We will be staying at Chalk Cottage – a safe and highly recommended B&B in the town (please see the website for details).

Please pack:

- summer clothes

- swimwear

- sensible shoes for walking

- overnight clothes

- toiletries

An anorak or windbreaker for our boat tour of the sunken shipwreck is advisable.

Parent chaperones needed! Please ring the number at the bottom of this form if interested.

"Well!" Jessica announced, looking fondly at Zaiba, Ali and Hassan. "I think I'd better ask to come too. None of us wants to miss out on a family trip!" She glanced around again. "Right?"

Everyone gave a big thumbs up. Then Zaiba's dad snatched up the form and immediately slipped into the other room, abandoning his meal – a big deal for Hassan! Zaiba could tell he was going to call Ms Talbot. She'd noticed him pop his phone in his pocket on the way out. A good detective caught even the smallest of details, which reminded Zaiba … she'd promised to video call her Aunt Fouzia that evening.

Aunt Fouzia was the sister of Zaiba's birth mum, who Zaiba called Ammi. Her aunt also happened to be the best detective in the whole of Pakistan! The two sisters had set up the world-renowned Snow Leopard Detective Agency before Zaiba was born. Zaiba's ammi had gone missing on a mission when Zaiba was just a baby and she missed her a lot. But having an auntie as brilliant as Fouzia meant she still felt a connection to her mum.

"Come on, Ali," Zaiba said, quickly popping a last piece of garlic-roasted broccoli into her mouth. Yum! "We need to see what Aunt Fouzia has to say about priceless artefacts."

The two of them went to snuggle up together on the sofa, with a soft blanket that covered both their knees. They reached to open the family laptop. Aunt Fouzia's face popped up on the screen instantly!

"Auntie!" Zaiba and Ali cried, each of them jostling to get in shot. Aunt Fouzia was a short lady with thick black hair, just like Zaiba's. Her smile was as wide as ever but there were bags under her eyes and Zaiba could detect a slight sag in her shoulders. Her auntie was tired.

"My sweeties!" Aunt Fouzia said. "You called at the perfect time. Samirah will be here to say hello soon. Ah, here she is!"

Zaiba smiled as her cousin walked into view, carrying a little bundle with a tuft of brown hair poking out the top. Sam, Aunt Fouzia's daughter, had just had a baby. She was named Nabiha, after Zaiba's ammi. Without a shadow of a doubt, she was the cutest baby ever!

Behind her cousin and aunt, Zaiba noticed that the living-room floor was strewn with baby blankets,

toys and picture books. So that's why Aunt Fouzia looked tired! It seemed like looking after a baby was a lot of work.

Zaiba wondered if her ammi had been just as tired looking after her. She had lots of questions she wished she could ask her. She did have the notes that her mum had scribbled in Zaiba's treasured Eden Lockett novels, though. These little notes had helped her solve many mysteries in her life – not just the detective ones.

"I want to hear all about your latest adventures." Aunt Fouzia waved her hand at the screen. "Tell me everything."

While Samirah breastfed Nabiha in the background, Ali and Zaiba filled in their aunt on all their History Club projects, finishing with details about their upcoming trip to Chesil Bay.

Aunt Fouzia smiled. Her eyes had a dreamy look. "I'm a little jealous. A sunken shipwreck? That sounds very exciting!"

Zaiba gasped. "But Auntie, you're the best detective

in the whole of Pakistan. You must be on thrilling cases all the time!"

Her aunt rocked on the Bokhara mat, where she was sat cross-legged. "Ha! It's true! I've had a wonderful career. And I'm a nanny now, which is also a very important job. I have to use my detective skills to work out why the baby's crying, when Samirah needs to rest and – most importantly – when Nabiha's nappy needs changing." She took the baby from Samirah and lifted her bum up to her nose, inhaling deeply.

"Ah, yes!" she cried. "I detect that this nappy needed changing at least – let me think – eight minutes ago."

"Ewwww!" Zaiba and Ali screwed up their noses. Nabiha was very cute, but they weren't too keen on changing nappies.

Samirah buttoned up her blouse and waved to Zaiba and Ali. "Thank you, Mum. Now if you'll excuse me..." She took her baby back into her arms and carried her into another room.

Suddenly, Aunt Fouzia's face lit up. "I must show you the new project I'm working on! Let me go and fetch it."

Zaiba's eyes grew wide with anticipation. What could it be? A thrilling new international crime to solve? A global gang Aunt Fouzia was about to bust?



Her aunt popped back into the frame, carrying a large book. "It's a scrapbook!" Aunt Fouzia beamed. She began flicking through the pages, which had old photos and newspaper clippings pasted to them. "I call it my 'Scrapbook of Legends'. It's to keep track of my career and the interesting people I've worked with. These agents have mostly retired but I still keep their names confidential." She tapped the side of her nose, as she always did when something was a secret. Zaiba had taken to copying the trait sometimes when she wanted to be mysterious. "For example, this woman..." Aunt Fouzia pointed to someone wearing a fedora. "She had the best sense of smell in Pakistan. Very useful."

She pointed to another photo. "And this man... I'll always remember the little snort he did when he

laughed! Ah, what wonderful memories." Aunt Fouzia turned the scrapbook round and began to flick through the pages with a fond look on her face.

Zaiba realized that the scrapbook was Aunt Fouzia's very own personal history project – an important history of detecting in Pakistan. The people in the snapshots were legends in their lifetimes. And, Zaiba also realized … she could be one too!

Aunt Fouzia had put her in charge of the UK branch of the Snow Leopard Detective Agency. With the help of Poppy and Ali, Zaiba had solved three cases already. Who knew? If they were to solve more crimes, perhaps one day she would be added to the Scrapbook of Legends? It was more than she dared to dream!

They'd barely said their goodbyes and closed the laptop when Hassan burst into the room, his face alight. Jessica was right behind him, looking almost as giddy. "Attention, everyone!" he announced. "You'll be glad to hear that Ms Talbot has decreed we shall *all* be visiting Chesil Bay next weekend!"

The family erupted in cheers. Zaiba was on the scent of a mystery and her family were coming with her – she couldn't wait!