

Singapore HeritageFest 2009
“Arte (factually) Speaking” Story-Writing Competition
Merit Award (Lower Secondary Category)



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Artefact: Dayak Hornbill Carving
Museum: Asian Civilisations Museum

The Rhinoceros Hornbill

Semangat was perspiring profusely, but not because of the extreme heat. He was perspiring because of his nervousness. His name, Semangat, was actually the supernatural power that ruled above all. He hoped that Semangat would bless him and allow him to slay the enemy and live to bring their heads back.

This was his first battle.

At last, they were at a clearing, where they met the enemy.

"Charge!" cried the leader, Balak at the top of his voice as the enemy approached. They charged with no fear. They wanted the honour. Semangat drew out his sword and wounded three soldiers in front of him. Although Semangat had slain many, his tribe was seriously outnumbered. The enemies took his friends, one by one. Just then, the enemy stabbed their leader, Balak in the abdomen. Balak fell to the blood soaked ground.

Semangat rushed in the aid of his leader. His leader whispered by his ear, "r... un", before drawing his last breath, and not moving again.

Semangat was devastated. Fighting off his tears, he fought each one of his enemies with vengeance. Balak was like a father to Semangat. He knew that even if he killed the enemies, he would not be happy. He knew that his leader could not be avenged that day, and so he ran to hide in the thick bushes nearby. From there, he could see the brutal killing of his comrades. When the battle was over, the enemies swiftly cut off the enemies' heads. They roared in celebration, leaving behind the bodies on the blood-stained soil.

"Why do we headhunt? Our little glory was built upon the sufferings of others. Was it really worth it? Was it better to have the glory, or a clear conscience?" Semangat pondered. He swore he would seek revenge.

Just then, a bird cry pierced the air. Down flew a huge bird from the tree top canopy. It had a black body, and had a beak, with an orange casque that twirled upwards.

It was a hornbill.

Semangat knew that hornbills were a sign of good luck, and were the messengers of good news. Hornbills rule the sky. This particular one was a Rhinoceros Hornbill, and it stopped right in front of Semangat and approached it. Semangat was afraid at first, but slowly became less afraid of it. The hornbill pushed his body against Semangat's. At that slightest touch, Semangat could feel energy flowing through his entire body. He felt as if he was floating in the air, going higher, and higher. His fingers tingled with excitement.

Semangat grabbed his sword, and stealthily moved towards the enemies' village. He knew where the head of the village was, it was in him, he did not know how he knew. He just knew it. Semangat dashed into the house, and within minutes, after defeating the leader, held the leader at knife point. The concerned villagers rushed into the house with his anxious family members.

Semangat lifted up his sword to prepare to slash the leader on the throat as the leader closed his eyes and waited for his death. When the cold hard blade touched the skin of the leader, Semangat paused. Semangat looked at his family members. They were all crying and devastated. Semangat thought, "They will try to kill me, and this revenge will never die." He dropped his sword, and went out of the house.

The hornbill soared overhead. He knew he had done the right thing.
(579 words)