

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



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Artefact: Iranun Pirate
Museum: National Museum of Singapore

The Iranun Blade

The victim's hunted eyes shone with the fire of defiance. Letting loose a guttural roar, the man took a step forward, thrusting his sword towards the midsection of his aggressor. Not pressing the attack, he shifted his blade upwards at the last moment, reversed the angle, and came down with a devastating chop that he knew, or at least hoped, would decapitate the pirate that now stood before him.

It was a commendable fake, but the captain of the attacking fleet was too skilled for that. Recognizing the feint for what it was (an attempt to leave his upper body vulnerable), he simply stepped backwards, flipped the wrong end of the sword upwards, and met the incoming blade with the pommel. As expected, the victim's sword got caught in the groove that characterized his Kampilan. In one dexterous move, the captain grabbed the defender's sword arm with his free hand and gave it a violent twist, eliciting a pained grunt. At the same moment, he twisted his sword. The trapped blade flew harmlessly over his shoulder into the deep waters. Having disarmed his target, the fighter stepped forward, crushed the victim's nose with a hard elbow and spun around with his own sword, right side up.

A satisfying crack emerged like music to his ears as the sheer force of the blow threw the victim sideways along the deck of the invaded ship. Assured that the man was dead, the captain ran towards his next victim, bloodlust reddening his battle-scarred countenance. The whole encounter lasted no longer than the span of ten seconds, yet the deck of the transport ship was already littered with corpses as the captain's crew carved up the futile defence. A few minutes passed, and the ship (along with its goods) was theirs.

As the pirate captain returned to his quarters, he admired his sword, revelling in both its quality and the symbolism it carried. What a fine blade it was! Carefully crafted and weighted, Kampilans were not renowned for their keenness of edge but rather the crushing blows that the blunt blades were known to administer to the unfortunate souls who crossed the paths of the Iranun pirates. His sword was special; handed down from captain to captain, it was a symbol of power and competence among his kind. Countless souls had died under that particular sword, and not even the Pacific Ocean itself could wash the blade clean of the innocent blood that clung to its violent history.

The next week, the captain was once again engaging in the throes of battle, but this time on

home ground. The fleet had spotted a metal behemoth with no sails that seemed to move faster than the wind itself. Ignorant, the pirates had set a course to intercept it. To their dismay, the leading ship was utterly sunk in a matter of seconds by an explosion of smoke and fire. Iranun boarders were repelled by long metal sticks that killed where they were pointed. One by one, the ships and their crew fell until only the captain's ship was left. As the prey-turned-predator had its men board the pirate ship, the captain saw the unfamiliar faces of his enemy: white skinned men with foreign uniform. The captain bowed his head in resignation as the soldier fired.

Unbeknownst to the dead, his beloved blade would soon make its way to a museum centuries later, bearing silent testament to the horrors it had inflicted.

(576 words)