

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



Contest ID: 27
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Artefact: Headless Rider on a Winged Horse Figurine
Museum: National Museum of Singapore

Temasik

The craftsman had come from the powerful kingdom of Majapahit, bearing bronze wares. He was proudest of the figurine of a rider on a winged horse. He had laboured greatly to produce it and the finished product was intricate and well-crafted.

He walked to the mouth of the Singapore River. There the indigenous orang laut were displaying their freshly caught fish. Traders were peddling their wares.

He stopped in his tracks as the sky suddenly grew dark. A gloom was cast. Everyone was apprehensive, believing this to be a portent of doom. A fleet of 100 ships came sailing up. They had the sun emblem of the Majapahit Empire on their sails.

The craftsman was absolutely stunned. He had known that his king had been eyeing Temasik for long as it was a centre of trade in South-east Asia and had rich coffers. Being small, it was easy to defeat. However, he had never expected an attack.

As the ships sailed up the Singapore River slowly and menacingly, the villagers of Temasik rushed to the shore with their weapons: sharpened wooden stakes. They would be no match for the soldiers with their bronze daggers.

Someone on the ships shouted, "Throw down your weapons and surrender, we won't kill you!"

The villagers did not answer. Instead they continued their futile charge. The craftsman was torn. He could not bear to meet his countrymen in battle. He knew he would not be harmed if he fled. Yet, the Majapahit Empire had done a dastardly thing: sending soldiers to fight defenceless villagers. How could he abandon the villagers to their fate?

His mind made up, the craftsman grimly joined the villagers. Just then, there was a flash of lightning so bright that everyone shielded their eyes. When it was over, the bronze figurine had expanded in size and come alive!

The horseman asked in a voice of booming thunder, "My creator, what do you want me to do?"

Awed, the craftsman replied, "Drive away the ships. Teach my countrymen a lesson, but...spare their lives."

The horseman answered, "Your will be done."

The winged horse flew to confront the ships. Although the soldiers were stunned by what they had witnessed, they laughed, thinking that they could defeat the horseman easily. As the horseman started speaking to them, a soldier severed the horseman's head with his dagger. As the head sank to the depths of the river, a fierce gale blew up, driving the ships away from Temasik. The captains of the ships tried to steer their fleets, but the gale was too strong. In a short while, the ships were heading back to Majapahit, with every soldier still on board.

The winged horse flew back to Temasik, its work done. It spoke for the headless horseman, "Bury us deep in the soil, for we are weary and require rest." The villagers acquiesced, showering praises on them. The winged horse bowed its head in acknowledgement. Then, the figurine shrank in size and became lifeless once more.

With great ceremony, the villagers dug a hole by the mouth of the river. As the figurine was lowered into its final resting place, the craftsman addressed it tearfully, "My wonderful creation, thank you for saving the defenceless villagers... and me. I have made my choice. I will stay here. Watch over Temasik. Like me, you adopted this homeland when you chose to defend it."

And so, to this day, the figurine remains a guardian of Singapore
(575 words)