

## *Erik and the Sea Dragon*

**W**hen the ship, Golden Dragon, had been repaired, Erik and his men dragged her back into the water and held a feast. Then they sailed off into the uncharted seas.

When they had been travelling three days and three nights they entered a thick mist, and could see neither to right nor left nor in front nor behind.

Thorkhild came to Erik and said: 'There is something strange about this mist.'

'You are right,' replied Erik. 'Mist is always whitey grey, but this is sometimes red, sometimes blue.'

'But the strangest thing about it,' said Thorkhild, 'is that it is warm. Whereas mist is always cold and damp.'

So Erik stood in front of his men and said: 'Has any one of you ever seen such a mist as this?' But they all shook their heads.

Just then they heard the most terrible clap of thunder right over their heads, and the whole boat shook with the sound, and the men trembled as the thunder rolled on and on above them.

Thorkhild looked at Erik and said: 'There is something strange about this thunder.'

'You are right,' replied Erik. 'Thunder always follows the lightning and yet we have had no lightning.'

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'But the strangest thing about it,' said Thorkhild, 'is that it does not stop but gets louder and louder, where-as thunder always dies away.'

At that moment Sven the Strong pointed up into the sky and said: 'Look! The sun!' And they all looked up through the mist and saw a great light shining through at them. And Thorkhild turned to Erik and said: 'It that is indeed the sun, it is a very strange sun.'

And Erik said: 'You are right. I have never seen the sun with a black spot right in the middle like that, nor have I seen the sun moving through the sky first one way and then the other.'

'But the strangest thing about it,' said Thorkhild, 'is that I have only ever seen one sun in the heavens, but now I see two!'

And at that a great cry went up from all on board: 'It's the Great Dragon of the North Sea!' they cried.

'Those suns are its eyes!' said Erik.

'And that thunder is its roar!' said Thorkhild, and at that moment they saw its huge jaws and they saw that the mist was not mist at all, but the smoke that issued from its fiery nostrils.

'We are lost!' cried Erik's men. 'Nothing can save us now!'

But Erik said: 'To the oars! We must row as we have never rowed before!' And they leapt to the oars, but try as they might they could not escape, for the Dragon of the North Sea opened its mouth and began to suck the waters down its great fiery throat, and the ship was carried back twice as fast as they could row forwards.

When Erik saw it was no good and that the Sea

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Dragon was upon them, he turned to Ragnar Forkbeard and said: 'What shall we do?'

Ragnar Forkbeard did not answer but, white as a sheet, he ran to the sleeping quarters.

'Has it come to this,' asked Erik, 'that Ragnar Forkbeard has lost his courage *and* his tongue?' And as he spoke the Sea Dragon loomed above the ship and a jet of flame licked across the deck, and the men ran here and there putting out fires.

Just then Ragnar Forkbeard reappeared carrying two bolsters and he said: 'I have lost neither my courage nor my tongue.'

And with that he strapped the bolsters on his back and started to climb the mast.

Sven the Strong turned to Erik and said: 'Ragnar Forkbeard has not lost his courage or his tongue – he has lost his wits.' Just then they heard a fearful noise and they span round to see the great Sea Dragon take the stern post in its mouth and snap it in two with its teeth.

Erik lifted his spear and threw it with all his might at the great Dragon, but it just glanced off its horny skin. Then Thorkhild threw his great spear, but that clattered to the deck without piercing the Sea Dragon. Then Sven the Strong stood up, raised his spear, and threw it with every ounce of strength he had, and the shaft went straight and true and entered the creature in the soft skin above its lip. For a moment the Sea Dragon drew back, but not for long, and its great jaws closed around the after-deck and Erik's men all ran back in their fear.

'We've had it now!' said Sven the Strong, but Erik

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pointed up in the air. And they all looked in amazement at the top of the mast. For there was Ragnar Forkbeard, clinging on by his legs, with a bolster in each hand.

The Sea Dragon took another great bite, and half the boat was between its fierce jaws, and its eyes were on a level with the mast-top and its nostrils were thrust into the sails. Whereupon Ragnar Forkbeard leapt onto its nose and gave a most tremendous shout that made everyone look up, and even the Dragon paused and tried to focus its eyes on the tiny figure on its nose. Then Ragnar Forkbeard took one bolster and plunged it into the Dragon's right nostril, and the second into its left nostril. The Dragon paused again. Then Ragnar Forkbeard took his good sword and plunged it into the two bolsters – one after the other – so that they opened up and all the feathers billowed into the air as the Dragon breathed out, and then as it breathed in again, all the feathers suddenly disappeared – sucked into its nostrils.

The Dragon paused, and its jaws went slack, and Ragnar Forkbeard jumped for his life just as the Dragon sneezed a most almighty sneeze, and the sails of the ship filled and the ship shot out of the Dragon's jaws and across the waters and on out of the mist, and over the sea it flew through the air as if it were a bird, not a ship, and at last landed with a great splash, miles and miles and miles away from the Dragon of the North Sea.

Erik's men cheered and threw their helmets in the air, and Ragnar Forkbeard climbed down, and after that no one ever dared to say he had ever lost either his courage *or* his voice *or* his wits ever again.