

Sight of the sea
won't stop these men doing their
chanter declared a feast that night,
Erik and his men got back to re-

Erik and the Dogfighters

While Erik and his men were staying at the palace of the old Enchanter and his daughter, an even stranger adventure happened.

One morning they were hard at work on their ship, Golden Dragon, having almost finished repairing the great hole in the stern that the Sea Dragon had made, when they saw another ship far out to sea.

Erik strained his eyes and then said: 'I have never seen a ship like that before.'

Ragnar Forkbeard too peered into the distance and then said: 'This is the strangest ship I ever saw!'

Thorkild raised his hand to his eyes and said: 'It has six sails and each sail is round like the sun. And how tall the masts are!'

The old Enchanter came to the shore, and when he saw the ship approaching he shook his head, and sighed a deep sigh. 'I fear your work on Golden Dragon has been in vain. None of us shall live to see another sunrise.'

Erik put his hand to his sword and so too did each of his men.

'Farewell, daughter,' said the old Enchanter, 'even I am not powerful enough to save you from this evil'

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that now approaches. And tears came to the old man's eyes.

But Erik gripped his arm and said: 'What is this strange ship that approaches? What foe does it bring that strikes such terror into your heart?'

The old Enchanter gazed at him and said: 'I know this ship from the fearful past. I have seen it once before from another land. It brings death and destruction for it brings the Dogfighters to our peaceful shore.'

Erik and his men looked out at the ship that was fast approaching, and they could see dark figures lining the deck and the glint of many swords.

'Whoever it brings,' said Erik, 'we shall defend this island to the last breath in our bodies.'

But the old man shook his head. 'How can you succeed where all have failed before?' And all the time the Dogfighters' ship drew nearer and nearer.

'Take your daughter to the great cave in the mountain, and we shall find you when the fight is done,' said Erik.

But the old Enchanter shook his head. 'You cannot fight the Dogfighters. Come with us, and perhaps we shall escape somehow . . .'

But Erik replied: 'We shall never leave our ship Golden Dragon, for it is certain such an enemy would steal or destroy it.' And all the time the Dogfighters' ship drew nearer and nearer, and now the men on the shore could see the glint of steel helmets in the wintry northern sun.

'Come away, quickly, while there is still time!' cried the old Enchanter, but Erik and his men had drawn

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their swords and already they were taking up their battle stations.

The old Enchanter shook his head and turned to go, but Freya, his daughter, stood where she was and said: 'Father, I will stay with these brave men and face this enemy. For I would rather die here and now on this shore than live in fear and shadow in the cave in the mountain.'

The old man tried to speak, but no words came to his lips. But he held his daughter to him, and then they both hid behind some rocks, as the Dogfighters' ship drew closer to the shore.

Erik and his men peered hard to make out their enemy, and now they could see that each of them did indeed wear a steel helmet and each helmet was shaped like a great dog's head!

'Are these men with the heads of dogs?' said Erik. 'Or dogs with the bodies of men? And secretly each of his companions felt sick with fear.'

Ragnar Forkbeard turned to Erik and said: 'How can we fight such creatures as these? And Erik stared at the grey sea and said: 'Even I fear it is hopeless.'

And they watched as the dog-headed warriors began to leap out of their strange craft. Then Sven the Strong took Erik to one side and whispered to him: 'Erik! Never have I felt such fear as I feel now.' And Erik looked into his eyes, and saw the fear there, and said: 'Then it is indeed hopeless.' And Erik threw his sword onto the stony beach and looked at his men, and they each one of them saw the fear in his eyes.

As the Dogfighters waded nearer, the companions

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saw that, though the waves were high, the dog-headed

warriors stood three feet above the highest!

Then Ragnar Forkbeard also threw his sword onto the stony beach and said: 'If Erik cannot fight these creatures, how can we? I too have never felt such fear.' Then the shore rang to the clatter of swords as each of Erik's men threw his sword down onto the stony beach ... all except for Sven the Strong, and he said: 'What has happened to us? Many times in my life I have been afraid, yet it has not made me throw down my sword ...'

And Erik and his men looked up and saw the dog-headed warriors wading through the boiling waters nearer and nearer to the shore and their eyes glittered in their helmets cold and hard. And then even Sven the Strong threw down his sword onto the stony beach saying '... and yet, I know, even I cannot fight with such fear in my heart ...'

But just then they heard another voice behind them saying: 'It is *not* fear that you feel!' And they turned and there was the old Enchanter's daughter standing white and frail in the windy northern sun, but her face was strong.

'I feel fear,' said Erik to Freya, 'because I know that no one has ever faced these Dogfighters and lived ... and he sank to his knees as if a great weight were pressing down on him, and all the time the dog-headed warriors waded closer and closer.'

But you are wrong!' cried Freya. 'Don't you remember there is one here who *has* faced them and lived!'

At this Sven the Strong looked up, and Thorkild

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looked up, and they said: 'Who? Which one of us has ever faced these fearful creatures?' And Freya replied: 'None of you have, but my father has! And without another word Sven the Strong strode over to the old man and said: 'Of course ... If you know them from the fearful past as you say, you have met with them and lived. Tell us *how!*'

And the old Enchanter wept: 'It is hopeless.'

'Tell us what happened!' cried Sven the Strong, and he lifted the old man up in his hands as the Dogfighters reached the beach at last.

The old man looked into Sven's eyes: 'Did I escape?' he asked.

'Of course you did!' cried Sven the Strong and he saw the fear flicker a moment in the old Enchanter's eyes.

But they are here! The Dogfighters are upon us!' cried the old man. But Sven did not turn round. He did not see the first Dogfighter reach the first of Erik's men ...

'But this is the second time!' cried Sven. 'You escaped before! How? How?'

How?' cried the old man, and he shut his eyes.

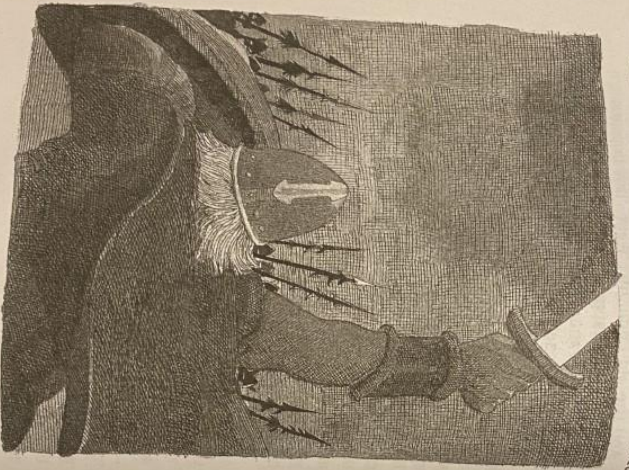
'It was not fear you felt,' cried his daughter. 'Don't you remember telling me - it was not fear you felt ...'

'No ...' said the old man, and the first of the Dogfighters struck the first of Erik's men to the white bone ... there, where he knelt on the stony beach.

'It was not fear ...' said the old Enchanter. 'I remember now! It was the *fear* of fear ... It was a spell the Dogfighters cast, for they themselves are cold cowards.' And the old Enchanter opened his eyes.

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raised his arms, and for an instant the wintry northern sun turned black – no more than the blinking of an eye – and then Sven the Strong gave a great cry: 'Erik! It is a trick!' he cried. 'These Dogfighters would make us afraid of being afraid! We are often frightened, but we are not cowards!' And before the words had left his lips, Erik's sword



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was back in his hand. 'I am not afraid of fear,' he cried. 'Fear is like an old friend, who shows by my side,' and he raised his sword and struck the Dogfighter a mighty blow across the shoulders, and the steel helmet rang, and before the echo had died amongst the grey rocks every one of Erik's men – Thorkild and Ragnar Forkbeard and Sven the Strong and the rest – had taken up their swords off the stony beach. The battle against the Dogfighters had begun...