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Opening extract from

How To Be A Pirate

Written by

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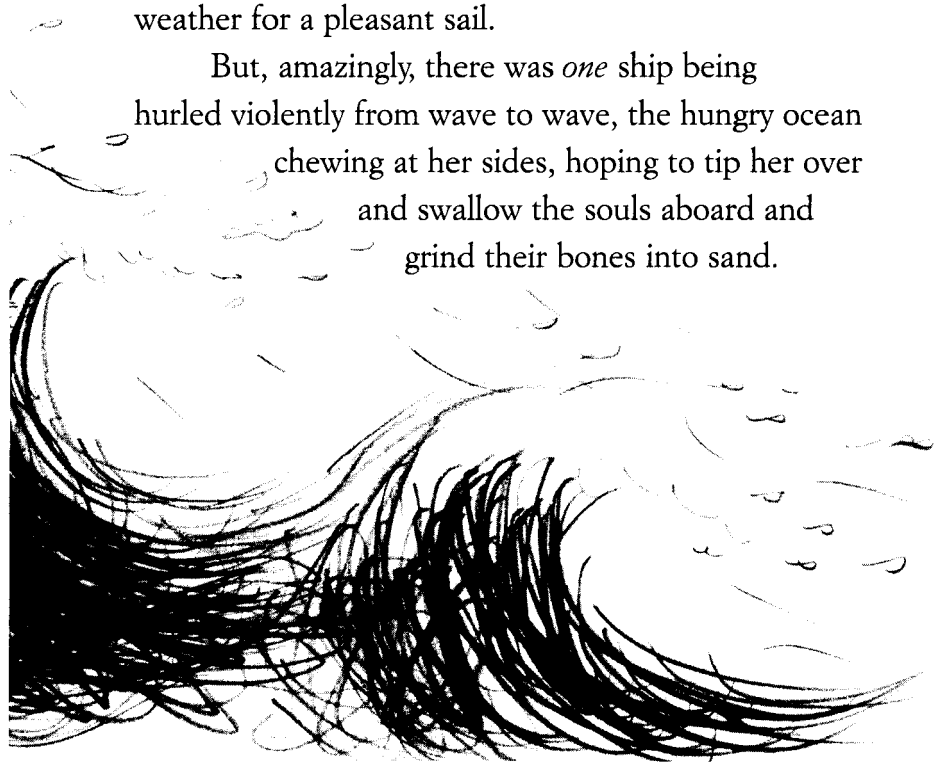
1. SWORDFIGHTING AT SEA (BEGINNERS ONLY)

Thor was SERIOUSLY annoyed.

He had sent a mighty summer storm to claw up the seas around the bleak little Isle of Berk. A black wind was shrieking across the wild and angry ocean. Furious thunder boomed overhead. Lightning speared into the water.

Only a madman would think it was the kind of weather for a pleasant sail.

But, amazingly, there was *one* ship being hurled violently from wave to wave, the hungry ocean chewing at her sides, hoping to tip her over and swallow the souls aboard and grind their bones into sand.



The madman in charge of this ship was Gobber the Belch. Gobber ran the Pirate Training Programme on the Isle of Berk and this crazy voyage was, in fact, one of Gobber's lessons, Swordfighting at Sea – (Beginners Only).

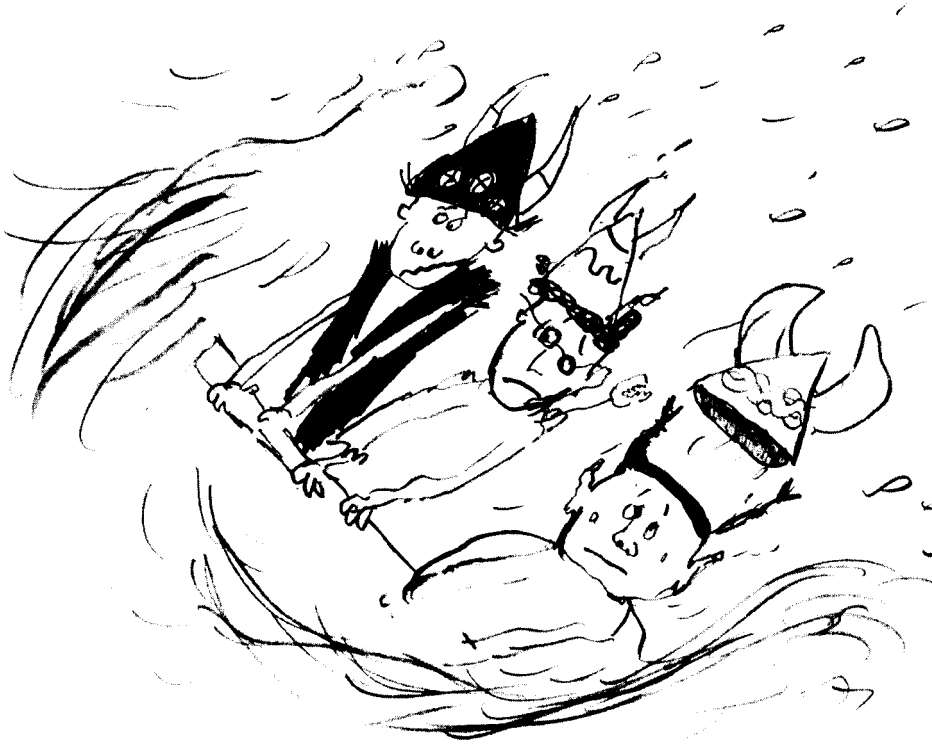
'OKAY, YOU DRIPPY LOT!' yelled Gobber, a six-and-a-half-foot hairy muscle-bound lunatic, with a beard like a ferret having a fit and biceps the size of your head. 'PUT YOUR BACKS INTO IT, FOR THOR'S SAKE. YOU ARE NOT AN ICKLE PRETTY JELLYFISH... HICCUP, YOU ARE ROWING LIKE AN EIGHT-YEAR-OLD... THE FAT BIT OF THE OAR GOES IN THE WATER... WE HAVEN'T GOT ALL YEAR TO GET THERE...' etc. etc.

Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third gritted his teeth as a big wave came screaming over the side and hit him full in the face.

Hiccup is, in fact, the Hero of this story, although you would never have guessed this to look at him. He was on the small side and had the sort of face that was almost entirely unmemorable.

There were twelve other boys struggling with the oars of that ship, and practically all of them looked


OKAY,
YOU DRIPPY
LOT!
yelled
GOBBER THE
BELCH



more like Viking Heroes than Hiccup did.

Wartihog, for instance, was only eleven, but he already had a fine crop of bubbling adolescent pimples and a personal odour problem. Dogsbreath could row as hard as anybody else with one hand, while picking his nose with the other. Snotlout was a natural leader. Clueless had ear hair.

Hiccup was just absolutely average, the kind of unremarkable, skinny, freckled boy who was easy to overlook in a crowd.

Beneath the rowing benches, thirteen dragons were huddled, one for each boy.

The dragon belonging to Hiccup was much, much smaller than the others. His name was Toothless, an emerald green Common or Garden dragon with enormous eyes and a sulky expression.

He was whining to Hiccup in Dragonese.*

'These Vikings c-c-crazy. Toothless g-g-got salt in his wings. Toothless sitting in a big cold puddle. Toothless h-h-hungry... F-F-FEED ME.' He tugged at Hiccup's trousers. 'Toothless need f-f-food NOW.'



* Dragonese was the native tongue of the dragons. I have translated it into English for the benefit of those readers whose Dragonese is a bit rusty. Only Hiccup could understand this fascinating language.

'I'm sorry, Toothless,' Hiccup winced as the boat plunged maniacally downwards on the back of another monstrous wave, 'but this is not a good moment...'

'THOR ONLY KNOWS,' yelled Gobber, 'how you USELESS LOT got initiated into the tribe of the Hairy Hooligans... but you now face four tough years on the Pirate Training Programme before you can truly call yourselves VIKINGS.'

'Oh great,' thought Hiccup gloomily.

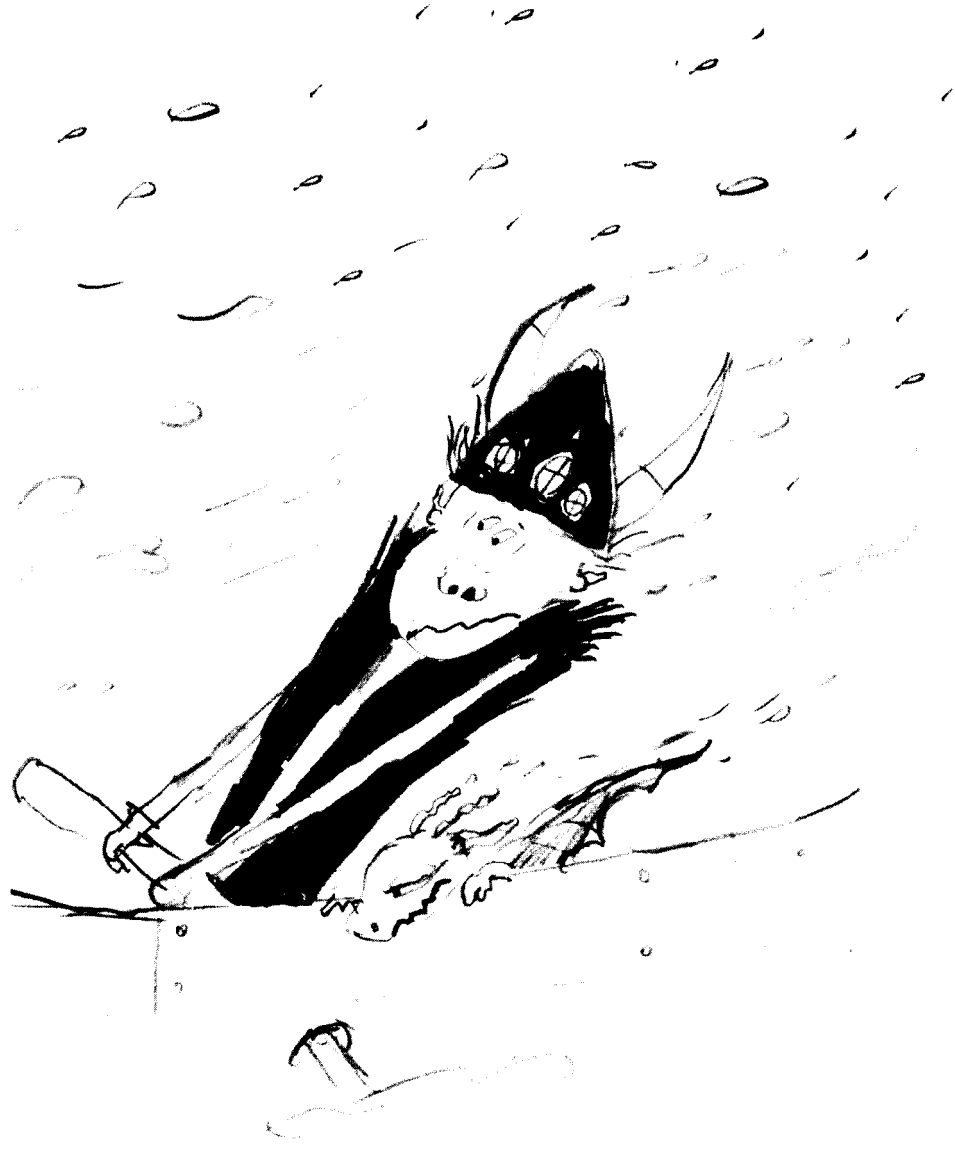
'We will begin with the most important Viking Skill of all... SWORDFIGHTING AT SEA.' Gobber grinned.

'The rules of Pirate Swordfighting are... THERE ARE NO RULES. In this lesson, biting, gouging, scratching and anything else particularly nasty all get you extra points. The first boy to call out "I submit" shall be the loser.'

'Or we all drown,' muttered Hiccup, 'whichever is the sooner.'

'NOW,' shouted Gobber. 'I NOMINATE THE FIRST BOY AS DOGSBREATH THE DUHBRAIN. WHO'S GOING TO FIGHT HIM?'

Dogsbreath the Duhbrain grunted happily at the



thought of spilling blood. Dogsbreath was a mindless thug of a boy with hairy knuckles that practically grazed the ground as he walked, and mean little eyes and a big ring in his flared nostrils made him look like a bristly boar with a bad character.

'Who shall fight Dogsbreath?' repeated Gobber the Belch.

Ten of the boys stuck their hands up with cries of '*Oooosirmesirpleasechoosemesir*,' wildly excited at the thought of being smooshed into a pulp by Dogsbreath the Duhbrain. This was predictable. That's what most Hooligans were like.

But what was more surprising was that HICCUP also leapt to his feet shouting, 'I nominate myself, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third!'





This was unusual because while Hiccup was the only son of Chief Stoick the Vast, he was not what you might call 'naturally sporty'. He was nearly as bad at Bashyball, Thugger, and all the other violent Viking games as his best friend Fishlegs.

And Fishlegs had a squint, a limp, numerous allergies and no co-ordination whatsoever.

'What has got into you?' whispered Fishlegs. 'Sit down, you lunatic... He'll murder you...'

'Don't worry, Fishlegs,' said Hiccup, 'I know what I'm doing here.'

'Okay, HICCUP,' boomed Gobber in surprise. 'Get up here, boy, and show us what you're made of.'

'If I'm EVER going to be Chief of this Tribe,' whispered Hiccup to Fishlegs, as he started taking off his jacket and buckling on his sword, 'I'm going to have to be a Hero at *something*...'

'Trust me,' said Fishlegs, 'THIS IS NOT YOUR THING... Clever ideas, yes. Talking to dragons, yes. But one-to-one combat with a brute like Dogsbreath? Absolutely NO, NO, NO.'

Hiccup ignored him. 'The Horrendous Haddocks have always had a gift for swordfighting. I reckon it's in the blood... Look at my great-great-

grandfather, Grimbeard the Ghastly. Best swordfighter EVER...'

'Yes, but have YOU ever done any swordfighting before?' asked Fishlegs.

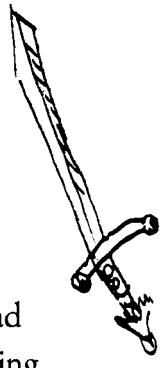
'Well, no,' admitted Hiccup, 'but I've read books on it. I know all the moves... The Piercing Lunge... The Destroyer's Defence... Grimbeard's Grapple... And I've got this great new sword...'

The sword was, indeed, an excellent one, a Swiftpoint Scaremaker with go-faster stripes and a handle shaped like a hammerhead shark.

'Besides,' said Hiccup, 'I'm never going to be in actual danger...'

The Pirates-in-Training practised with wooden cases on their swords. 'Molly-coddling, we never did that in MY DAY,' was Gobber's opinion. However, it DID mean the Hooligan Tribe ended up with more live Pirates at the end of the Programme.

Fishlegs sighed. 'Okay, you madman. If you have to do this... keep looking in his eyes... keep your sword up at all times... and say a big prayer to Thor the Thunderer because you're going to need all the help you can get...'



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