

# **Norse Star**

**By Jeff Mildon**

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# Chapter 1: The Encounter



The fjords of Norway unfurled in every direction, jagged cliffs rising from dark waters like the teeth of slumbering giants. Overhead, the moon hung low, a pale silver disc casting ghostly reflections that shimmered across the sea. The dark waters reflected the heavens, a mirror to the world above, broken only by the slow ripple of the longships cutting through the sea's surface.

The moon hung low, a pale silver disc suspended over the black abyss, its dim glow stretching long, ghostly fingers across the water. The aurora borealis twisted above, writhing like a celestial serpent, shifting in unnatural hues of green, blue, and violet. The colors burned, vibrant yet eerie, illuminating the sea and casting an otherworldly glow upon the men who sailed beneath it.

The longships of Erik Bloodaxe's fleet glided silently, their dragon-headed prows gleaming under the flickering light.

And yet, Something was wrong.

The usual symphony of the ocean was absent—no rhythmic slapping of waves against the hull, no creak of the wooden planks as they flexed under the wind. Even the gulls that followed them from distant shores had disappeared, their cries swallowed by the stillness.

No wind carried between the cliffs. No distant howl of wolves from the forests beyond. Even the shadows felt heavier, like unseen eyes pressed against the edges of reality, watching, waiting. It was as if the world itself had paused, holding its breath for something unseen.

At the prow of Stormfang, Erik Bloodaxe stood like a statue of war, his silhouette framed by the unnatural light dancing

across the heavens. His thick auburn beard, streaked with frost, moved only slightly with the motion of the ship. His grip tightened on the haft of his great axe, his knuckles whitening beneath the wolf-fur bracers that lined his wrists.

He was no stranger to war, to death, to the unknown. He had raided the halls of kings, fought battles beneath the banners of Saxons and Franks, and spilled blood on every land his longships had touched. Yet this night unnerved him in a way no battlefield ever had.

The cold was unnatural, biting deeper than any winter's wind. It gnawed at the edges of his furs, seeped into his very bones, as though something unseen reached for him, clawing through the darkness.

Behind him, his warriors stirred, their unease as tangible as the frost in the air. These were not men easily shaken.

They had braved oceans so fierce that even the gods might tremble. They had stood atop the burning remains of monasteries; blades soaked in the blood of those who called upon Christ instead of Odin. They had torn riches from the hands of cowards and forged their fates with steel and fire. And yet, they clutched their weapons tightly tonight.

Torvald the Elder, a man with more scars than unbroken skin, gritted his teeth and spat into the sea. The black water swallowed his offering without a ripple, as if the ocean itself refused to acknowledge them.

His weathered face twisted with suspicion as he wrapped his thick fingers around the hilt of his sword.

"This silence is an ill omen, Erik."

His voice was a low growl, a whisper that barely dared to break the unnatural quiet.

"The gods whisper through the winds, but tonight, they have fallen silent."

Bjorn Stonehand, a mountain of a man, ran his fingers along the edge of his axe.

"Then let them watch." His voice was gruff, yet there was an edge to it that betrayed his unease. "If battle comes, we will carve our names into the bones of the world."

Gunnar the Red, younger than most, barely past his twentieth winter, rubbed his thumb against the iron amulet of Thor that hung around his neck.

"This night is cursed."

He clenched his fists as though he could squeeze the fear from his blood. He had heard the stories all his life, of his father, a shield-brother of Erik Bloodaxe, who had fallen on a foreign shore. Gunnar had trained to live up to that name, to earn the respect it carried. But now, facing something no saga had ever described, he felt that legacy wrap around his throat like a noose.

The warriors exchanged uneasy glances, but none dared speak louder than a whisper. The quiet was too thick, pressing against their senses like a storm yet to break.

Erik turned his gaze toward the distant ice-capped mountains, their white peaks reflecting the shimmering auroras. The sky above had always been alive—the lights shifting in slow, dreamlike patterns, a dance of the gods above.

But tonight, the lights twisted differently. They spun like a great spiral, bending and stretching as though being pulled toward something unseen. The colors bled together unnaturally, churning like a storm trapped between the heavens and the earth.

It was a movement he had never seen before. A movement that did not belong. Then, it happened.

At first, it was just a glimmer, a subtle flicker amidst the celestial flames overhead. But then, without warning, a searing column of light erupted from the sky, a lance of emerald fire piercing the heavens.

It swelled, pulsing, like the heartbeat of the gods, before exploding outward in a burst of pure radiance. The auroras convulsed. The sky twisted. The sea itself trembled beneath the weight of something immense.

The warriors shouted, staggering as the longships lurched. The unnatural force pushed against the water, bending reality itself as the sound of a great hum filled the air. Not the voice of thunder. Not the song of the winds. Something older. Something deeper.

Erik gritted his teeth, forcing himself to remain steady as the vibrations rattled his bones. And then, from the heart of the light, something descended.

A shape, vast and unholy, emerging from the void. It moved with a grace that defied the laws of the world, gliding without sails, without oars, without wind. It was unlike any ship ever crafted by mortal hands. The air crackled. The sea hissed. The silence that had gripped the world shattered, replaced by a presence too great to comprehend.



Torvald's breath hitched. His grip tightened on his sword.

"By the gods," he whispered.

Bjorn, for the first time in his life, made the sign of Thor's hammer across his chest. Gunnar stumbled backward, his eyes wide with terror.

"It is Jörmungandr," he choked out. "The end times are upon us."

Erik did not move. He simply watched, the light burning into his retinas as the impossible ship descended toward the sea.

Something older than the gods had come to Midgard. And there would be no turning back.

A sudden, blinding light exploded across the sky, turning the deep black of night into a blinding day. The heavens convulsed, a pulse of emerald and sapphire fire tearing through the sky like the blazing heart of a dying god.

The auroras writhed violently, their once gentle, ghostly dance transforming into a maelstrom of chaos, their colors bleeding together in a storm of shifting hues. They twisted into unnatural shapes, spiraling downward like a celestial vortex, its center pulling toward the waters below.

Then came the sound. A deafening hum, neither thunder nor wind, but something else entirely. It was deeper, older, vibrating with a force that shook the very bones of every man aboard the longships. It did not come from the earth, nor the heavens, but from somewhere beyond both.

The warriors cried out in shock, some throwing their hands over their eyes, others gripping their weapons with white-

knuckled hands as if bracing for the wrath of the gods themselves.

Even the sea reacted, the once glassy black waters now trembling with unseen force, sending tiny waves rippling away from the center of the storm.

Then, from the heart of the twisting auroras, a shape emerged. It descended slowly, moving with unnatural grace, defying the very laws of the world itself.

The warriors watched in horrified awe as a massive vessel, gleaming like blackened steel, lowered from the heavens. It did not fall like a rock, nor drift like a feather, but instead moved with the measured intent of a living thing, its smooth surface gleaming beneath the swirling fires of the sky.

The air grew thick, the weight of something immense pressing down upon them, though not with the force of wind or wave. It was like the presence of a god, an unseen force that sent a thrumming pulse through the air and sea alike.

It touched the water. But no waves formed. No ripple disturbed the fjord's surface. The great vessel settled upon the sea as if the water itself bowed in reverence.

A hush fell over the fleet. The only sound was the thrumming hum, vibrating through wood, water, and bone, a song that did not belong to the earthly realm. The warriors stared in mute horror, their instincts screaming to run, to fight, to do anything but stand in the presence of this impossible thing.

Erik's hand tightened around his axe, his pulse pounding in his ears. His breath was slow and deliberate, but even he felt

the ice of something far worse than fear creeping up his spine. Torvald was the first to speak, his voice barely a whisper over the hum.

"By the gods," he rasped, his breath visible in the cold night air.

The glow from the massive vessel illuminated the fjord, casting long shadows over the towering cliffs. The light was not like fire, nor the sun, but something colder, something not of this world.

Bjorn Stonehand's fingers twitched against the haft of his axe. He said nothing, at first. He rarely did, not until the blood had settled. But his eyes, cold as the fjord itself, scanned the beings before them. He was already calculating height, reach, and movement. They weren't berserkers. They were worse. Controlled.

"This is no ship," he muttered, his voice hoarse.

Erik narrowed his eyes, taking in the impossible smoothness of the vessel's surface. It had no seams, no planks, no sails. There were no oars, yet it glided effortlessly. No man had built this, nor had any god he had ever known.

Gunnar clutched his iron amulet.

"Jörmungandr," he whispered, his voice barely audible. "The great serpent has risen from the depths."

The name sent a ripple of dread through the warriors, as though the very mention of the World Serpent had given it power.

"Jörmungandr brings Ragnarok," another warrior muttered. His knuckles whitened as he clutched his spear, his lips moving in a hurried prayer to Odin.

But Erik wasn't so sure. Jörmungandr was the great beast, the bringer of chaos, the one who would rise from the depths at the end of all things.

But this...

This was not a beast. It was a ship. But not like any ship he had ever known. It did not creak under the weight of the sea. It did not rock with the waves. It floated like a shadow. A vessel carved from the void itself.

Erik gritted his teeth, the icy fingers of unease pressing against the back of his mind. He had fought kings, raided empires, and conquered lands across the sea—but this? This was beyond even the wildest battle songs of the skalds.

The hum deepened, vibrating through the very marrow of his bones. Then, the vessel moved. Not by oar. Not by sail. It glided forward smoothly, silently, and effortlessly. As though the fjord itself parted before it, bending to its presence.

The warriors staggered back, some gripping the sides of their longships as the great vessel drew closer. Its surface, dark and gleaming like polished obsidian, pulsed with lines of soft blue light, symbols flickering along its edges.

A low murmur spread through the warriors, some whispering prayers, others merely staring in paralyzed horror.

"It cannot be..." Torvald exhaled.

But it was. It was here. And the world would never be the same.

The world stood frozen, not just in silence, but in a moment of impossible reckoning.

Then, without warning, a portion of the ship's surface shifted, as though the metal itself were alive. A hatch opened silently, revealing a long, luminous ramp of pure light extending downward toward the water.

Then, they appeared. The warriors aboard Erik's ships staggered back as tall, slender figures emerged from the glowing ramp. They moved without sound, their steps too fluid, too precise to be natural.

The beings that descended the ramp moved with an effortless grace that defied human motion. They were humanoid, but... not human. Their forms were tall and slender. Their features were eerily perfect, their skin smooth and gleaming with a silver sheen. Their eyes glowed, reflecting the auroras above, as if they carried the stars within them. They wore robes of shifting material, fabric that flowed like water, changing color with every movement. The air around them shimmered, warping slightly, as though reality itself struggled to contain their presence. Their faces were neither grotesque nor entirely human, but strikingly symmetrical, their high cheekbones and elongated eyes exuding an unnatural presence. Their skin gleamed like polished metal, smooth and flawless, reflecting the faint glow of the auroras above.

Their leader, a figure standing at least a head taller than Erik, stepped forward. A soft glow emanated from beneath its robe, the source unclear. It stopped a few feet from the

Viking warband, studying them with those piercing, liquid-silver eyes.

Torvald's grip tightened on the hilt of his blade, callused fingers trembling, not from fear, but from memory. He had once watched a seer burn alive for speaking of fire from the stars. He had buried that vision in silence ever since. And now it walked toward him.

The warriors tensed. Hands clenched hilts, shields were adjusted, and breaths were held. The hum in Erik's bones grew stronger. Then, without moving their lips, a voice spoke inside his mind.

"Erik Bloodaxe, King of the North, you are known to us."

A collective gasp rippled through the warriors. Some clutched their weapons, others whispered prayers to Odin and Thor, their hands shaking. Erik did not move. His heart thundered, but he stood his ground.

"You speak my name as if we are old friends," Erik said, his voice steady despite the pounding of his heart. "Who are you?"

The tallest of the figures lifted a six-fingered hand and gestured toward Erik, palm upturned. A swirl of blue light coalesced in his palm, forming intricate symbols, like runes carved on Viking shields, that pulsed with an energy.

"We are the Zepharions," the figure said, his voice as deep as the void between stars. "And we bring you knowledge beyond the stars."

The fjord, the night, and the very air itself seemed to hold its breath. The Vikings stood at the precipice of a destiny they

could not yet fathom. Torvald gripped his axe tightly, his knuckles turning white as he locked eyes with the glowing silver gaze of the Zepharian. Every fiber of his being told him to strike, to kill, to send this sorcerer from the sky back to whatever hell had birthed it.

The other warriors stood motionless, their breath visible in the cold air, hanging like mist between them and the impossible being that stood before them. The only sound was the distant lapping of water against the hulls of the longships, but even the sea itself seemed subdued, as if afraid to disturb the moment.

Torvald spoke. "Knowledge beyond the stars? Trickery." His voice was low, edged with suspicion. "No man speaks through the mind unless he deals in sorcery."

The Zepharian tilted its head, the motion smooth, effortless, almost too perfect. The glowing silver eyes flickered, like shifting pools of liquid light. The expression was not one of hostility or fear. It was curiosity.

"You see magic where there is only understanding."

The voice did not come from its lips, yet it rang clearly within Erik's mind. A shudder ran through the warriors. Some clutched their weapons, others took small, hesitant steps back. No one spoke, but their expressions screamed their thoughts.

Erik stepped forward, breaking the spell of fear that gripped his men. He had stood before kings and warlords, had watched the light fade from the eyes of enemies he had slain. He had faced death itself. But never had he faced

something like this. This was not a man. Not a beast. Not a god. And yet, it stood before him, speaking his name, knowing his people.

His instincts screamed at him, telling him this was no enemy to be taken lightly. But neither was it something he could turn away from. If what they claimed was true... If they carried the wisdom of the heavens themselves...

Erik exhaled slowly, his grip relaxing slightly on his axe.

"What is it you seek?" he demanded. "No man gives knowledge without expecting something in return."

The Zepharian's glowing eyes did not waver.

"We seek nothing but to share."

The warriors shifted uneasily.

"Your kind is... unique among those we have encountered. Your ambition, your ferocity, your will to conquer against all odds. We have watched your people grow from the shadows of time."

A murmur ran through the warriors. Some of them looked to Erik, waiting for his response. Others did not hide their unease.

Gunnar, the youngest of them, his wild red hair tousled by the wind, spat onto the ice-slicked deck.

"This is folly!" he snarled. "We should not listen to whispers of ghosts!"

His voice was bold, but there was fear beneath it. To the Vikings, there were only two kinds of beings that could



command such unnatural power, gods and monsters. And these beings were neither.

Torvald turned to Erik, his brow furrowed with deep lines of mistrust.

"We should strike them down now, before their trickery ensnares us all!"

A few of the warriors nodded, their hands tightening on their weapons. Bjorn, ever the pragmatist, remained silent, but his gaze was heavy with unspoken questions. He didn't trust the Zepharians. But neither did he trust the old gods to protect them now. And Bjorn had learned long ago, if the rules changed, so must the warrior.

Erik silenced them all with a single look. His men had followed him across the sea, through blood and fire, through war and famine. They had trusted him to lead them through the storm. They would trust him now. He turned back to the Zepharian, his voice measured, his stance unyielding.

"Show me your knowledge," he commanded, "and I will decide whether you are friend or foe."

The Zepharian raised its hand once more. This time, the light that emanated from its palm did not pulse in a simple glow. It expanded outward, spreading through the air like ink in water, forming shifting symbols of blue fire that hovered in the cold night air.

The warriors gasped, some shielding their faces, others watching in transfixed awe. Before them, an image began to form, a vision so real, so tangible, that Erik could have sworn he was looking through a window into another world.

It was a ship. But not like any Viking longship.

Sleek. Curved. Its form impossibly smooth, without planks, without nails, without sails.

Its hull gleamed like the finest polished steel, but bore symbols—runes of unknown origin—that pulsed with living light. It was beautiful, and yet terrifying.

A ship that needed no wind, no oars. A ship that could defy the waves, defy the very elements themselves. The vision hovered before them, cold and silent, but its presence was deafening.

The warriors stared, their expressions a mixture of awe and terror. The firelight from the longships flickered across their faces, casting them in shadow and flame as they beheld something beyond human comprehension.

Erik inhaled sharply. A thousand thoughts ran through his mind at once, but he could only grasp one.

"It cannot be..." Torvald whispered.

Erik clenched his jaw. But deep inside, beneath the warrior, beneath the conqueror, beneath the blood-soaked king—He knew the truth. The world had changed. And there was no going back.