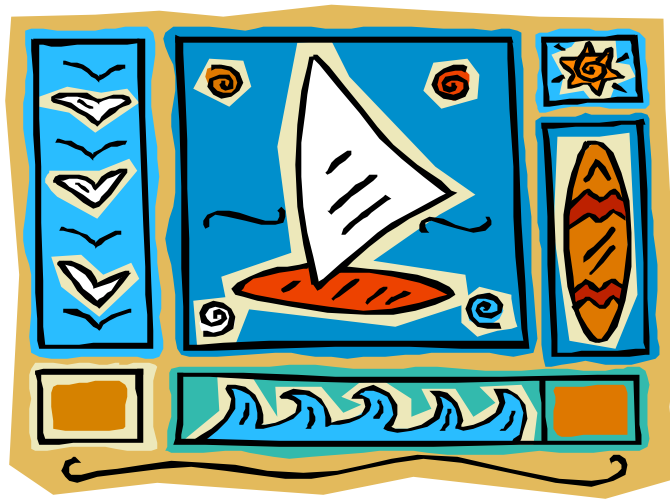


SEA STORIES



Extract 1

"And I thought of the tide, how swift it ran and strong into the little cove. The wind blew down from the headland like a funnel. I got the boat out into the bay. I got her out there, beyond the beacon, and I tried to go about, to clear the ridge of rocks. The little jib fluttered. I could not sheet it in. A puff of wind came and the sheet tore out of my hands, went twisting round the mast. The sail thundered and shook. It cracked like a whip above my head. I could not remember what one had to do. I could not remember. I tried to reach that sheet and it blew above me in the air. Another blast of wind came straight ahead. We began to drift sideways, closer to the ridge. It was dark, so damned dark I couldn't see anything on the black, slippery deck. Somehow I blundered down into the cabin. I had a spike with me. If I didn't do it now it would be too late. We were getting so near to the ridge, and in six or seven minutes, drifting like this, we should be out of deep water. I opened the sea-cocks. The water began to come in. I drove the spike into the bottom boards. One of the planks split right across. I took the spike out and began to drive in another plank. The water came up over my feet. I left Rebecca lying on the floor. I fastened both the scuttles. I bolted the door. When I came up on deck I saw we were within twenty yards of the ridge. I threw some of the loose stuff on the deck into the water. There was a lifebuoy, a pair of sweeps, a coil of rope. I climbed into the dinghy. I pulled away, and lay back on the paddles, and watched. The boat was drifting still. She was sinking too. Sinking by the head. The jib was still shaking and cracking like a whip. I thought someone must hear it, someone walking the cliffs late at night, some fisherman from Kerrith away beyond me in the bay, whose boat I could not see. The boat was smaller, like a black shadow on the water. The mast began to shiver, began to crack. Suddenly she heeled right over and as she went the mast broke in two, split right down the centre. The lifebuoy and the sweeps floated away from me on the water. The boat was not there any more. I remember staring at the place where she had been. Then I pulled back to the cove. It started raining.

Maxim waited. He stared in front of him still. Then he looked at me, sitting beside him on the floor.

THE DEAD SEA

The Dead Sea is a salt lake, situated between Israel and Jordan, and forms part of the border between the two countries. The surface of the Dead Sea, 408m (1,340 ft) below sea level as of 1996, is the lowest water surface on Earth. The lake is 76km (47mi) long and has a maximum width of about 16km (10mi); its area is approximately 1,049 sq km (405 sq mi). The Dead Sea occupies a north portion of the Rift Valley. On the east the high plateau of Moab rises about 1,340 m (4,400 ft) above the sea; on the west the plateau of Judaea rises to half that height. From the eastern shore a peninsula juts out into the lake. To the south of this peninsula the lake is shallow, less than 6m (20ft) deep; to the north lies its greatest depth of 400m (1,312 ft)

The Dead Sea is fed mainly by the Jordan River, which enters the lake from the north. Several smaller streams also enter the sea, chiefly from the east. The lake has no outlet, and the heavy inflow of fresh water is carried off solely by evaporation, which is rapid in the hot desert climate. Due to large-scale projects by Israel and Jordan to divert water from the Jordan River for irrigation and other water needs, the surface of the Dead Sea has been dropping for at least the past 50 years.

Nearly seven times as salty as the ocean, the Dead Sea contains at a depth of 305m (1,000 ft) some 27 per cent solid substances: sodium chloride (common salt), magnesium chloride, calcium chloride, potassium chloride, magnesium bromide, and many other substances. Because of the density of solids in the sea, the human body easily floats on the surface. The high salt concentration means, however, that the lake contains no life of any sort except for a few kinds of microbes; fish carried in by the Jordan soon die, and even salt-water fish put into its waters cannot survive.

The Dead Sea is economically important as a source of potash, bromine, gypsum, salt, and other chemical products, which are extracted inexpensively. The shores of the Dead Sea are of growing importance as a winter health resort. The lake is closely associated with biblical history; the sites of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are traditionally located on the site of the lake, and the Essenes produced the manuscripts known today as the Dead Sea Scrolls in their community on the north-west shore of the lake. The mountain-top site of Masada, the site of the Jewish Zealots' last stand against the Romans in ad 70-72, is also on the western shore...

DAY 9: THE GREENLAND SEA

A night of varying degrees of instability. Occasionally some steep pitching and tossing which has clocks, books and glasses sliding onto the floor. The engine noise is a loud, persistent, constant factor we shall have to get used to. Noise insulators, like stabilizers, were never part of the Norsel's specifications.

Egg and bacon breakfast. Fraser is worried that we have been given no lifeboat drill. Roger had awoken in the night to find a large sailor in his cabin. He was a messenger from the captain who had seen some ice near by and thought that we might like to photograph it.

Wintry conditions. Snow flurries on deck and a heavy sea. Seabirds like tern, fulmar and kittiwake, rest on the ice-covered bow before resuming their graceful gliding search of the waters.

I show Fraser the findings of an American survey, published in the shipping magazine *Trade Winds*, which asked people for whom they would give up a seat in a lifeboat. Of men, 67 per cent would give up a seat to their wives, 52 percent to Mother Teresa, but only 8 per cent to Madonna. Of women, 41 per cent would give up a seat to their husbands, and only 3 per cent to "men not their husbands". I don't think Fraser's even found the lifeboat yet, so the question is academic.

I ask the captain what our maximum speed is.

"Well," he pulls heavily on a yellowing hand-rolled cigarette, "with a light load, good weather and the current behind us...ten knots."

I reckon it will take us thirty hours just to clear the coast of Spitsbergen and another two days before we reach the fishing fleets on the Barents Sea.

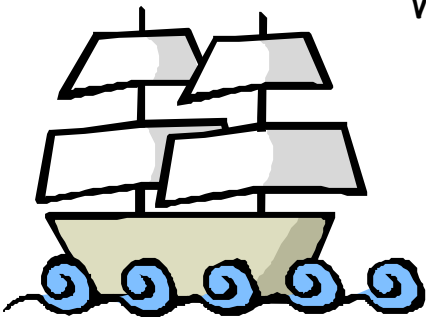
Such is the pitching and tossing of the ship tonight that as I lie in my narrow bunk I experience the not unpleasant sensation of being stretched. First of all my body tries to slide out through my feet, then a moment later everything tries to escape through the top of my head. Go to sleep wondering how one could design a machine to reproduce this effect.

Sea Song

A wet sheet and a flowing sea,
A wind that follows fast,
And fills the white and rustling sail
And bends the gallant mast -
And bends the gallant mast, my boys,
While, like the eagle free,
Away the good ship flies, and leaves
Old England on the lee.

"Oh for a soft and gentle wind,"
I heard a fair one cry;
But give to me the snoring breeze,
And white waves heaving high -
And white waves heaving high, my boys,
The good ship tight and free;
The world of waters is our home,
And merry men are we.

There's the tempest in yon horned moon,
And lightning in yon cloud;
But hark the music, mariners!
The wind is piping loud -
The wind is piping loud, my boys,
The lightning flashing free, -
While the hollow oak our palace is,
Our heritage the sea.



A Cunningham