**/// Episode 02 – The Sea Dragon**

**ASSASSIN’S CREED VALHALLA AND XBOX PRESENT: ECHOS OF VALHALLA.**

**LIFE IN VIKING TIMES, THE PODCAST**

/// INTRO

(Sound of waves and wind)

Voiceover:

*Can you hear the sea whisper?*

*She was there at the start, at the very beginning, and will remain unchanged till the end of time.*

*How peaceful she seems, quietly ebbing and flowing...*

*And yet…*

(Clap of thunder, the sea starts to get rough)

(A storm erupts, the sea rages)

Shipwreck:

 (Cries from sailors)

*- She’s going to capsize!*

*- Not if you keep your course!*

*- But it’s impossible, the storm is too strong!*

*- Keep your course, I tell you, and brace yourselves! Now is not the time to give in to fear!*

*- Watch out!*

(Sound of a wave **crashing** against the side of the hull)

(A tidal wave comes down on them)

(The castaways shout)

/// NARRATION

(Sound of waves crashing against the cliff)

Voiceover:

*Our army had set sail for the great island to the West.*

*Under the command of Chief Ivar Ragnarsson and his brothers, our warriors had set off to conquer the Land of the Angles and the Saxons.*

*Such an adventure was worthy of our ancient sagas.*

*Crossing the North Sea was the first of many dangers to overcome…*

*From atop this cliff, I will tell you how things transpired.*

*From here, you can see the beach this expedition set off from.*

*And from here, the view is magnificent. The sea unravels as far as the eye can see, its endless blue surface shimmering like a sheet of silver scales.*

(Musical transition)

**Focus #1 –Vikings and the Sea**

**LUCIE MALBOS**

The sea is omnipresent in Scandinavia. **-LUCIE MALBOS, Lecturer in Medieval History, University of Poitiers, France -**

**The language spoken by the ancient Scandinavians, Old Norse, has left many marks on modern languages, particularly French but also English. Mainly, these terms pertain to the sea and to navigation, such as gust, keel, and bitt. There are also words with a broader meaning, like “hole” that stems from the Old Norse “hyrl”, which originally meant the depth of a swell or the pool in a river.**

Voiceover:

*In the months leading up to the journey, every shipyard in the region was in a frenzy. Shipwrights, rope makers, blacksmiths… Hundreds of workers toiled relentlessly to build the fleet that would carry the warriors to England. Building each one of those ships required no fewer than twenty oak or pine trees!*

(Noises of a shipyard, stretching ropes, etc.) No saws! Cutting is done with axes, mallets and sharp pieces of wood.

Voiceover:

*The master shipwright was infused with ancestral know-how, perfected from one generation to the next, to give life to faster and nimbler vessels capable of surviving the high seas.*

*With their noble curves, extreme proportions and magnificent animal erect on the prow, the boats looked like genuine sea dragons.*

*They were constantly being improved, down to the very last detail. Our master shipwright required utmost levels of rigor and precision. Nothing was left to chance…*

Dialogue between master Olaf and the workmen:

(Sounds of hammer on wood)

(bold footsteps on the ground)

* *Greetings master Olaf!*
* *(coarsely) Mhhhh.*
* *So, what do you think master?*
* *(curtly) No, this won’t do. We need to start over!*
* *What… ?! That will take us days!*
* *It will take the time it takes! We need to lengthen the hull and widen the curve of the stem!*
* *But… master. That’s impossible.*
* *Do you want the death of our warriors on your conscience?*
* *No, Master, I do not.*
* *Well back to work you go, then!*

**Focus #2 – Ships**

**There is no reference of the term drakkar as such in the historical sources. It was coined at the end of the 19th century after the erroneous transcription of the Old Norse word “dreki”, of which the plural is “drekar”. Originally this term designated not the entire ship, just the dragon-shaped figurehead located on the bow.**

Voiceover:

*After months of gruelling toil in the shipyards, the fleet was finally ready.*

*The Great Army had gathered by the coast. Once supplies had been properly inventoried, they were loaded onto the boats.*

(Sound of equipment being loaded onto the ship)

**Focus #3 – Cargo**

**Thierry Noël: Organizing the boats and life on board was extremely difficult, it is an extremely narrow space. - THIERRY NOEL Content and Inspiration Consultant for Ubi Soft - Chests are used as benches for the rowers and these can be moved from time to time for comfort, but there really isn't much room anyway. Some space is saved by putting the shields up on the sides, protecting them from the spray in some measure. And obviously there are many ropes criss-crossing in all directions, making it hard for the seamen to go about their tasks.**

(Sounds of a camp, fire, inaudible conversations)

Voiceover:

*On the eve of the departure, a special atmosphere reigned in the camp. It was the night of the summer solstice. The warriors had bid their farewells to their loved ones. On this last night on the land of their forefathers, some tried to find their courage in vast quantities of food and drink. Others prayed to the Gods to implore their protection during the crossing…*

*Yet the Volva had been reassuring. The Spirits had flocked to her to reveal the outcome of this expedition.*

(Chanting, percussions)

The Volva’s monologue:

* *Listen, I bear good news. I can sense that Njörd will be merciful. He will calm the waves and fill your sails until you arrive safely…Warriors, rejoice! The time will soon come for you to slay your enemies once again!*

(Cries of joy, roars…)

Voiceover:

*Patience… You will be given many an opportunity to fight! Patience...*

*That night, one warrior in particular was restless and sleepless.*

*He came to the very cliff I stand upon to stare at the stars and meditate his plan.*

*It was chief Ivar Ragnarsson, Ivar the Boneless!*

*This conquest had become a personal matter to him. A matter of revenge.*

*His father, the legendary Ragnar Lodbrok, had set foot in England before him, to his great misfortune. King Aelle had captured him and put him to death in a very cruel manner. Legend has it he was thrown naked into a pit full of snakes…*

Ivar’s monologue:

* *Father, this time I will not fail! I will kill Aelle tomorrow with my own hands. And even if Odin decides to call me to his table and this fight proves to be my last, I shall not leave this earth as long as I have not avenged you. The blood of this cursed king shall run down my sword.*

*This time, he would set sail on his journey backed by a swarm of determined Vikings… The greatest Viking army ever raised to cross the North Sea.*

**Focus #4 – the conquest of 865/866**

**Thierry Noël: Ragnar is said to have been captured in Northumbria by King Aelle and executed in an absolutely atrocious manner. Obviously, it’s a legend.

As to the Vikings' reason to attack England precisely at this time, we have no exact answer. In any case, it is likely they coordinated their efforts even though they operated in small groups, small war bands. This, in particular, is attested to by historical sources left by the Vikings who came back from Ireland, where the great local king was in the process of defeating them. So they packed up and left and that's typical of Viking opportunism. They retreated and fell back on England, an easier target.**

(Cawing of ravens)

Voiceover:

*The big day is finally upon us!*

*Ravens are circling in the skies. It is a good omen!*

*The sun has not yet risen, and men are hurrying along to board the ships as quickly as possible.*

(Sound of boats being loaded and pushed out to sea)

Fragments of voices:

 *- Hurry up! Push!!! Harder!!!*

*- Take these supplies aboard and prepare for departure.*

*- Don’t slow down. Remember the Volga’s words! Njörd is with us!*

*- You hear me comrades? Faster! Don’t disappoint the Gods!*

(Sounds of physical effort, of boats on the waves)

Voiceover:

*And they are off! Finally!*

*Spurred by their emotions after such a long wait, the men row with fantastic energy, their faces whipped by the sea spray. The proud sea dragons crash through the waves! They heave at the oar* (sound of oars)*, and very quickly touch the horizon. The warriors cast one last glance at the shore, while it is still in sight…*

*Will they ever set eyes again on the land of their forefathers? Will death mow them down on a faraway land?*

**Focus #5 – Viking Invasions**

**How invasions were led**

**Lucie Malbos**

**Gradually, the Vikings learn of the strengths and weaknesses of the Western world and become increasingly bold.**

**Thierry Noël
Vikings are commonly regarded as great warriors, but they weren't necessarily stronger than others. And at the same time, they were able to use quite disruptive techniques, as we would say nowadays, that is to say fatal charges against the enemy, outflanking them, attacking from all sides... The game will illustrate these manoeuvres.**

(Sound of waves, wind, sea swell and seagulls)

Voiceover:

*As you know, for a people of travellers such as us Vikings, the sea is a means to escape towards unknown lands, new horizons.*

Dialogue on faraway lands:

(Sounds of a calm sea)

* *You seem lost in your thoughts.*
* *(Caught unexpectedly)* *Oh… I was wondering if there were any lands beyond the island of England.*
* *Most probably. But you will have to wait until our next voyage before exploring them.*
* *Well, I hope the Gods hear you because I have every intention of travelling to the other side of the world.*
* *Ha! But for the moment, just focus on the course.*
* *Don’t worry, I know what I’m doing…*

*Our ships have drawn countless wakes that the seas have erased.*

*The Vikings have learned to tame the immense blue expanse better than anyone else.*

**Focus #6 – Navigation**

**FRANÇOIS EMION**

**Take a country like Norway. - FRANÇOIS EMION, Lecturer in Nordic Studies, University of Paris Sorbonne - Fjords stretching several tens of km inland, bordered by cliffs towering several tens or even hundreds of meters high. To travel from one place to another, the obvious choice was to take the boat.**

**The Saami populations, the Lapps, provided furs and walrus products, enough ivory for the whole of Europe, hide ropes of walrus and seal... and all these goods were in demand, therefore this trade route stretching along the coast of Norway, gave its name to Norway itself: etymologically, Nor Veyer: the way to the North.**

Voiceover:

*It has been a week since the ships set off for the Great island.*

*But it is essential to stay the course! This crossing is a far cry from our usual coastal navigation. But our seamen are never at a loss when it comes to being resourceful. They use whatever they have at their disposal to guide themselves! The movement of the water, the direction the wind blows… All these ever so subtle signs! At night, they watch the position of the North Star. In the daytime, that of the sun, provided they can see it! When the clouds cover the skies, we have the “sunstone”, a magical instrument devised by the Vikings…*

Dialogue between seamen:

* *Do you think we are lost?*
* *No, look the sun is hiding right there!*
* *Are you sure? I can’t see anything...*
* *This stone* ***will show us the way****. We need to tack to starboard.*
* ***Quickly****, hoist the sail and set the course to starboard!*

**Focus #7 – Navigation techniques**

**FRANÇOIS EMION**

**It was thought the sunstone was made of quartz, could polarize light and, even on a cloudy day, would indicate the rays’ direction, but this is a subject of great controversy.**

**LUCIE MALBOS**

**Regarding the discovery of Iceland, it seems they kept crows on board and let them fly out to see if land was near.**

 (Sound of waves, wind, swell, seagulls)

Voiceover:

*The days at sea can be gruelling.*

*The constant sway, day and night, can drive you mad!*

*Life on board, the cold, rain and promiscuity require an iron strong discipline. Everyone has a role, and should never step out of place.*

Dialogue between the captain and the storekeeper:

*- Mötunautr, what supplies do we have left?*

*- Just a few dried fish, some salted meat and oat bread.*

*- Make sure the crew can hold on for another while. But be careful not to ration us too much, I don’t want our warriors to be weak when we reach the coast.*

*- I’ll do my best, but I hope the Volva was right because we can’t keep going for much longer.*

*Despite the precautions, supplies start to run out.*

*For the sailor in charge of supplies, keeping hungry men in shape is a real feat.*

*But shortages are nothing… The worst is yet to come…*

(Thunderstorm)

Dialogue between seamen:

*- (cry from afar) The wind rises!*

*- Oh! It looks like Njörd’s wrath is brewing…*

*- You’re right! Look at the waves... they’re getting stronger.*

*- Quick! Bring down the mast!*

(The sea rages)

*- The waves are too high, we’re going to capsize...*

*Watch out!!!*

(Tidal wave, sound of men swimming)

*- Help!!!*

*- Help!!!*

Voiceover:

*The sea would serve as their tomb.*

*Only one boat had sunk. The rest of the fleet had been spared.*

*Njörd’s wrath finally died down. The storm gave way to normal seas.*

*They now needed to get back on course.*

*And row, endlessly…*

(sounds of swell and rowers)

(Inaudible conversations)

Voiceover:

*How many days had gone by? How many weeks?*

*Eventually, all notions of time and space are lost…*

(Musical transition)

*But one morning... A cry breaks the silence:*

- “Land ahoy!!!”

(Cries of joy, musical transition)

*Finally, they have reached England!*

*These are the shores of East Anglia. But the men are not yet aware of that. They believe they have landed in Northumbria…*

*Soon, the locals will see the sea dragons emerge from the mist!*

*And they know exactly what those menacing creatures mean, as it is not their first encounter with the Vikings…*

**Focus #8 – The Landings**

**Ryan LAVELLE**

**Viking ships such as the one at Gokstad in Norway - RYAN LAVELLE, Early Medieval History Professor, University of Winchester - were ideally suited for amphibian raiding as they could come right up to the coast, right up to the beach.
The keels of these ships, at the bottom of the hull, were very strongly built and could stand a great deal of punishment.**

Voiceover:

*On the island, the mere mention of the Vikings sent shivers down their spines…*

*Nobody had forgotten the Lindisfarne raid.*

*Nor the expedition of king Ragnar, Ivar’s father.*

*But that was nothing compared to what the Great Army would unleash upon them.*

*Ivar was about to display the full measure of his power. And his vengeance promised to be vicious!*

*Having tamed the seas, the Vikings were about to make the Earth tremble!*