

The Giant and the Leprechaun
By Danny Cove

Much has been said of the Viking incursions in the English lands of Wales and Northumbria, and there are even stories of giant men with long beards recklessly wielding heavy weapons on the shores of ancient France, but lesser known are the Norse treks into more distant lands. No one knows why the raiders failed to establish colonies in the New World before the arrival of Columbus, but there is one legend about why they failed on the shores of the Emerald Isle. The early Irish, it seems, may have had more in common with the foreign pillagers than one would first think. But to tell the story, we must travel to the edge of an unknown, Gaelic port town, to a tavern where the first Irishman and the first Viking to meet each other were sitting at a table of compromise and understanding.

To be quite honest, it was compromise and understanding in the form of competition. It was, to be brutally honest, a drinking contest. Between rounds of mead were shots of the harshest whiskey, and by the fourth round, there were nearly three gallons of liquid ingested between the two men. Drunk as they were, however, they decided that this was the time to begin their diplomatic palaver. "So do ye have a wife back home?" the Irishman said, his throat catching for a minute in a bout of indigestion.

"Actually, I have two," the Norseman replied, holding up three fingers. He took a moment, looking at them with a cross-eyed stare, and then shrugged and downed another shot of whiskey, nearly yelling as it made its way down.

"Two wives?" the Irishman asked, also holding up three fingers behind crossed eyes. "How...how do ye...have the time?"

"I am gone most of the time," the Norseman said. "Here and there, sailing the high lands and walking on the green seas. Wait...no, that's not right."

"And what did ye say yar name was?"

"I never said," the Norseman answered him. "It is Hralik. Hralik the...wait, I had it."

"Ye can't remember the second part of yar name?"

"It's a title, not a name," Hralik said. "And it's Hralik the...not mean, but, like...I fight a lot. Aggre-...aggress...digress...digestible! That's it, Hralik the Digestible. Wait, that might not be right..."

"The Digestible," the Irishman repeated. "Well, that makes sense with a belly like ye've got." He hiccupped and almost managed to belch up a bubble as another round of mead was brought over. Hralik aggressively began pouring them down his throat. "In any case, Hralik sounds like ye're trying to hack something up, like a, a...what do ye hack up? A...bilgewater!"

"Bilegewater?"

"I don't know, it's what I said. And it's what ye'd cough up if ye went to sea with me." He mimicked the sound of hacking something up and tried to make it sound like *Hralik*.

"Not a sailor, then?" Hralik asked. "Makes sense, being a leprechaun."

"I'm not a leprechaun," the Irishman said.

"You must be," Hralik said. "Let us look at the eviderence." His eyes closed momentarily, then stayed closed for a whole minute before he hiccupped and woke himself up. "You are very small. I could stomp you into a puddle with this one boot." He indicated his massive marauding boots, leather and covered in some animal furs.

"I'm not small, ye're just a giant," the Irishman responded angrily. "Me mates and I are all like grasshoppers compared to ye giants."

“Giants are evil creatures,” Hralik corrected him. “They will kill our gods someday, and I hope to see that Ragnarok, when all living beings battle for the fate of the world tree.”

“Right,” the Irishman said. He picked up the last remaining cup of mead and chugged it. Almost immediately, another bottle of whiskey was opened and set before the two men. “As ye were saying.”

“Third, wait, no, fourth,” Hralik started up again. “You have red hair, and I heard that leprechauns have that.”

“We all have red hair!” the Irishman responded. He looked around and then turned back to the Viking. “Well, a lot of us do. It be an Irish thing.”

“You also have gold.”

“It was an expression!” the Irishman exclaimed. “When I said I needed to go and make some gold in the bathroom, I didn’t mean actual gold!”

“So you meant...your stream?”

“Okay, what was your last point, Hralik?” The Irishman was growing aggravated now.

“I heard someone say that leprechauns are lucky. And your name is Lucky, so-”

“My name is Lucas!” the Irishman yelled.

“Lucas?” Hralik asked. “You do know that it has ‘kiss’ in the name, right?”

“Alright, alright, let’s settle this rationally,” Lucas said. “How do we keep ye and yar men from attacking our shores?”

“Ah, the leprechaun wants to make complicated negoti...negoli...negations with me. How shall we reach a common ground? Personally, my people love to fight.”

“So bring it, giant!” Lucas leapt to his feet and grabbed what was left of the bottle of whiskey. He downed it in one move, then swung it around menacingly like a weapon.

Hralik, not to be outdone, rose unsteadily to his feet, swayed for a moment, eyed his opponent, and then eyed nothing at all. His eyes were closed by the time he landed on top of Lucas the Irishman. The bottle in Lucas’ hand shattered on the floor as he was pinned beneath the weight of the heavy Norseman.

After all eleven of Lucas’ brothers and six of his sisters managed to pull the massive Viking off of him, they decided the best thing to do was to carry him back to his crew with the news that they’d reached a tentative peace treaty during a complex negotiation. At least, that’s what Lucas’ family told the raiders, as Lucas himself passed out before making it out the door of the bar. The Vikings took their fallen leader back out to sea, where the salty air eventually allowed him to recover from an enormous Viking stupor. In shame over losing the drinking contest, they never set foot in Ireland again.

And that is how the Irish escaped the invasions of the Vikings: not with a fight, but with a hangover.