

# The Last Longship.

Inspired by this image, painted by Richard Anderson for the book Red Tide by Marc Turner.



<https://twitter.com/flaptrapsart/status/1390743642529320966>

“Heroes!” They named us.

We knew ourselves as monsters.

“Fearless!” The crowd chanted.

Though of fear, we were full.

“Bring home victory!” The elders asked.

They knew, and we knew, they asked in vain.

The nails of the longship sat proud and unfinished. The hull, too, was built with haste. The tar that sealed the hull ran thin into our boots. Our armor sat heavy, unfitted. Our weapons chipped, folded. Our bellies empty and churning.

The horizon was aglow a deep crimson, a phoenix of blood and brimstone. Streaks of amber fell upon us like springtime pollen. Smoke, ash, death, brine, a bouquet only a privileged handful ever smell twice.

We swept aside the arrows that weighed down our shields. We shook off the water that soaked our furs. We stretched our tired limbs, and flexed our strained lungs.

We set fire to our longship.

The untreated pine warmed our backs. Thin wood and missing nails gave our ship their needed speed. Our vacant stomachs gave us nothing to retch. Their weapons would catch in our clumsy bolts of armor, and our weapon's dulled edges would take longer to kill.

We burnt the last modicum of home.

Of fear we were full, but fear is easily shared.

We wouldn't be heroes, but our enemies deserve a worse foe.

We were forced to fight in hell, so we became the devil.