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Opening extract from
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Terry Jones: Fantastic
Stories**

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Terry Jones

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 THE AMAZING 
TERRY JONES
PRESENTS

HIS UNBELIEVABLE ADVENTURES AND

**FANTASTIC
STORIES**

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**FANTASTIC
STORIES**

ILLUSTRATED BY

MICHAEL FOREMAN



**PAVILION
CHILDREN'S**

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THE SHIP OF FOOLS



A YOUNG BOY NAMED BEN once ran away to sea. But the ship he joined was a very odd one indeed.

The Captain always wore his trousers tied over his head with seaweed. The Bosun danced the hornpipe all day long from dawn to dusk wearing nothing but beetroot juice. And the First Mate kept six families of mice down the neck of his jumper!

‘This is a rum vessel, me hearty!’ said Ben to one of the sailors, who was at that moment about to put his head into the ship’s barrel of syrup.

‘It’s a Ship of Fools!’ grinned the sailor, and he stuck his head in the syrup.

‘I suppose you all must know what you’re doing,’ murmured young Ben, but the sailor couldn’t reply because he was all stuck up with syrup.

Just then the Captain yelled: ‘Raise the hanky! And sit on the snails!’ Although, because he still had his trousers over his head, what it actually sounded like was: ‘Gmpf der wmfky! Umf bmfwmf umf wmf!’

‘I’m sure he means: “Raise the anchor! And set the sails!”’ said young Ben to himself. But whatever it was the Captain had said, nobody seemed to be taking the slightest bit of notice.



‘They must be doing more important things,’ said Ben to himself. ‘So I suppose *I’d* better obey Captain’s orders.’

So Ben raised the anchor by himself, and hoisted the sails as best he could, and the ship sailed off into the blue.

‘Where are we heading, shipmate?’ Ben asked a sailor who was hanging over the side, trying to paint the ship with a turnip and a pot of lemonade.

‘Goodness knows!’ exclaimed the sailor. ‘It’s a Ship of Fools!’

‘The Captain will know,’ said Ben, and he climbed up to the bridge, where the Captain was standing upside-down at the wheel, trying to steer with his feet.

‘I’m almost sure you shouldn’t steer a ship like that,’ said Ben to himself, ‘but then what do I know? I’m just a raw land-lubber getting his first taste of the briney.’ But even so, Ben realized that the Captain couldn’t see where they were going, because his trousers were still over his eyes. As it happened, the ship was, at that moment, heading straight for a lighthouse! So Ben grabbed the wheel, and said: ‘What’s the course, skipper?’

‘Bmf Bmf Wmf!’ replied the Captain.

‘Nor’ Nor’ West it is, sir!’ said Ben, and he steered the ship safely round the lighthouse and off for the open sea.

Well, they hadn’t sailed very far before a storm blew up.

‘Shall I take in the yard-arm and reef the sails, Captain?’ yelled Ben. But the Captain was far too busy trying to keep his game of marbles still, as the ship rolled from side to side.

The wind began to howl, and the sea grew angry.

‘I better had, anyway,’ said Ben to himself, and he ran about the ship, preparing for the storm ahead.

As he did so, the rest of the crew grinned and waved at him, but they all carried on doing whatever it was they were doing. One of them was hanging by his hair from the mainmast, trying to play the violin with a spoon. Another was varnishing his nose with the ship’s varnish. While another was trying to stretch his ears by tying them to the capstan and jumping overboard.

‘Well... I wouldn’t have thought this was the way to run a ship!’ said young Ben. ‘I suppose they know the ropes and I’m just learning. Even so... I didn’t realize the newest

recruit had to do everything. But I suppose I'd better get on with it.' And he set about doing what he thought should be done, while the rest of the crew just grinned and waved at him.

The storm gathered force, and soon great waves were lashing across the deck, as the ship rolled and wallowed. Ben rushed about trying to get everyone below decks, so he could batten down the hatches. But as soon as he got one sailor to go below, another would pop up from somewhere else.

And all the time, the ship rolled, and before long it began to take on water.

'Cap'n! We must get the men below decks and batten down the hatches, while we ride out the storm!' yelled Ben.

But the Captain had decided to take his supper on the fo'c'sle, and was far too busy – trying to keep the waves off his lamb chop with an egg whisk – to listen to Ben.

And still the ship took on more water.

'She's beginning to list!' shouted Ben. 'The hold's filling with water!'

'It's OK!' said the Bosun, who had stopped doing the hornpipe, but was still only wearing beetroot juice. 'Look!' and he held up a large piece of wood.

'What's that?' gasped Ben.

'It's the ship's bung!' said the Bosun proudly. 'Now any water will run out through the bunghole in the bottom of the ship!'

'You're a fool!' yelled Ben.

'I know!' grinned the Bosun. 'It's a Ship of Fools!'

'Now we'll sink for sure!' cried Ben.

And, sure enough, the ship began to sink.

'Man the lifeboats!' yelled Ben. But the fools had all climbed up the mast and were now clinging to it, playing conkers and 'I Spy With My Little Eye'.

So Ben had to launch the lifeboat on his own. And he only managed to do it just as the ship finally went down. Then he had to paddle around in the terrible seas, fishing the crew of fools out of the heaving waters.

'I spy with my little eye something beginning with . . . S!' shouted the First Mate, as Ben hauled him into the lifeboat.

'Sea,' said Ben wearily, and rowed over to the next fool.

By the time night fell, Ben had managed to get the Captain and the Bosun and the First Mate and all the rest of the crew of fools into the little lifeboat. But they wouldn't keep still, and they kept shouting and laughing and falling overboard again, and Ben had his work cut out trying to keep them all together.

By dawn the storm had died down, and Ben was exhausted, but he'd managed to save everyone. One of the fools, however, had thrown all the oars overboard while Ben hadn't been watching, so they couldn't row anywhere. And now the First Mate was so hungry he'd started to eat the lifeboat!

'You can't eat wood!' yelled Ben.

'You can – if you're fool enough!' grinned the First Mate.

'But if you eat the lifeboat, we'll all drown!' gasped Ben.

'It's a pity we don't have a little pepper and salt,' remarked the Captain, who had also started to nibble the boat.

'It's salty enough as it is!' said the Bosun, who was tucking into the rudder.

'Urgh!' said the Chief Petty Officer. 'It's uncooked! You shouldn't eat uncooked lifeboat!'

But they did.

By midday, they'd managed to eat most of the lifeboat, and Ben had just given them all up for lost, when, to his relief, he saw land on the horizon.

'Land ahead!' shouted Ben, and he tried to get the fools to paddle with their hands towards it, but they were feeling a bit sick from all the wood they'd just eaten. So Ben broke off the last plank and used that to paddle them towards the shore.

At last they landed, and the fools all jumped ashore and started filling their trousers with sand and banging their heads on the rocks, while young Ben looked for food.

He hadn't looked very far, when a man with a spear suddenly barred his way.

Ben tried to signal that he meant no harm, that he had been shipwrecked, and that he and his crew-mates were in sore distress. Once the man understood all this, he became very friendly, and offered Ben food and drink. But as soon as the two of them returned to Ben's shipmates, the crew of fools all leapt up making terrible faces and tried to chase the stranger off.

FANTASTIC STORIES

‘Stop it!’ cried Ben. ‘He’s trying to help us!’ But the crew of fools had already jumped on the poor fellow, and started beating and punching him, until eventually he fled back to his village to fetch a war party. ‘Now we can’t even stay here!’ screamed Ben. ‘You’re all fools!’

‘Of course we are!’ cried the Captain. ‘We keep telling you – it’s a Ship of Fools!’

Now I don’t know how what happened next came about, or what would have happened to Ben if it hadn’t, but it did. And this is what it was.

Young Ben was just wondering what on earth he was going to do, when a sail appeared on the horizon!

But before Ben could shout out: ‘There’s a ship!’, he turned and saw the war party approaching with spears and bows and arrows, while the crew of fools were busy trying to bury the Bosun head-first in the sand.

Ben finally shook his head and said: ‘Well you’ve all certainly taught me one thing: and that’s not to waste my time with those I can see are fools – no matter who they are – Captain, Bosun or First Mate!’

And with that, Ben dived into the sea and swam off to join the other boat. And he left the Ship of Fools to their own fate.

