



8 Men and a Duck: An Improbable Voyage by Reed Boat to Easter Island

Nick Thorpe

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8 Men and a Duck charts the hilarious and unnerving Pacific voyage as it rolls between waves of high drama and high farce: from the five-day launch off a Chilean beach, to the bungled phone call that triggered a naval rescue alert, to the sad fate of Pedro the duck, to the constant race against the inexorable sinking of the soggy hull.

On a fateful South American bus trip, journalist Nick Thorpe overheard some fellow passengers discussing an improbable plan to sail 2,500 miles from northern Chile to Easter Island on the *Viracocha*—a boat made of reeds. The crew's aim in reviving this pre-Incan boat-building technology was twofold: to reopen the controversial migration theories of Thor Heyerdahl, who sailed his boat the *Kon-Tiki* from Peru to Polynesia in 1947, and to have one heck of an adventure in the process. Thorpe talked his way on board Captain Phil Buck's *Viracocha* only to find himself plagued by uncertainty. Why did the crew include a tree surgeon, a jewelry salesman, and two ducks? What happened to the navigator? Did anybody actually know how to sail? And, most important, where was the life raft?

Despite the best efforts of storms and sharks and fast-moving freighters, an alarming lack of sailing qualifications, and a rival explorer dogging the adventure at every turn, the crew members of the *Viracocha* lived to tell their extraordinary tale right through to its wickedly unexpected conclusion. Nick Thorpe's account is by turns funny, touching, and thrilling—a story of friendship, fate, and the unlikely distances people will go for real adventure.

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