

## Young Shetland Writer 2010

### Dialect Winner - Peter Ratter

#### *Da Perishin Nort*

Skipper John 'Broon-beard', son o da gret Lowrie 'White-whisker', scratched his moorit beard, starin' oot at da vast, blue ocean dat stood afore him. Peerie chunks o' ice littered da horizon, as if an artist haed taen a tin o blue paint an barbarically splattered hit aa ower dir clean, white canvas.

Da temperature wis freezin; frost clung tae John's beard an fatigue wis settin intae his crew. His faeder had been aa ower da wirld, travellin on da metal monstrosity kent as da 'Meerie Meggie'.

Ivery single man in John's ten-man crew hated 'Meerie Meggie', an hated dir half-mad Skipper wi a passion. But John didna care, he loved da sense o thrill, adventure, an maest of aa, da adoration he received fae da weemin-folk back hame. He grinned as da waarm, fuzzy feelin o pride an satisfaction wirmed hits wye intae his mind, gnawing at his raa conscience lik a chunk o fresh meat.

Leanin ower da port side, he planned whar tae geen nixt. He gazed intae da unlamentin blue sea. Starin back at him wis a tall, broad man garbed in bull's-eye rubber boots, bib an brace overalls and an ex-army gretcoat dat he had bowt efter da end o da Second Wirld War. He had a birsey beard, straekid wi blotches o white hair. His face wis lang, nearly horse-shaeped. His nose wis lang an thin, earnin him da nickname 'Tirrick' when he wis at school. He had twa eyebrowos dat a craa coulda biggit his nest in, an sittin under dem were twa een dat coulda brunt hols in clood. Stukkin upa da tap o his haed wis an auld, grey flat kep. Clumps o curly hair wir eruptin furt fae under hits brim lik watter sprootin oot o a burst pipe. Tae be blunt, John looked lik a gret glaikit brute. But dat didna maeter tae him. His nim wid echo across aa da years tae come.

"Broon-beard ..." he said tae himsel in his usual, deep voice. But den it strak him lik a smack tae da head. Whaar wid he geen? Somewye dangerous, obviously, but whaar? He gazed intae da frigid, frosty sea, ponderin da situation. He searched his deep, dark mind fir somethin.

Dan he minded something peerie. Lik a smaa pebble at da boddom o a pool o water, it wis still far awaa. He began tae concentrate, tae try reach it. His mind swam deeper and deeper trow da murky pool dat wis his mind, till he cam upa dat peerie pebble. Hit stood afore him, starin him in da face. He grabbed it, an rejoiced. John cam oot o his trance, finally mindin. Hit wis a story his faeder had telt him whin he wis joost a peerie mite. A Viking Thane be da nim o Skarvald went tae da Arctic in search o an ancient ring, said tae be very powerful. Skarvald never returned, nor did his crew, and their story past intae legend.

John removed a bottle fae his jacket an took a glaep o water. Satisfaction an excitement owerwhelmed his mind. He smacked da port side wi a ham-sized nev, causin flakes o roost tae faa lik snaa.

"Boys!" roared John, commadin da attention of his crew. "We set sail fir da Nort Pole!"

Da skipper wis answered wi cheers fae da crew; dey seemed tae be foo o new life; hit wis like comparin' new-born lambs tae three year auld ewes. Athin meenits, da twin lumms o da 'Meerie Meggie' spewed oot smok lik whaanious, roosty mallies, an aff dey set sail fir da Arctic.

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John waukened in a loch o sweat, pantin. Da ship wis listin badly, and da 'Meerie Meggie' was creakin an bucklin in da turbulent seas, sendin sherp pricks o fear up his rig.

His fear-induced awaukenin hadna come at a better time, or so he tow. Last night, (an every night afore) he'd dreamt about a ring; hit wis a dark blue colour wi golden trims. Hit wis sarounded be bluish wisps o frosty energy, dat seeped an wisped aff o hit lik da black reek fae a paet fire, except da energy was as caald as da harsh nort itsel.

In his draem, da ring stood afore John, beggin him tae pick it up an plaece it on his finger. But whenever he wid rekk oot fir hit, da muckle figure o a man wid appear, an da ring wid vanish. Da last thing he wid hear wid be da roarin gleers o an uncan boady.

Da closser dey sailed tae da Arctic, da warse da draems becam. A voice in his head telt John dis wis da ring, an dat wi hit he could become pooerful. Den, da voice o raeson telt him somethin about dis wisna right, an dat he should turn back noo.

Da ship listed sherpely again, bringin John oot o his dwaam. He got dressed quickly, an ran oot on deck. Hit wis a muckle storm; snaa, ice and saat water sweeped ower da deck lik an Arctic hurricane.

"Skipper!" yelled a deckhand. "We're takkin on water, and da engines have saised up!"

John froze. Dat peerie voice o raeson dat had been nigglin at his mind wis right. Dey should ha turned back. But hit wis too late noo.

"Boys!" he roared. "Man da rafts!"

A half-hearted "Aye" echoed fae da crew, an athin meenits, da lifeboats wir ready an John wis bein lowered intae da watter.

As his raft swung aside da 'Meerie Meggie's' red, roosty hull, John filled wi sorrow as his ship sank afore him. His grief wis cut short bi da screams o some o his crew. Da lifeboat had swung too closs tae da 'Meerie Meggie', and had smashed. Athin seconds John wis in da waater, barely clingin ontae a plank o wid tae keep aflott. Da screams o his crew pierced his lugs. Da freezin abyss below him numbed his legs. His sorrow damned him. He fell asoond.

When John waukened up, he wis lyin face doon on da icy shores o da Arctic. A moorie wis ragin owerhead, an his claise wis drenched in sea-watter an melted snaa. It wis a miracle he wis still alive. He arose tae his feet lik an animal o little wirt, an started tae oag around. He didna keen whar exactly he was headin, but some peerie voice inside him directed him forward. He limped onwards, forgin trow da blizzard lik a hardy Shetland ram. Efter aboot ten meenits, John fell tae his knees, cripple an crooked lik an auld craa. He raised his nev intae da air, and smacked da snaa-covered grund underneath him. Da skipper wis joost aboot tae give it annidder good smack, whin he noticed da grund whar he

had hit begin tae crack, and sprootin oot o da craack wis a dark bluish energy; peerie crystalline snaaflakes were sooked intae da energy fae da grund, adding tae da frosty clood dat wis forming afore John.

As if be instinct, da skipper began tae cloor an tak on wiida ice until hit cracked an eventually caved in. He gaffed wi manic glee as he saa whit da ice contained: dat ring fae his dreams.

"Dis is hit!" shouted John. "Dat ring dad spak about!"

Joost as he recked oot tae pick up da ring, he noticed it wis on da haand o somebody, or somethin. John grunted and tried tae grab da lavish ring, tempted joost tae rip it aff da rotten haand's finger. Bit as soon as he touched da ring, it glowed an eerie blue, and da hand twitched. In an explosion o snaa, icicle shards an bluish energy, a corpse arose fae da icy craetir, garbed in naethin but a ragged cloth. Hits skin wis a greyish colour, and some o da flesh had faan aff o pairts. Hits head wis baald, except fir a ragged broon beard, rough as a bird's next, dat hung underneath a revoltin chin. Hits eyes glowed blue, and it grinned wi a mooth foo o black, maggot-infested teeth. On its left haand wis da fabled ring John sought efter. Da unlivin corpse lifted its airm, an its hand began tae glow blue.

"Skarv-" John wis cut aff. Afore he could feenish, da corpse struck him doon wi a bolt o dark energy. As life drifted awa fae him, dat sam voice o raeson echoed trow John's haed: "Du shall fin only death in da far nort ..."