

Creative Writing Competition 2016

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Title: **Reputation is all**



Cutting through the dull bottomless pit of freezing surf and spray the sleek yew bow of 'Dragon Flyer' gathered speed as it travelled downwind towards the ever approaching lacklustre rocky outcrop that marked the entrance to the river Seven. Proudly standing at the front of his father's favourite ship Ralla the younger placed a firm muscular hand on the dragon carving that crowned the ship; the best ship in all of Daneland. Despite the joyous feeling of the wind in his golden hair and a good ship on a great wind under his feet, Ralla was troubled.

Despite his appearance as a Danish war lord who would scare the devil out of its skin Ralla was no warrior. His exquisite chain mail coat, lethal war axe and lord's helmet inset with silver were all gifts from the man he feared and envied the most - his father.

Ralla the Vast was a Danish lord of war unmatched by any other. However his fathering ability stretched little beyond generous gifts from his endless raiding of the jagged Northumbrian coast. Ralla the younger was the polar opposite. He had little battle experience and the reputation of a teaspoon and this was why he had set out on this perilous voyage.

Reputation is all.

That was known throughout the world by warriors of new and old. And Ralla's unrivalled ambition for a reputation to better even that of his father had lead Ralla to one of the most dangerous parts of England.

Having borrowed his father's best ship and crew of forty hardened warriors with little or no direct permission Ralla had lead them round the bottom of the English coast.

His final chance to withdraw his attack was approaching. With every passing second the ship neared the lion's mouth. His brain was ablaze, processing ideas quicker than the spin of a black hole. He could turn and flee to the safety of home. But could he live with the eternal suffering that would stem from that decision. Possibly even disowned by his father. Coward. Disowned. Lack of reputation forever. He couldn't back out now. On the other hand the reason he had considered abounding his plan glared at him like a disease. His plan. A plan that would question the bravery of the gods. He would sail up the river seven until he reached a large town, knock sevens bells out of its hopefully small garrison and ransack the place. He would then take all the treasures of this Christian place and its churches and escape before any sizeable force could mass to destroy them. It relied on total surprise and there was every chance the town would be waiting for such an attack. His father's warrior and Ralla would be destroyed during their suicidal attack. If he was lucky he would die in the fighting. If not, it was unbearable to think about. Choosing was impossible.

But he made up his mind; he told the shipmaster to steer the ship...