

Stormy seas and the ship of mystery.....

A tale of intrigue from McWho, the wayward Highlander

S w i s h.....swash.... (The first word spoken slow and in a methodical type deep voice followed by a pause and the last word spoken quickly but in a jolly, dandy, hell of a day sort of tone)

All I could think of was that it must have been a doodle of a night before to give me such a hell of a morning after.

S w i s h.....swash.... (Same as above applies)

Try as I might, nothing came to mind, although the mallet persistently hitting my head did not help matters.

S w i s h.....swash.... (and again.....)

After the morning tide had woken me that day, it took a full two years before I remembered most of what occurred during that night. Unfortunately by that time I had already remembered the most important and dramatic event that had befallen me that night, an event that caused me most regret during the rest of my life.

It all started, as most things did back then when I was a wee dram, with my mate Stew, a great guy in and out of mischief like ticks on deer who on this day shattered a perfectly good sleep with another of his “better then the wheel” idea’s.

Ye, it was perhaps near noon that he woke me..so what... when young’uns should be up and slaving to chores, but lord above I’d been up all night being schooled under the moon. I mean when’s better to nick cattle eh! But I would prefer to wake up to the licking of a cows tongue any day then to Stew’s ugly fur lined mouth spurting out ungodly smells.

Not only that but Cowes don’t act as excited as he was and me still in my trying to wake up out of a thick fog mood. Jumping around and yapping like a buck hare during the bucking season (which as I believe is all year round....just like Stew’s). Couldn’t understand a word he was saying to me as I dragged my cloths on before he dragged me down to the Blood and Guts – a pub whose reputation and vomit soaked sawdust floors was less pretty then its name, whose walls, tables and..on occasion..the floor, brimmed over with sharp dangerous implement, like an armoury or something. Worse still was the smell of a 50 year old stew, which was really 50 year old to all accounts, started by the present bar keeps dad.

Most wished (until the third illicit whiskey dram when their nostrils gave up from overload) he’d just do it a favor and ditch it, but....

1, no one had the gut – lord knows what surprises awaited the unfortunate from its inners.

2, it concealed the smell of vomit!?



Just another mid Tuesday afternoon in the blood and guts.

3, apparently the bar keep thought it added historical value to the place, which we all knew was complete bollocks. Everyone knew it was only the stew and its dense pungent smell that was keeping the roof from falling in.

Apart from that, the place had great cheap booze and the nightly fights were great entertainment in these pre-TV days.

Any way back to the tall tale, Stew had met a “guy” (Oh no) in the pub who weaved a wondrous yarn to my friend of something that sparked, or should I say reeked full of that ultimate daily dream of his.....adventure.

About an hour later, while holding up the bar I could see his point and feel that although the story seemed feasible, given the recent raging coastal storm we'd had, producing skyscraper waves. That a strange ship, or yacht as they called it, had been spotted shipwrecked within the dark loch under and within the ring of Sky Mountains.

I had to wonder what exactly he wanted to do about it, but I had my suspicions and started to mentally dread the 5 day hike from the relative warmth of this bar in the height of winter to Skye and the sky mountains. A colossal tyrant of black rocks of jagged slopes and hearse winds that howled around the loch they hid.

Did I mention a 5 day WALK, ye well won't dwell on that , peat fire, dung heaps and the common peat bog aren't things to write home about, as romantic as I hear some people refer to travelling in the highlands , that 5 cold day trip reeked of something much different.

We finally approached the ring of cloud Mountains from the south, an almost insurmountable ring of rock and ice, especially in winter and especially when seen from below them, which hides and undoubtedly holds the most dreaded loch and its mist in place.

“Once the mist surround you, it never ever lets go” as the old ghostly story goes.

The easiest approach and the quickest to the treasure was to follow the rocky coast, but as is usual a storm had brewed up and was churning up the sea ploughing waves as tall as pines onto the rocks, whose frailing white decimated remains threw spray like giant tentacles up the slopes and into the sea.

Our only hope was to walk further inland and traverse the low pass into the ring, although low is in no way indicative of its height as some said even the pass was higher then Nevis – ye right...

From the pass we followed the ridge up and over wet heather, and deep peat bogs – ye the usual – into the snow fields, which even during the hottest summer, did not seem to shrink. Around us the jagged peaks appeared here and there out of the thick white clouds that the wind throw around them like rocks, plus below the almost calm fog above the loch awaited our presence.

Most of the way here, Stew had been as happy as a lark in summer, prancing and dancing as if life was a breeze. Of course, I regret now, not turning back now upon seeing the Loch but hindsight is a great thing, and down we went into the bawls of the rings.

Strange thing was that as we reached the fog, the wind dropped to nil. Then as we entered it, it seemed to flow around us rather than part like normal and within it, it felt eerie and quiet, like a



Overlooking the Ring of the Cloud Mountains

graveyard does at night. The old ghost story states that the mist is actually made up of the lost souls that the sea's capture but I tried not to think of that.

No instead we headed head long towards where the ship was said to founder towards the end of the loch as the growing thought of treasure filled both our minds.

Sure enough, as we grew closer we sighted her. A strange looking ship, resembling more of a coffin than any vessel we'd seen with slightly curved sides and stunted ends and tattered sails fashioning weird designs. She was fast on the rocks with a huge hole towards her rear where all manner of objects lay, including some rather shiny things.

"Treasure" I heard Stew shout, "It's really treasure" nice to know I wasn't the only one who had my doubts! As he ran hell for leather or treasure in this case, dipping and dancing like a mad man who'd just found "treasure".

I dare say, I went a bit do lally at seeing all this gold in plain sight and not trapped behind bars. Within the ship, the hull was filled to bursting with much more treasure in spilt piles and opened chest, a pure treasure trove just as the words say. It all shone even in this dull light like the sun, on a sunny day sometimes shines on a calm loch producing what looks like a sea of diamonds, but this time is was for real.

Just couldn't believe what I was seeing. Upon looking around I saw what I thought was coiled rope and picked it up to help drag a chest out or something but on closer inspection it was of leather and narrowed gradually down its short length – didn't really matter at the time, it was just a means to an end.

We had the usual mental episodes of joy etc upon finding the ship etc, what we're gonna do, how we're gonna spend it, the usual but just as I started seeing a life of ease spread before us, the calm was broken as I felt the ship move, not of its own accord, now that would really have been spooky. Outside the sea had started to roughen up, which of course we had failed to hear and was now tossing the ship around. I tried to grab Stew who was still busy stuffing his pockets but he would not listen. Not that is, until we heard a loud scrapping from the wood of the ship being dragged along rocks.

"The ship was going into the sea" I remember shouting at which point Stew pushed me towards the hole and shouted.

"GO"

So I did turn and ran not thinking at even this moment that anything bad would happen, I mean you don't as kids do you, especially as kids who are rich but after landing out of the ship, I was laughing out loud at the thrill of the whole thing. Until I noticed, stew was not beside me, but still in the ship by the hole, surrounded by the stormy waters of the loch. Plus of all things he had a smile and was waving at me.

I waved back of all stupid things, waved knowing that he cannot swim and I froze as the sea enveloped him. Finally, I acted, probably doing the most stupid thing, I could but I dived into the water. I could swim, quite well back them, but in stormy water?

Next I knew was waking up on the shore and then awhile later remembering about Stew. Silly twat, always had to do the adventures, had to do the risky stuff. All I can think or hope of now is

that he is down on the loch floor still doing a jig around his treasure. Mostly I still occasionally wonder if one day he will wake me with another mad idea.

They say you only have a few good friends in your lifetime, and Stew was the best.