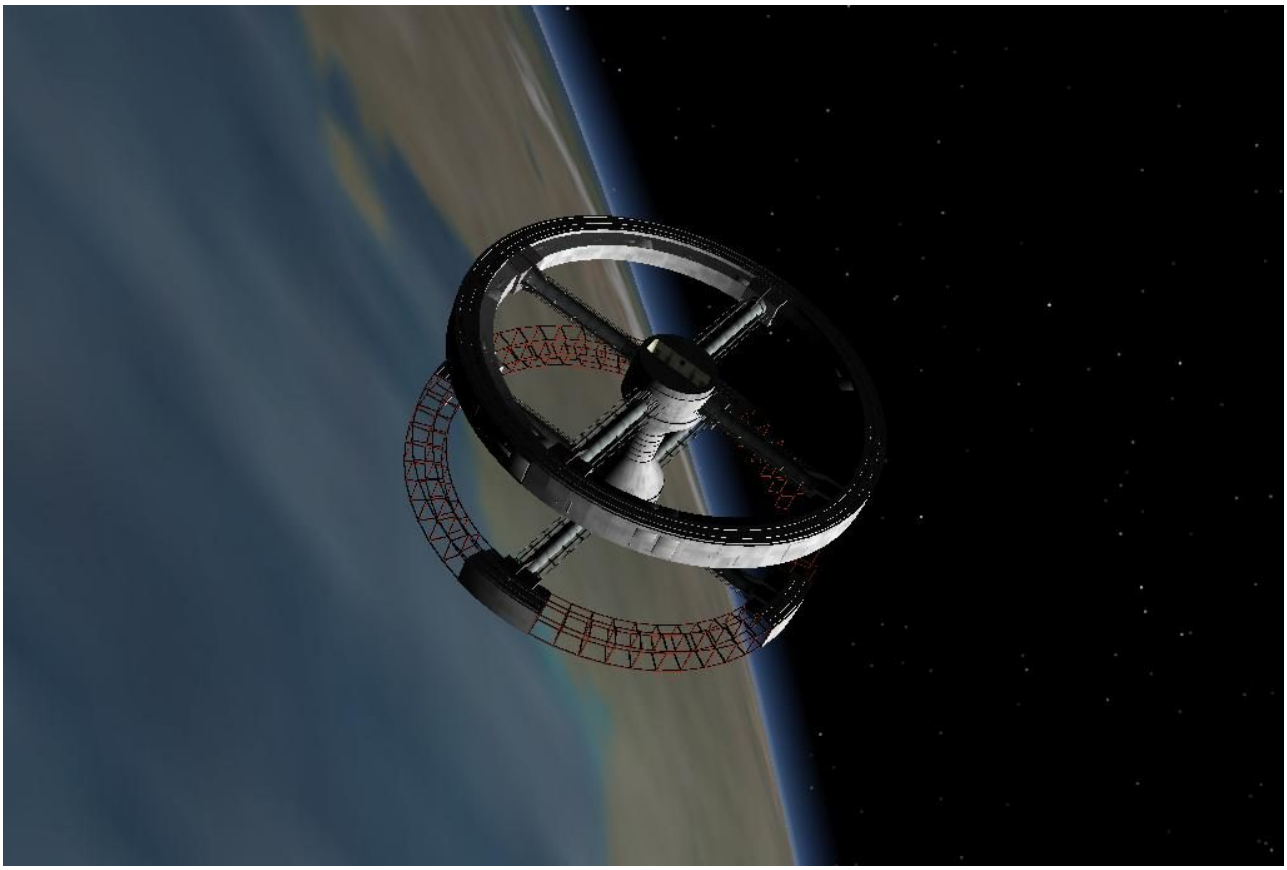
The New Orkney Language Literature — an excerpt from ‘Deep Wheel Orcadia: a Future Fantasy’

By Harry Josephine Giles



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Deep Wheel Orcadia is a space station orbiting a gas giant, a few hundred years in the future and a few light years from Earth. Astrid was born there, and has returned after studying at art school on Mars. Darling, from a wealthy Mars family, is on the run and visiting Orcadia for the first time. They’re an item. Here we meet them halfway through the book …

Darling an Astrid tak a waak thro the wynds o Meginwick

Roon this cunyo, the skeul; roon this,
the bruck byres, whar Astrid's blide

tae spy young fock is gloweran yet;
furder, the bell thay'd gang tae in pairs;

here, the Haa whar the wynds meet,
whar the Ting sets fees an lots quaaters,

whar benks is shuitten back fer the dansan.
Darling trys tae listen, but

hid's that peedie, an jeust past the waas
is the tide, the starns, an aaldwarld things.

Thair hands sweeng closs, touch, twine,
pull back, touch more. An than – "Astrid?"

Thay birl, touchan yet, but Astrid
staps awey an the uncan body

says "Hid's nivver thoo?" The body
is Gunnie, at twal year syn wis Astrid's

inseparable freend, at ten year syn
gat nyargie, at sheu's no spocken tae

ava fae sheu teuk the ship tae Mars.
"An wha's this?" speirs Gunnie.

Astrid's forgotten hoo tae deu this
an swanders trow speiran at Gunnie's faimly,

gien neows o her awn, myndan on only
tae share the things sheu deusno mind

aabody on the staetions hearan
in aboot twa oors, mebbe less.

Sheu haads hersel appen, keeps
her innerlie nirts gairded, an whan

thir both girned an promiesed, sheu cheerios,
an firm taks Darling’s bumbazed haand.

* * *

Darling and Astrid take a walk through the corridors of Meginwick

Round this cornernook, the school; round this, the rubbishscrap stores, where Astrid is pleasedkindhappy

to seespot young people are glowering still; further, the bell they’d go to in pairs;

here, Hall where the corridors meet, where the Collective Council sets wagesprices drawallocates quarters,

where benchesshelves are shoved back for the dances. Darling tries to listen, but

it’s so small, and just through these walls is the atmosphere of the gas giant, the stars, and all the oldworldancient things.

Their hands swing close, touch, twine, pull back, touch more. And then – Astrid?

They spinturn, still touching, but Astrid steps away and the stranger

says That’s never you? The strangerpersonbody is Gunnie, who twelve years ago

was Astrid’s inseparable friend, who ten years ago got tiresomegrumblingboring, whom she hasn’t spoken to

at all since she took the ship to Mars. And who’s this then? saysasks Gunnie.

Astrid has forgotten how to do this, and stumbles through asking after Gunnie’s family,

giving news of her own, rememberknowreflectwilling only to share what she doesn’t mind

everyone on the stations hearing within two hours, maybe less.

She holds herself open, keeps her inmostshelteredintimateaffectionate fragmentsmorsels stillreservedsecret and guarded, and once

they have both grinnedgrimaced and promised, says cheerio, and firmly takes Darling’s bewilderedstupified hand.

Thay spaek aboot Mars

“So wha’s thee fock?” speirs Astrid, but
Darling’s reply is “Boring! You don’t
want to know.” “Thoo kens mine!” says Astrid,
but things wi them is ower caller
fer her tae be a needle or
a hammer. “Whar’d ye bide, than?”

Darling describes the muckle domms
an tooers o Chryse, weel enof
tae be convinceen, closs enof
tae true. Astrid kieks an eebroo,
fer Chryse wis ower gowd an Angle
fer her mixter-maxter crood.

“A’m only seen hid fae ap on Ascraeus.
Hid’s a peedie bit peedier fae thare.”
Darling snushes. “Too peedie for me.
This is more my size.” Sheu spraeds
her airms, raxan oot the tap
o the mintie taing o the mintie staetion,

tae haad twa meuns an a normous o starns.
“A miss it,” says Astrid, an Darling’s ferly
palled. “Hid’s true. No jeust me freends,
but bidan somepiece A coud be…”
“Be what?” “Be onybody. Or no
mesel. Or jeust no hiv tae be:

whan thir that mony fock,
that much tae deu, thoo deusno hiv
tae be.” Darling haads her haand.
“But you still liked to walk up

the biggest mountains in the system?”
“Yass. Else hid wis gey haird tae see.”

* * *

They speak about Mars

“So, tell me about your family,” asks Astrid, but Darling’s reply is “Boring! You don’t want to know. “You know about mine!” says Astrid, but things between them are too freshcleanhealthy for her to be a needle or a hammer. “Where did you livestayremain, then?”

Darling describes the greatbig domes and towers of Chryse, well enough to be convincing, close enough to true. Astrid kicks an eyebrow, because Chryse was far too wealthygolden and Angle for her heterogeneous jumble of a friendship group.

“I’ve only seen it from up on Ascraeus. It’s a fair bit smaller from there.” Darling snorts. “Too smallyoungminor for me. This is more my size.” She spreads her arms, stretchreachexpanding out of the top of the tiny promontory of the tiny station,

to hold two moons and a huge number of stars. “I miss it,” says Astrid, and Darling’s verystrangely at a loss. “It’s true. Not just my friends, but livestayremaining somewhere I could be…” “Be what?” “Be anybody. Or not myself. Or just not have to be:

when there are so many people, so much to do, you don’t have to be.” Darling holds her hand. “But you still liked to walk up the biggest mountains in the system?” “Yes. Otherwise it was very hard to see.”

Astrid taks Darling haem fer dinner

“This is me neow freend” – an the layers in “freend”
isno sheur an willno be explained.

Darling is winsome noo; sheu’s someen ither
or the skarr thing o a toorist Astrid met.

Mebbe the thowt o parents luntit performance.
Wi Darling's silence aboot her awn parents,

Astrid's ower thankful fer Inga an Øyvind's
maet an kindness – until fair intae the mael

she spys thair vooels roondan, thair consonants clippan,
thair wirds sweetchan tae marrae Darling's awn,

an becomes unspaekable barman. Whan her awn
"een" slips tae "one" sheu comes quiet, waantan

thaim tae notiece, fer her mither tae say
"Buddo" an wi hid tak her back tae the taeble,

but the black haert o her silence haes aafil gravity,
an so the conversaetion fags, faas,

hears hidsel, is less an less true,
til hid's jeust Darling at's yet smilan an spaekan.

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Astrid taks Darling haem fer dinner

"This is my new friend" – and the layers in "friend" aren't sure and won't be explained.

Darling is charmingattractivecomely now: she's someone other than the frightenednervous tourist Astrid met.

Maybe the thought of parents firedinspired performance. With Darling's silence about her own parents,

Astrid's very grateful for Inga and Øyvind's meatfood and kindness – until well into the meal

she notices their vowels rounding, their consonants clipping, their words switching to matchequalmate Darling's own,

and becomes unspeakably seething with rage. As her own "een" slips to "one" she

goes silent, yearning

for someone to notice, for her mother to say “FriendChildLove” and with it bring her back to the table,

but the black heart of her silence has greathorrible gravity, and so the conversation failsflags, falls,

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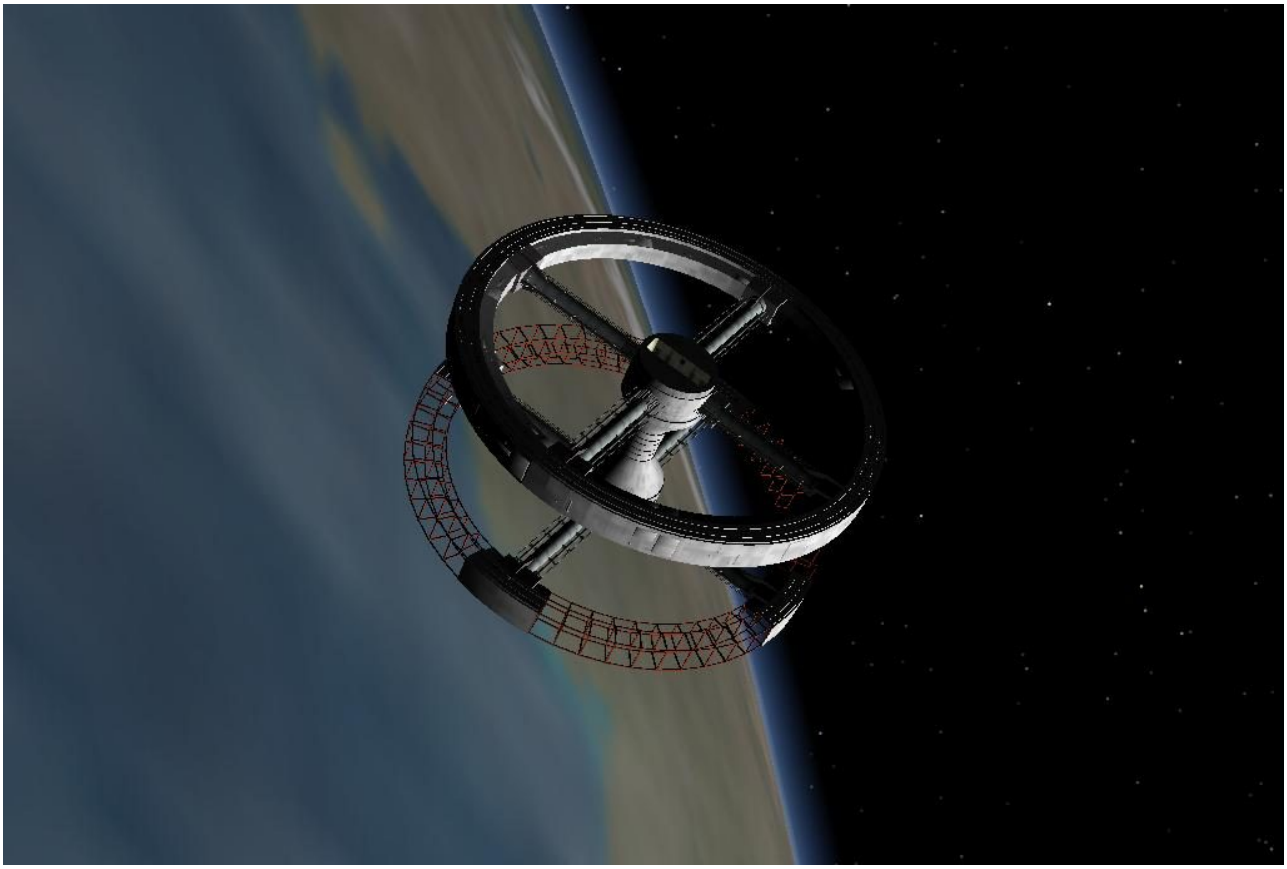

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