

## Story Line: La Berg Ancien

### Chapter One

He was rather talkative for a sea captain. Even when they were getting ready to transport him over to the ER at Charleston Memorial in Fall River, he insisted on having his ship's clock go along. He'd gone into some sort of deep vertigo, swimming around like a top, but he continued giving out instructions about the handling of that instrument, while Nurse Charlotte and Nurse Mae were getting him off the gurney onto the examining cot.

"Don't worry," Nurse Charlotte told him. "It'll stay right here, and we'll all know where *you* are!"

Even the captain laughed. You could laugh even though the world had begun spinning around like you were tumbling off in space and had no right to be. He "took" to the nurses instantly, because they seemed not only expert in their service to his emergency, but sympathetic in their delivery. He knew instinctively that they were being kind to him, and knew it was sincere. Charlotte even drew him out a bit with questions about where he lived and what he did.

He'd simply collapsed. He told her that he'd been annotating his captain's log when it hit him, "... same as the berg," he told her, maybe mumbling just a bit. She smiled sympathetically back at him. They were well into preparing the tests now, and she was placing the cold, slimey electrodes on his chest. She told him to relax. "There," she said, "it tickles but we're gonna get you through this. You just relax."

"When I close my eyes, I spin," he told her.

"That's all right, dear. Keep them open if you want."

"Thanks he said. "I hope I'm not causing you any trouble."

"You're no trouble at all," she told him, smiling warmly. She nodded to Nurse Mae, who was reading tape off the machine. "Is he?"

"No," said Nurse Mae. "He's a good looking sweetheart."

He felt embarrassed, and it took his mind off the spinning.

"What kind of berg were you talking about," Nurse Charlotte asked him.

"The big one," he said, "in the Ross Sea."

Nurse Mae looked down at him with a nice expression. She said, "the Antarctic?" She was standing above his head and he looked up at her upside down.

"Yes," he told her, the very same."

"Her great uncle was named Shackleton," Nurse Charlotte chipped in.

"No," he said.

"Oh, yes. He was quite famous for going down there, too, wasn't he, Mae?"

Nurse Mae nodded and he looked at her. She was the younger of the two, and quite good looking. The older one was what the French called "sympatique". He was almost having a good time, if anything going on there could be called a good time.

"He was more than famous," the sea captain said. "He had something special."

Nurse Mae beamed down at him, and now he felt the vertigo easing away.

"What were you doing down there?" Nurse Charlotte asked him. She was drawing a hell of a lot of his blood, he thought. He wondered what the hell were they going to do with it.

"I commanded an ice breaker," he told them, "the *Ibi Maru*."

"What a strange name," Nurse Charlotte told him. Sure, he thought, it was. "It is," he said. "It was an unusual ship in every way, the heaviest ice breaker ever built."

"Wow," chipped in Nurse Mae. "Grand Uncle Ernest would've loved that, I'm sure."

"Yes, he would've all right," the sea captain said to her, trying to hold back a laugh. "I know the story like the back of my hand. Your uncle was a very courageous, stubborn, undefeated hero. The ice pack took it to him and he took them off it, the whole damned crew, snatched them back and saved every one."

By now the doctor was ready to start the diagnostic process, coming in bruskiy through the drawn curtain. "How are we?" he said to no one. Nurse Charlotte filled him in. "I think we have directional," she said. She ran the symptoms down. "Okay," he replied, "we'll wait for the test results. We'll probably want a stress test, too." He looked down at the sea captain. "We're going to eliminate the worst prognosis first," he said, "then the next worst and so on. This looks like it's episodic, but we'll want to make sure." He winked at the sea captain. "This your clock?" He was glancing down at the ships clock between the sea captain's legs. Then, not waiting for a reply, he said, "Never leave home without it, eh?"

## Chapter two

So the one thing he'd carried aboard the *Ibi Maru* that he cared about was the ship's clock with that crusty, worn out clang and a half a choke on the first bell. He'd had it on the Forrester with McCain and had gotten it and him off in one piece, miraculously un-fried, and had taken it off with him in good condition. Never knew why he'd done it or how. It had history, had come from an old New England Clipper Ship and he was almost wishing it had come off the Discover with Shackleton. Make a nice story right now, he thought. He looked up at Nurse Mae and thought that would make a good story. He was tempted. But then he remembered he'd had it with him during the Andrea Gail matter, too, out off New Jersey. Yes, he thought now, the perfect fucking storm. You think Nature's being generous with her bounty, and you find out she's damn generous with her knockout punches too. That was the first time he'd learned about the knockout punch with no rhyme or reason to it. That was a punch that had materialized up north of the Grand Banks and come shifting in backwards, like a sneaky fighter letting you have it in the kidneys when you were ahead on points. Wow, a perfect knockout of a storm delivered via the kidneys, and here he'd transferred over to search and sea rescue because he'd now hated the very idea of being burned up alive, at sea or anywhere else, and he'd been introduced on what seemed like a normal day of chopper patrol to whip-winds that knocked tops off of seventy foot giant waves that were cresting two or three times in a mile, waves that would hit anything in the way like a ten ton boulder falling off the Eiffel Tower splat onto a barge in the Seine River. Oh, God, yes, he thought, now starting up to spin again, you went down smack whoa, and were completely useless in it. That's how good you were, and all that was left of it now was somebody's book.

So he'd had that part of it, wanted no more, and had retired to "civilian" uses. Took a condo with a small boat dock on the Wareham River next to the decommissioned Nantucket Light Ship and a yard full of "ducks" – old army amphibians – and now he lived with his ship's clock and had until the Japanese tracked him down.

They came armed with a pile of drawings and the inscrutable smiles and he had to laugh at them. He could look back at this and laugh at it in his mind. He could laugh about it even though the ceiling in the ER was wanting to lift up again and roll away blurry, and he seemed to be wanting to slide off sideways when he shut his eyes. It was funny he thought, how they arrived with those rolls of paper under the arms and were so modest and apologetic that it hardly qualified as a door-to-door sales job.

But that was what it was all right. They'd come on at the door like he was an admiral, not just a mid-ranking early retired officer who'd had enough shipboard experience to warrant early retirement and a steady diet of valium. They treated him with super deference and said they wanted to ask his valuable opinion about a project the Japanese were undertaking in the construction of an ice breaker.

What? He'd never been on one.

Ah so, but he'd had enough "adventure" in matters of sea command to suggest compatibility with this particular project, which had unusual aspect of its own.

Oh? How so?

Oppa, well, you see, good sir, it is going to be different, in a special way.

Yes, different in a lot of special ways, radically different.

Why me?

Ah so, why not? Inscrutable smile. These damned orientals never come clean, he thought. They had such a manner that even if they were levelling the straight skinny, you'd never know it.

So why me? Because among younger retired Lieutenant Commanders qualified to skipper large craft, he'd had as much adventure as anyone could reasonably be expected to stomach, and had survived. This ice breaker, she was going to be special, and she was going to challenge the South Pole.

### Chapter three

The *Ibi Maru* was conceived as a “super” breaker much as the USS Forrester had been conceived as a super carrier, the first of its kind and the testing ground for unheard of potential. The bit of history which had the Forrester test her metal and her design concept off the Viet Nam coast, and burn up almost to doomsday on the eve of battle, well, it proved nothing. It proved that more would come. It is just the fortuitous outcome for first born anythings.

She (the *Ibi Maru*) was conceived as a 30,000 dwt ice breaker, the heaviest ever designed, occupying a surface area around the size of a football field, only a little longer because of her unique hull shape. Her bow was configured something like a giant Manta Ray, with two “outriggers” of titanium alloy stretched forward and above the plane of the keel, kind of like lobster claws, he’d noted. Jesus, what was this? The keel was “spined” from the forepeak back amidships under the first half of the hull, so that when lifted onto pack ice it would tend to crack in as well as crush downward. And the outriggers would tend to ride up over the pack, at least to a height of more than fifty feet, so that in effect she would grab the ice shelf like a swimmer coming out of the water, and then slam downward with tremendous force. This innovation, the Japs had inscrutably informed him, was an improvement on conventional sea ice breakers. The tips of the outriggers were fitted out with powerful heat lasers, so that in advance of her crushing effect, the *Ibi Maru* would be able to cut into ice shelves that were above her climbing ability, and in effect, they said, cut off the bottom and collapse the top. Wow! Fucking wow!

He hadn’t known whether to laugh out loud or what. They’d stood around his round garden table on the deck overlooking the docks and wondered aloud. But that wasn’t the most salient feature. That honor belonged to the configuration of the hull and the distribution of weight.

The *Ibi Maru* was to be double-hulled, with the outer layer of aluminum eggshell sandwiched between sheets of titanium alloy, with a tremendous flex capability. The inner layer, about eighteen inches inside the outer layer and separated from it by foam, was connected to the superstructure in such a way that, like an “A” frame on a cable-stayed bridge, the inside weight was shifted to the outside of the outer hull. In effect, this meant that her bottom would flex upward when she rode up over the ice, and then shove downward with the spine keel cracking into the frozen mass. It also stabilized the outriggers so that when they flexed up over an ice shelf, they stiffened and produced a cutting moment.

Double wow! He remembered wondering if these gentlemen were earthlings. What a joke. Nobody of course could build a ship like this. And he said so, trying to make it sound friendly too. No, they told him, she’s been built, she already exists.

Taking it all in was hard, even in memory. There was even more. She was powered by twelve big deisel electrics on roller rails. Damn, they were configured so that when the prow of the ship rose and jammed forward, they could ride up on rails to provide additional weight. And she was driven at such times by four enormous gas turbines, called “birds”, arrayed along her wide stern quarter and

angled out. This meant that she could pile drive, lift up fifty feet or more, bite in and wiggle to crack open the pack ice like an ice ax. And she was already in existence, he remembered thinking. That's what they'd said to him standing there in his own pad.

He was numbing up now, feeling a cold chill slide down his back. He no longer wanted to think of the here and now, what might be going on with him. So he gave it up to remembering. He remembered that he'd finally been attracted to the Japanese project because of its outlandish chief element, the *Ibi Maru*. That they had actually gone ahead and constructed such a ship was impossible to imagine; but that they were offering him the helm was instantly impossible to turn down. He'd agreed almost before he could even consider what it meant.

He did say, "Why me?"

And they told him that his record best matched the conditions they foresaw for the maiden voyage – which was to retrace the route of Shackleton's expedition in the heart of the Antarctic winter, to test her prowess. She was to put herself deeply into the pack ice, into a frozen fastness.

Then he asked the real question. Why are you doing this? Why isn't this governmental and cooperative? And they told him simply that it was "private". That's all they would tell him. It was a private matter and he could guess all he wanted.

He said he wouldn't guess, but he wanted to know if there would be a Japanese crew, and if that was a private matter too. They told him, surprisingly, that no, he could pick his crew from among suitable candidates; but there were only going to be fifteen in all to man a 30,000 ton high technology vessel, and they supposed he and they would reach the same conclusions regardless of personal factors. Ah so, well, at that stage he's thrown it in and climbed on board. It was too good to miss.

## Chapter four

“Steven Whelaus in command.”

Oh, hell yes, it had been a great day, stepping up the gang plank onto that revolutionary ice breaker. He'd been met by the “owner”, a mysterious looking small fellow with dark glasses who practically fawned over him. He was glad to be wearing dress blues with maritime insignia and a captain's hat with frosting. He'd followed the small fellow into captain's quarters in back of the wheel house, and he'd quickly noticed in passing all the usual stuff in the way of navigational aids, everything backed up double. (Add in what all.)

He'd stowed what little he had, and pulled out the crew roster. Almost all were double skilled. As he stood with the small fellow, a large man with “toughness” written all over him appeared in the doorway. He assumed this was Judo Sturm, a man marvellously announced as good with engines, good with stoves, good with dicy situations and good with communications gear. Ample capacities, he thought, in a big fellow. He wondered what the small fellow could do, other than write enormous checks. The *Ibi Maru* had to have slid down her ways in nothing under \$100 million, he thought.

“You secure?” Judo asked him.

“Yes,” he said. “How 'bout the others?”

“All aboard.”

“Okay. We'll meet in the ward room at six. Then I'll inspect the ship.”

“Aye, aye,” said Judo, and turned and went out. It was like pulling a blanket back from the window in bright sunlight. He was a big fellow, all right, and Captain Wheelhaus thought he'd probably like him.

After the initial meeting and ship's inspection, they'd started taking on provisions for the voyage. They were sailing from blah blah on the south coast of a Japanese Island. They'd pass over the Marianna's Trench and head straight south for Aukland. He was to enter at night and leave before sunlight the next morning, taking on a first mate as pilot who would be familiar with the Antarctic Peninsula and its sea environs. Then he was to drive straight off the lee coast of Georgia, deep into the pack ice towards the continental shelf. It would be dark and it would be dangerous, if the *Ibi Maru* was anything except what her designers thought she was. They of course, were a fucking committee. Damn, he thought, like a camel instead of a horse.

But the first few days out were supreme. There were no faults with propulsion, or with sea roll (most breakers are relatively unstable until they hit ice.) She was like the Manta Ray she'd been designed to imitate, and she glided along with one side lifting gently and then the other, squat on her keel. Very nice, he thought.

And he quickly became amused by and friendly towards Judo. The big guy was talkative in just the right way.

In fact, the crew had bonded quickly, small as it was. Three mates for watch captains, three hands in the engine rooms (there were two, one housing the turbines and the other the massive array of locomotive generators), two each on the out-riggers, three general deck hands as they were tabbed, himself and Judo, the chief cook and bottle washer. All had multiple duties to go along with the

extraordinary range of skill training and experience each possessed. And it came to him on the examining cot all this time later, swimming for life maybe, that his particular duality had been merely the fact that he was a helicopter commander with an extraordinary background of “challenging” experience. That was why he’d been approached, yes, he thought, fighting off the chill in his back as the two nurses worked around him, because the Japanese had done an incredible amount of homework and knew precisely what they wanted.

The crew seemed to band together from the first, and as the *Ibi Maru* plowed into the Southern Ocean and the daylight hours contracted, he had established the mid-light hour as the time for sitting together in the large ward room for a meal. The ship was so fully automated, she would plow on with grand assurance while her compliment ate together, and shared feeling and stories. Judo remained aloof, quietly serving the meal and tending the mood. He was good at it, and after several days, Captain Wheelhaus asked him to sit down after the meal and have coffee and small talk together. That was basically what started it, he remembered. Jesus, think of all the surprise that led to, amazing.

They sat down and talked over strong coffee, and he asked him, Judo, he said, when I looked over your CV, I found myself asking how you got from two tours in Nam as a SEAL into this business of managing the galley and the communications setup on an ice breaker.

Judo was not modest, but hugely reserved, and it showed. He’d also been in several lines of police work in Chicago, with a strange gap in his resume of about two or three years.

“You get where you’re goin’,” Judo told him.

“Yes I know, but how did you know where you were going, and where did you learn to cook, you know?”

Judo wasn’t going to fend him off. He knew the psychology which lay back of the conversation, knew it was necessary to open up.

“Yeah, sometimes I wonder myself. I just took to certain things.”

“What happened in Chicago?”

Judo’s blanched, then turned beet red. This was going pretty far, maybe too far.

“Nothin’,” he said. “Nothin’ I’d care to talk about.”

“But there was something, wasn’t there?”

“Yeah, jeez, there was. I got caught in that thing at Burnham Harbor, couple a years back.”

“And disappeared.”

“Yeah, that’s it. Too much to suck in, figgered I might’s well duck the show – at least the aftermath. They were tryin’ to dig it out. I sicced ‘em on the Midway.”

“Ah hah, I get it. But how’d you get here?”

“Hell, you picked me.”

“No, I mean, how’d your name come up. Where were you then?”

Judo looked at him then, as if to make sure where the conversation was going. “Where were you, Cap’n?” He broke into a broad smile. Then they both laughed. The sea captain knew they were both going to hold back a card or two; but in a way it was reassuring. Judo knew the sea captain had extraordinary

courage, had proved it under extreme conditions. And the sea captain knew he could count on Judo for a multiplicity of actions, when and if needed. The man was multi-faceted, and by God, he remembered now lying on the examining cot, yes by damn, he knew engines too, could knock down a turbine if he had to.

Well, he thought, damn if he could fly the chopper lashed to its pad on the after deck. That was still your job alone.

## Chapter five

His mind was retracing. The *Ibi Maru* had plowed on south, into the gathering darkness and the huge ice flows. And she proved her metal, climbing up on irregular shelves of sea ice and casting them aside after breaking them apart, and she proved just as efficient as she rammed into the first sections of pack ice closer to the continental shelf. They'd given her turbines a good workout or two, and had grand results. She hardly had to back off cutting into thirty foot stacks. And the heat lasers were marvelous, like ray guns, he remembered.

They were working close to the invisible coastline and had started back north along the Peninsula when the chatter started. He called it chatter because it was basically an instant messaging link via satellite to the NSF Office of Polar Programs, an open link which was available to everyone concerned officially or privately with the Antarctic. The small fellow had insisted on using this link because he wanted Washington to be aware of the performance of the *Ibi Maru*, wanted to show 'em, the sea captain thought, what "high tech" really meant.

So the chatter had started. And Judo had come in with it.

"You ain't gonna b'lieve this," he said, handing a transcript to the sea captain. They were in the wheel house watching the prow of the big ship glide up on some low ice floe formations.

"What?" He took it in hand and glanced down. He was looking at e-mail traffic forwarded on the open line by the NSF's public relations officer, Laurie Piper. "What's this?" he asked.

"Read it," replied Judo. "It's interesting."

The sea captain began to read, glancing over the text. It appeared to contain several questions from a magazine editor directed to a professor of Geophysical Sciences at the University of Chicago - about a mammoth ice berg that had just calved off the Ross Ice Shelf. It was bigger than Delaware. *How long might one reasonably expect such a chunk of ice to last, it said. In other words, how long will it take to melt?* And the answer to this was: *It'll take six to twelve months for the berg to "escape" the Ross Sea (unless it runs aground on the Pennell Bank, in which case it would become an "ice island" that could last for decades.*

Then another question: *Is it possible to say how old this berg - or the ice in it - is? This shows my ignorance, I realize, but I don't actually know if glacier ice comes in layers of various ages, or is all basically the same age.*

And then the answer to that: *You're right. The ice is of a "continuum of ages", with the oldest being at the bottom (or near the bottom if there is now ice being added to the bottom by basal freezing of the ocean water) and the youngest at the top (where yesterday's snowfall is the absolute youngest). Probably the oldest ice is from the last glacial period, about 30,000 years old, and comprises about 5% of the total berg. The rest of it is probably an average 2000 years old.*

Then this question, *Anything strange in it?*

*What?*

*Anything strange about it, or in it? I mean how unusual is it?*

*It could be the harbinger of something more, and that's how it might be potentially unusual. Or it could be just an anomaly. Hard to say right now, and I don't think we'll find anything in it, cold as it is.*

This last was a joke – of the kind professors liked to throw in, he thought. He turned to Judo. “What’s going on?” he said.

Judo almost blushed. “I dunno,” he said, “but I know that perfess’r fella. We spent some time together when I was down in Chicago. I thought he was hidin’ out.”

“From what?”

“Little fracas we had. He hired me to chase somethin’ in the lake.”

“Oh? So what does that make him here?”

“Nothin’, I ‘spose. But the guy’s quite a brain, and he’s inta some pretty strange stuff. Nice guy though.”

The sea captain had laughed. He lookd out through the wheel house window at the Southern Ocean darkening up ahead and rolling in swells that were too big to define. It looked like you were going up hill. “What are they talking about?” he said.

“A tremendous ice berg. Seems like it just broke off somewhere. Everybody’s talkin’ about it.”

“Ah yes, okay. Let’s tune in then. See what you can get.”

Judo had disappeared, and later on he came back with some additional “banter” from the net.

## Chapter six

“What?”

Judo was red faced, almost the color of his red-leathery neck inside the blue Docker collar. He was taken aback where he obviously hadn't expected it, the sea captain thought. Like you'd caught him jerking off. He started to stammer, which was very untypical. “I ah, I ah, I'm ah, sorry, sir,” he mumbled.

“Oh hell, forget it. Least wise you know him.”

“Yes, sir.”

The sea captain had burst out laughing. They were in the wheel house and the *Ibi Maru* was up on the flank of the Antarctic Peninsula, plowing ahead in the dark fastness of the continental shelf ice. It was so incongruous. Judo had contacted the professor ensconced in a secure “sanctum” inside a fortress of a science building on the Midway Campus in Chicago where he'd chosen to hole up for several years. The man used to visit the Antarctic regularly, even sailed on ice breakers, the sea captain thought. But he'd given it up from having explored one thing too many, apparently in Lake Michigan. And ol' Judo, he'd been right there with him. So now, out of the blue, there'd been renewed contact. It had a certain irony, he thought.

“Okay,” he said, “what'd you tell him?”

Judo hesitated.

“I printed it out,” he said, sheepishly, “after I eavesdropped on 'em.”

“On who?”

“The lot, sir. We've been gettin' the banter from Miss Laurie at NSF, and she's been gettin' swamped from the media shits on this big berg story. She's the one injected my prof into it, and he's been talkin' to a Coast Guard captain.”

“Oh? Who's that?”

“Guy named Wheeler. Kinda like your name.”

“Steve Wheeler?”

“Yeah.”

Well, he knew him all right. One of the valiant. He smiled, thinking he'd decided right then to maybe get in on the act. “So what'd they say?”

Judo handed him the document.

The first message was from Macaulay himself, addressed to the Wisconsin scientists who'd first identified the crack in the ice shelf that meant the big berg had calved. It said: *Hello, gang. A few comments for the morning. I've finally made a few simulations of the berg's drift (we're looking for big improvements over the next month in the quality of tidal data for the Ross Sea Tides). I think the iceberg will eventually break in half, but I don't think this will happen until several weeks go by and the berg gets translated about 50 km to the west along the ice front. Right now it's kind of “jiggling” around in its “parking spot.”*

*Watch out for the other half of the Ross Ice Shelf also calving. There's a small but real chance the ice shelf could break off and leave Minna Bluffs as the “new” western end of the ice front. I think there's a small but real possibility that this iceberg could strand and become an ice island on the coast of the Ross Sea just north of Ross Island. If it happens, the character of sea ice in the Ross Sea*

*would change, and you could kiss ship traffic to Ross Island goodbye. Anyway, it's worth keeping a "watch out" for what happens when this berg begins to batter the front of the Ross Ice Shelf."*

The second message was from Piper Laurie, passing the predictions on to interested parties, including Captain Wheeler, who replied to her from the ice breaker *blah*: *Interesting! We talked about this at length this morning, even before I got your email. Professor Macaulay is right on the money about this thing changing the character of the sea ice... hell, this thing will be an upwelling machine below the waterline and a weather maker above. If it hangs up, we can expect approach channels to McMurdo to be an order of magnitude longer than they are now, and a helluva lot more risky. If it slides across the north face of Ross Island and hangs up on the continent, we have a show-stopper! Jesus, and if Minna Bluff ends up as the western extremity of the ice shelf – and the ice lets go along the backside of Ross Island, we are going to have to install floats on the LC130's. I think the best scenario here is that this thing is going to be the biggest pain in the butt since me... at a minimum, even if this thing doesn't hang up and heads for open water, I see calving icebergs all over the place, trapping sea ice that would've normally blown out and leaving little mines all over the Ross Sea for our ships to smack into. And if it does head out north, it'll probably be right on the 180 line – the same line we move ships into the Ross Sea on!*

## Chapter seven

So that's how it started. Flat out on the examining table, the chill working down his back, afraid to close his eyes and let the universe roll away, the sea captain was reflecting on how it started. Can't happen, did happen. Can't sink the fucking Titanic, did sink her, wham, straight down, broken in half like a toy in the bath tub. Oh God, he thought, why don't you ever know? Why don't you see it coming? Captain Wheeler had ended up with bravado... "Cheers," he'd signed off, "I want a raise."

Well he damn well deserved one, and so did all the others who ended up struggling with this vast piece of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet that cast itself into the Southern Ocean and began to change everything. They talked about where it would go, how it would work loose, whether it would hang up, what it would threaten. But no one had guessed or even imagined what was *in it!*

"Where'd you pipe in on this," he's asked Judo.

"I contacted the perfess'r."

"Yes, I surmised that, Sturm. What I mean is, what did you say, and what did he say about it, and was it on the open line?"

Judo blushed again. It was so uncharacteristic of him, the way he ordinarily looked, it was almost grotesque. "I said hello," he said, "an' I asked 'im if we were in for another one've 'is 'humps' – like, y'know, the unknown bad thingie. An' he asks me where I am an' I tell 'im, an' he says he's already heard about our voyage an' he figgers we'll end up in the thick've it, whatever it is."

"Thanks," the sea captain told him rather curtly. "You got it all mapped out then?"

Judo blushed some more. "No," he stammered, "but they redirected us." He handed over another print-out. It was from the small fellow, and it requested the sea captain to redirect the *Ibi Maru* around the tip of the Antarctic Peninsula and into the Ross Sea. It didn't say what to expect or to do when they got there. It just said "go." Well, damn, he figured, if it isn't "dick measuring" against the Coast Guard, what is it? Were you supposed to crack that trillion pound berg in half? Drag it out to sea and run over it?

He laughed, painfully and sick. He felt a wretch coming up and he tried to raise up. Nurse Charlotte and Nurse Mae were all over him, softening whatever it was that was going on, handling him like a baby.

## Chapter eight

It seemed to float up at him, the slow turning insight of his own memories. Yes he remembered the ward room when he'd disclosed their itinerary – loop over the tip of the peninsula and head straight south again hoping to “enjoy” enough open water to hit the flank speed. Jarvis, the chief engineer, saying what the hell is that, like he's turned into Scotty from the Enterprise. Yes they were all bonded from pushing through the ice on up the trail of the Discover, and had even celebrated passing the spot where she'd finally been abandoned and crushed to smithereens, abandoned and then ice struck and then presumably sucked down into deep fathoms like cracked kindling. They were bonded and free speaking and they'd had a communal belly laugh because in fact no one yet knew the flank speed of the *Ibi Maru*. She'd made fifty knots on a flat sea, and could maybe do more. Might capsize on her outriggers, too. She had power and the underbelly of a whale, including its long striations. I don't know if I can push her, Jarvis said, and they'd all laughed again. First mate Grogan turned around and he said, well, we could still make Ross Island in less than five days, assuming we don't hit anything we can't crack through. And they'd laughed again, too, although maybe a little nervously. Judo was strangely silent, and the sea captain figured he'd been picking the Chicago professor's brain about where they were going and what maybe they'd find. He'd assumed this, he remembered, and had been right on.

Now it was like looking down over the top of the ship's clock, hearing it strike six bells and watching Judo stand shadowy in the doorway beyond. The pain was steady.

“You've renewed your acquaintance, I suppose.” It was sarcastic, but not meant to be.

Judo standing awkwardly in the doorway beyond, filling it up.

“Yes,” he'd admitted.

“Mind letting me in on it?”

Judo, straightening up. “No, sir. I just, you...”

“What?”

“You know why we're heading back in there, south?”

“We're going to observe, Judo. Maybe assist the ice breakers down there, something like that. Basically ego for the short fellow, I guess.”

“No, I mean, what's down there.”

“Just some big slice of ice off the Ross Ice Shelf, I suppose. So?”

The sea captain felt himself tense as if waiting with a subtle anxiety rising, just as it had happened that moment in the wheel house.

“So,” Judo's saying from the doorway, “what 'ol Mac's been tellin' me, it's that this fuckin' thing is thirty nautical miles wide and two hundred thirty fuckin' miles long. That's *more* than thirty miles across, maybe that's fifty land miles, y'know? An' this thing, hey, if she comes on loose from 'er moorin', well hell, she's only less'n her own length from McMurdo.”

The sea captain kept his stare. “Are you saying there's going to be a collision, Judo?”

“No, sir; I ain’t sayin’ nothin’. But ‘ol prof., I wouldn’t fool around with that man’s brainbucket when he’s talkin’ this stuff. He says it might open like a Jack knife an’ slap back on the face’ve the shelf right onto McMurdo; an’ he says if somethin’ like that happened, Jesus, it’d be like havin’ a cold comet come crashin’ into the earth, at least for folks unlucky enough to still be hangin’ at McMurdo, and that’s a lot a tourists these days, even in the dark season he says.”

“Well, maybe it won’t happen,” the sea captain told him.

“No, hell, but then maybe it lifts up off’n the edge’ve its socket and steers north till it hits Ross Island, or snags up, which is worse, ‘cause ‘ol Mac says then it might just flip around and come crashin’ back at about three knots an hour by the time it hits McMurdo. And that’d be like the end a the world.”

The end of the world. Whose world, he’d wondered. They could fly everybody out. Let the thing clean up the garbage. He’d started to laugh to himself and Judo had looked at him quizzically.

“You all right?” he’d said.

The sea captain blushed. He’d got to like Judo and they liked talking together. It filled up the long hours of pushing along.

“Yes, I’m all right,” he’d answered. “But maybe it’s time for me to talk to your professor myself. Is he available on the televiewer?”

“I dunno. I ‘spose. We been usin’ the IM.”

“What are you talking about, besides the berg – old times?”

Again, it’d come out slightly sarcastic, and he wondered why. Almost like you were jealous, he thought. But you weren’t. Maybe you were starting to get afraid.

He’d smiled then and made a joke of it, and Judo had accepted that gesture.

“Ol’ times,” Judo said. He shrugged, looking massive in the doorway. “It was more like a bad time.”

“Like what?”

“Yeah, a time you don’t wanta hear about. We were chasin’ somethin’ in the lake.”

“In the lake?”

“Yeah, somethin’ like a hump under the water. Never found out what it was.”

“Oh.”

Sure, the sea captain remembered. Something in the lake. And the more he asked the less additional information he got.

It was the same starting out with the professor. Judo rigged up a secure teleconferencing circuit from the com center in back of the captain’s quarters. It overlooked the mid-ships where the chopper was tethered on a big bullseye. The deisel stacks were on either side, spouting smog. He always wondered what that looked like from a satellite perspective – like a bug, he thought, polluting a vast, white, pristine world of ice, snow and cloud.

When the professor came on, the sea captain said, “Good morning, professor.”

And the professor had said, “It’s afternoon here.” And then there was silence and the monitor resolution was poor and he’d thought the professor was eating something, sitting there and eating something.”

“Sorry. Good afternoon.”

"Hi. What's up?"

"I see you're having lunch."

"Yes, it's lunch time here."

"He's eatin' that fuckin' sandwich again," Judo said. He was trying to bring up the resolution. "Eats this Branston Pickle stuff on 'is ham." Judo broke out laughing, and the professor said, "What's up, Judo?"

"Cap'n here, just wants ta know more about the berg - you know, that Jurassic Park stuff."

Then the professor laughed, and they all laughed. That was how you got acquainted, he thought. Funny, very funny, and very weird, too, if you thought about it. The Antarctic dawn was graying out the crisp clear stellar landscape in the vast sky above them, choking the portholes and cabin windows with a kind of reflected white-out. They would soon be making flank speed at 180 degrees.

"Are you involved in this?" the sea captain asked.

"Yes, I'm consulting with NSF, and they're charting your progress. I'm in touch with Laurie Piper."

So they all were, he remembered. The Coggin and the Beardsley had started in ahead, off Argentine waters. They'd stormed through the roaring fifties and headed down the Antarctic coast about three days ahead of the *Ibi Maru*. Laurie Piper, herself a PhD, was coordinating, and the professor, who liked her and saw a lot of her at meetings, liked to joke that she was getting ready to announce a new round of "God meddling" in the natural schema. Wants to become His press officer, he'd joked. So while they were going in behind the US Coast Guard on a fuzzy mission, they'd joked and probed at each other like a couple of handlers waiting to release their jumping frogs.

Yeah, he thought, you started it with your curiosity, and you asked him about the hump business; and he asked you about the perfect storm business and neither one of you wanted to level. Then he said he understood you'd picked a lone Japanese sailor out of that tempest and lost two swimmers doing it; and you said you understood he'd sunk the entire fleet out of Burnham Harbor, Chicago.

Yeah, he thought, feeling the laugh ignite pain in his chest, trying to hold it off. It wasn't a very auspicious way to start, considering the gravity of where they were and what they were doing. And to top it off, the video resolution was flaky, and it was coming from above the atmosphere between them and the polar orbiters, probably something going on in the Van Allen Belt.

But they'd settled into a dialogue, too. He had the satisfaction of that on his own part, a kind of intensely interesting learning curve, yeah, dealing with what is and what isn't and why not and what maybe. Why would a chunk of ice that gigantic break loose. He'd asked the professor.

"Any one of several reasons, or combinations," the professor had answered.

"But what's your guess?"

"Natural causes."

So they'd laughed.

"No, but, why, how?"

The professor had disintegrated right then, and then come back on talking and the sea captain had missed part of the answer: "...know a lot less than most

people realize,” he’d heard. Then: “Of course, we divide the past into segments that seem to best reflect certain events or characteristics; but no one knows what actually went on for all those billions of years. We think the earth was slow to develop as a habitat; but that notion seems somewhat at odds with the compression of change going on today. If there’s some sort of analog governing the overall evolution, we can probably expect space visitors in a year or two, something like that – I mean the unlikely replacing the likely, a different order of change than we’re used to. But my guess is that there’s a considerable narrative tucked into the blank spaces of history. So the berg is a natural phenomenon that is not caused by smoke stacks in Pittsburgh; but it might be caused by something that is unnatural in the scope of normal causation.”

He’d flickered out again, and when the resolution improved again he’d just been sitting there in his fortress on the Midway, watching the camera.

You were supposed to reply, show that you understood, he remembered. And you said to him, “Well, I suppose that’s just a big I don’t know.”

“Exactly. We’re better at guessing what it might do in the tidal currents after it breaks its dockage. We’re not very good at guessing its animus, if it has any.”

“Okay, roger that. What’s your best guess as to where she’s going?”

“She’ll either jack knife or ride out to a grounding point on the Island, maybe both. They’ve spotted what looks like a fissure across her mid-section, and a shadow line on her longitudinal axis, kind of like a cross, a shadow cross. If either one is a rift, she might crack in two, or start calving when she hits ground somewhere. Or she might stay together...”

“And what?”

“And do something we can’t even imagine,” the professor had said.

“Like what?”

“Like I don’t know.”

But, you’d told him, if we’re going in there, and the standard cutters, too, why the hell are we doing this if nobody knows what it might do, and can’t even guess. You guys all think she’ll raise hell in the Ross Sea and we’re gonna sail into it and you don’t know...

“You see what I mean?” you’d finished.

The professor had become pensive, like he’d joked a little bit too much about it.

Then he’d said, “Okay, here’s what you’ve got to understand. You’re going to face a hugely unfamiliar circumstance, and if something goes wrong, you won’t have much of a chance to save your ship, maybe worse. I don’t mean to make light of it, but we’ll just have to take her as she comes.”

“Yeah, roger. Fuck it.” They’d both laughed, and when he’d turned around Judo was laughing too.

## Chapter nine

Anticipation rose while grinding through the light ice floes in that coastal sea lane, and the sea captain had begun to maintain hourly contact with the cutters up ahead of the *Ibi Maru*. Captain Wheeler on the USS Coggin had reported first sighting of the huge ice berg with a muffled “wow!” – and reported that it seemed to be backing out of its notch on the Ross Ice Shelf. It was difficult to discern, but he thought it might be slowly beginning to swing open like a switch-blade. Maybe not, but, it’s like you can see ice crack off the high white line of the ice cliff, he said, and you can see this all the time but the whole thing is always stationary, like land. Then you see this same thing and, by God, it’s *moving*. How do you know? Hell, he said, I don’t know. No, you couldn’t *really* see this or tell for certain if this mass is really moving, but you can more or less sense it. Maybe it’s just knowing that she’s unhooked, he reported.

So first contact had been made from the water side. On the great shelf itself, a couple of planes had flown out to the edge area with a party of glaciologists and tried to scope the thing. They were standing by a huge crack with icy detritus chipping off the edges. They reported sighting the fissure about seventy miles up the longitudinal section line. It was cloudy looking and foreboding. And the rift continued, they reported, on both sides of the crack and into the Ross Ice Shelf itself. Yes it looked like it was widened to about fifty meters down the face and went in they guessed, maybe ten or twenty miles. Then they asked for a space scan and everyone knew they could hardly judge it.

The sea captain wasn’t sure in his own recollection now, why and when he’d decided to keep a “captain’s log” apart from the standard ship’s log. But it had been somewhere and sometime approaching rendezvous with the two conventional cutters ahead of him. He couldn’t remember when he’d started to call the big berg a “she” either, or if maybe Judo had started that. But it caught on. Pretty soon everybody was talking about “her”, like maybe she’d turn out to be alive, like some cold-mantra’d gaia. Certainly a thing floating in the southern ocean unattached to land and measuring the size of Delaware with the freeboard of seventy some meters and a girth under the waterline of damn near half a mile and god knows what inside her bowels from 30,000 years – Jesus, he thought, you might as well endow her with something akin to life, even if dead. So they did, and now he was watching his ships clock between his legs, tilted up on its pedestal and coming up on six bells. He’s been undergoing examination and treatment for several hours, and they were still fussing around him like friendly puppies. Hell, he thought, whatever it is, they’re doing it forever. He wondered about the tubes going in his nose and mouth and arm, and the monitors looking like they were there competing with his clock.

## Captain's Log

It was not like he was living it all over again; but it was... it was just like he was writing it down for the first time, seeing it go down on water stained, blank pages in front of him, and somehow too, the ship's clock was slowly winding its hands backwards. Then it stopped and he started and it was like he was writing it all over again, *ab original*, like it was some kind of oral history taking place before him:

### 1. Ship's Date – March 15

*Strange sight ahead. We can see the cutters off in the distance, like specks in front of us, stationary. Yes she'd swung herself open off the shelf about 50° already and we've rounded her "head" and we've come down the inside edge plowing on for about three or four hours. We're under the towering shadow of that icy escarpment, and you can't help wonder what would happen if she "snapped shut" again, whoa, like the jack knife instead of the switch blade. Thought chills, but we'd probably make it out – pour it on. The cutters wouldn't. We'll rendezvous about eighteen hundred hours, in the dark.*

*It's funny. Coming along side of her I kept thinking about sailing off the Cornwall coast from Penzance, out to the Isles of Scilly. Dangerous, un-English looking rock cliffs, so different from anything you ever thought about England with her full bodied civilization "ancien" and her glories to man and his ceaseless enterprise and her worldly, insatiable "reach for more". Damn, what'm I talking about.*

### 2. Ship's Date March 16

*Captain Wheeler of the USS Coggin now insists there's something inside that berg. Whoa, we laughed at him, at first. Like she's gonna have a baby, eh? Hell no, but when we conferenced up Macaulay he just said I wouldn't laugh if I were you. I caught Judo gleaming with some inscrutable pride. God, he eats that professor's stuff like it was spaghetti and clam sauce.*

*The professor started to interrogate Wheeler and it went like this:*

*Prof. : Where would you estimate the fissure is located on the longitudinal section?*

*Capt. Wheeler : About half way, give or take.*

*Prof. : Yes, the sky scan confirms that all right, but she's a little vague. There seem to be scattered shadows, too, that could be sub-fissures, maybe cracks leading off the main one.*

*Capt. Wheeler : Would that be affecting stability?*

Prof. : Hard to say

*And you pipe in because the first thing you wanted to know is whether she's going to open and drift out, or close and maybe crunch against the coast, including McMurdo. You asked this because it kept coming up and maybe the Professor was responsible for it himself. He wasn't very reassuring. Said right now they needed to be thinking about the fizzle, since it extended on both sides and back into the Ross Ice Shelf, where it might have a helluva lot more significance than a mere bone crushing ice berg, the biggest one ever known. Jesus, why do brave men treat danger with a sense of humor?*

*Discussion brought out some interesting observations. It appears the fizzle is hollowed into the main bulk, and widens downward so that only a relatively thin layer of ice prevents you from going deep inside. We debated whether the Ibi could crack through that layer. We're pretty cocky. The cutters aren't sure and therefore skeptical. Maybe it was thirty meters and broken up and then reformed as a crust. Satellite readings are suggesting that in the dawning Antarctic daylight it seems shadowed like a cave, and went in at least a mile or two; but maybe it's optical. This is apart from that longitudinal "shadow" noted before. Professor thinks we need to examine a lot further to see if the fizzle poses a threat of cracking the mother berg in two. Be a different kettle of fish then, he told us. So we've decided to "go".*

### 3. Ship's Date March 17

*We figured on a good hour and a half to attempt an entry. I half expected the cutter crews to line their decks with field glasses to watch the old Ibi crash into that "thing". You wondered if anybody gave a damn whether the ridge tops might just come down on us, like rocks in the bathtub. We cranked up at twelve thirty hours and turned on the gas turbines. She moved smoothly and with accelerating headway into the outer maw of the fizzle. Outriggers looked to be almost at the tops of the crust, and we turned on the lasers about 500 feet out. Big cloud of steam came up and out of that mass of ice, gigantic, and the rays tattooed that ice face like a machine gun raking trenches. We were still accelerating when the outriggers engaged and began to lift. You could hardly see where they went in, or up over, but we felt the bow began to rise and you knew we were chewing into that lovely berg, giving the old lady a bang.*

*Then could feel our underbody crunch in, and the spine bite and then just stop! Whoa! We'd beached ourselves, ground to a halt! That meant the crust was an overlay and there was a lot of block ice underneath it. We cut power and after a moment or two settled back in the wash. The deisels had rolled on forward as they were supposed to and were now inclined so*

*that they couldn't run back, and that's when we realized we were stuck. We'd run up on that ice berg like a gnat on tits.*

*I was out on the larboard bridge with Judo while First Mate Crogan and the chief engineer were figuring out how to back her off. The Ibi was wedged on a sub-surface platform with her outriggers resting just above shelves of the slick ice they'd burned out of the crust. We finally decided that she would back herself off when the interior heat of the hull provided a glaze along her spine, and we could induce this condition by redirecting and circulating hot air from the turbines. In the meantime, Judo and I looked over the terrain, if you could call it that. Back of us the sea was dead calm, and we could see the cutters like bathtub boats idling in the water, standing off about half a mile. Up dead ahead there was an ice rise about fifty meters to the cliff wall on either side. Judo thought we could traverse the ice rise and gain the top of the crust, and he felt we should mount an "away" team to look things over. I demurred, until he pointed out that if we merely backed away we'd be replaced by the cutters in any planned further action. "Gotta give 'er a clean chance," he told me. We were standing out on the bridge and it wasn't even cold. I guess we were infected with the heat of excitement and anticipation from this vast cold world that was so strangely moving into our lives. I said okay, what would you do? "Go over the top," he said. "We oughta climb over the lip here and get into this broad." God, I laughed. This broad. Judo was already preparing to "take liberties" as he said. He's a brave honcho all right, with the balls of a mastodon.*

*He picked three others and I watched them gear up and start off up the crust. They were carrying emergency oxygen, ice axes, crampons, etc., and wearing full Navy wet suits. They looked somehow like bugs crawling up that ice rise. It didn't take long, and then I saw Judo standing on top, waving down at me after he'd looked beyond, indicating a drop. I knew he was going down, was going to go down into whatever was there. Then they disappeared.*

#### *4. Ship's Date : March 18*

*We aren't officially worried, but no word from Judo; and they aren't packing rations for more than one overnight away. The radio gear isn't supposed to penetrate that much ice, so we feel the situation excused for the moment.*

*In the meantime, we pulled up a video conference with the cutter captains aboard. They are much impressed with the Ibi's communications credentials. We had Professor Macaulay, sandwich and all, together with Laurie Piper from NSF and a few other "know it alls" who like to pontificate over the true "true" of the vast cold wasteland called Antartica. Much debate about whether the fucking thing is going to melt, according to Judo, who's probably just as glad to be away from everybody talking at once and nobody giving a damn about what the professor started telling us.*

*Until, of course, Branston Pickle dripping down his wrist, he starts talking about what could be done with the iceberg the size of Delaware. He says ship it to L.A. Yes, he really said that, said it would supply fresh water for 2000 years, and the death struggle between sliding off into the briny deep and drying up like a desert prune would disappear like the argument over whether communism is here to stay. Big deal. The prof – I can see him in my mind still – saying okay, what the Saudi's tried and couldn't do, we can – if the thing holds together! Sure, that's the play on this fizzle thing. It's like the tropical storm turning into a no-name hurricane because it runs into something called a "vortex" high, yeah, I know about that.*

*How the hell would you do this? Professor says, blah, blah, blah, etc.*

*And right away his "patron girlfriend". Laurie, pipes up with her hand scratched notes on the "Press Release". This is going to top every story we've ever had, she says. Macaulay drops the remaining bits of his pickle laden sandwich as if he's sighted a hump in the sky, and starts to cough nervously; and from then on it's down hill. What's wrong with these people? The cutter captains started making fun of them, out of frustration I suppose. They liked the idea of moving that berg up north.*

#### 5. Ship's Date : March 19

*At first light we noticed the cutters had fallen off, were south of us by about three miles. It means we're moving north, the whole shebang. This cold lady must've swung through 60° of arc by now, and it's clear we're traveling north in the Ross Sea. Worry over the return of the away team has compounded the tense feelings permeating our shipboard activity.*

*But here comes Judo! We spot him at the top of the ice fall moving fast. Can't tell whether he's excited or afraid, or both. Sends a chill up the old spine. Jesus, he's bounding down that chunk-crusty ice like a jackal after a fat gopher. Then the others appear, on a rope. What's their hurry? He's waving down at us like we're blind, and we waved back. Good old Judo.*

*When we get 'em aboard, Judo tells us the bad news. "For Chri'sake," he blurts out, kicking out of his gear, "Didn't you hear nothin'?"*

*No we told him. Radios don't work under the ice. "Where the hell were you?" I ask him. "You were supposed to reconnoiter the surface."*

*"That's fuckin' it," he blurts. "We found a boneyard down there. A fuckin' gigantic boneyard."*

## Chapter ten

The spinning starts up again like a slow moving kaleidoscope and the edges are dim and fuzzy and close in he's looking straight down now at where they had the stuff in him and on him and Jesus almighty, he thought, they're all over you.

But he held on. Go with it, he's thinking. Fuck it.

Yes, a boneyard.

"You... found a boneyard?"

"Yeah, we fuckin' found a huge boneyard down there."

Judo laughs. He laughs the way a man does before they tie the blindfold. He's gray and sweaty.

"Explain!" You were getting excited too, he thought now. This was no joke, no "chicken today, bones tomorrow."

Judo'd measured the scene of telling. He was also enjoying it.

"Hell man, got over the crest an' down on the starb'd side 'n we spotted somethin' that looks like an excavation, kinda shaped like half a clam shell's been lifted up an' then they whacked off the front half've it'n then you c'ud see it was worked down the side there a long way, overlookin' the rift kinda, you know?"

You didn't know. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"A rift, Cap'n. This huge indent carved outa the side a that rift an' it goes down and back into 'er. Goes back in like a cavern in the ice. So we decided to go in."

He'd stood happily there, looking back at you like you were the idiot now.

"We decided to go in," he says again. Now he's looking off at the cutters standing by in the distance now, like he doesn't understand this. "Where they goin'?" he interrupts himself. You look around. "They're not going anywhere," you told him. "We're going!"

He didn't know why they'd stood there like that, as if they were afraid to go where Judo had started to take them.

"Okay... boneyard," the captain had finally said. "Let's put it on the table."

And that turned the trick, all right. Judo started talking.

"From the top there," he started, "this bloody fizzer thing, it stretches straight across this here beauty. It's a 'v' shaped, kind've an old crevasse like it's been around a while, y'know? An' wasn't nothin' special about it, I s'pose, just a crack across her belly, straight's an arrow, with this crusty ice blockage more 'r less the same all the way down, all the way's far as you c'ud see. All but maybe quarter mile up her starb'd side, where we noticed this sculptin' effect like it was one a them glass ant hills kids get, y'know? An' the crust seemed ta get up pretty close to 'er where she was opened up, and it wasn't so far off, so we went over there, 'n we figgered maybe we'd find out what's really underneath us here, y'know?"

"An' so we go in, and it's this thing I been tellin' you, we go down maybe a quarter mile, windin' a bit – but she's all sculpted y'see, like it wasn't natural. An' then we come out on this big cavern, an' its piled up with gravel 'n dirty rhyme 'n like it come off the land, y'know? Not like no ice berg, not like no glacier I mean, y'know? Like what's this doin' there?"

“An’ that’s when Higgins spotted the first bone. Fuckin’ thing’s bigger than him, stickin’ up outa the shit.

“An’ we poke around beside it and there’s more, je-zus man, there’s a ton a bones in there, *big* bones!”

And they were astounded. He remembered this, just astounded.

Word had already flashed through the crew from the others, and everyone started wearing a bewildered look. But maybe by the same token of response it was decided *non arguendum* not to grace the flotilla of cutters with this apochryphal information. It was decided to dial up Professor Macaulay.

## Chapter Eleven

Something seemed eerily appropriate linking up with the visual image of the Chicago expert through the vacuum of space. They were using transponders on the two polar orbiters sent up to provide just such service, with encryption included in order to not share it with Laurie Piper and the now many scientific “ear buffs” trying to tune into the adventure being faceciously referred to as the “big cube.”

Macaulay came on dressed in his usual nonchalance.

“How big was it?” he asked.

How big was what. You mean the cavern?

“Yes.”

“Plenty big,” Judo answered. “It was huge.”

“Height?”

“What?”

“Height? How high to the tops?”

“Good thirty meters,” Judo replied.

“And how far down the lateral edge?”

“Maybe half a mile,” Judo told him.

“Ah, so. And what would you say is the configuration and the general circumference?”

Judo pauses, looking studied for a moment. Then he said, “Wasn’t no general circumference, boss. She was was big as the deck a this ship, and kinda irregular, with other holes goin’ off.”

“You all saw the same thing?”

Judo had looked over at the sea captain and then at the three mates on the away team. Nobody’d said a word.

“Yeah,” said Judo. “We all saw the bones.”

“Any thing else?”

One of the others had moved, indicating he wanted to say something. Go ahead the sea captain told him.

“Ah... we... I saw some impressions in the ice walls. And there was some metallic stuff in the rhyme and the till, looked like shavings of some sort.”

“Impressions?”

“Yes, sir, like shaped shadows.”

“Were these recognizable as images?”

“No, sir.”

“But they were, as far as you could tell, not ice formations, air pockets, schisms, that sort of thing.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Did you notice anything else?”

“No, sir.”

“About how many bones would you say you saw were in there?”

“A great many, sir. The ground, I mean the ice was chock full of them, sticking out in all sorts of ways, and up on the sides of the cavern.”

“Any skulls?”

“Not that we saw, sir, at least not that we recognized as such.”

The Professor seemed to ponder this. Then, making a few notes out of camera view, he asked - “Judo, what did you do then, I mean after you’d stumbled into this.”

Judo stepped forward again, so that they were electronically face to face. “We were kinda late in there, boss, and I was kinda concerned about getting’ back. I knew them ice ledges would be treacherous after dark, so I decided maybe we should just camp right where we were in there until first light. So we did.”

“Very brave, Judo, don’t you think?”

They’d all burst out laughing again.

My Jesus god, the sea captain remembered saying then, what is this? They couldn’t stop laughing. The Professor’s laughing too, laughing so hard he was obviously very pleased with himself. Sense of humor, the sea captain thought. Always rescues.

## Chapter twelve

It was the imagination, that's what did it. When other explanations failed - when reason flagged - imagination just kicked in, the silent siren of hope and glory, and of countless horrors. The sea captain was convinced now, suspended between knowing and remembering - and very ill - that the Professor was a psychic as well as a brain. His mind was so clear, maybe the outpouring of adrenalin, a quick surge of hormone, and his thoughts had become so elegant, such a clear combination of remembered learning and intuitive knowing, yes he thought, Macaulay had it all right. You'd watched him appear on the large monitor, a transfixure among flickering electronic lines, with audio unnaturally sharp and resonant in ghostly comparison, and you knew he had the imagination all right. Would never guess at nor presume, no, never speculate as long as there was a reasonable explanation or the clear promise of one. But when there was not, the imagination barged right in. You looked at him, yes he thought, so damn laid back, like he doesn't need facts - eating lunch if you will - while the world crashes on - eyes large and deep blue and focused behind colorless shell-rim glasses, a face both friendly and smart, the big grin that was telling you his humor was uncorking a fantasy. Only it wasn't fantasy, it was conjecture, and as such, it retained a scientific "edge", a coherence that said look, we don't know what this is and we can't intelligently guess on the basis of the information at hand. So we won't try. But we'll just imagine a few things here, talk it out, and try to leave the experience with a sense that later on it may become relevant or not - nevermind which - as a useful exercise. It was a kind of no promises, no regrets performance.

You'd never expect this from scientists, he thought, especially the old ones, of his reputation. Instead of talking they'd be planning a new expedition, try to collect a few more fd-bits, and call it research. But hell, that kind of snail's pace would land you in the Cambrian after the Jurassic had already swept by. Oh well, he thought, we were not used to dealing with millions of years anyway. A few imaginative images weren't going to harm anything in that sense, were they?

He didn't know. The Professor'd asked for a delay of several hours while he considered all that had been reported to him via satellite by Judo and the away team. Then he'd come back on, carefully making sure they were on the secure channel, and presented his ideas. They were not conclusions, but they hit you smack between the eyes like they were conclusive *something*, he thought; and after what happened next, you could believe just about anything anyway.

"My first surmise," Macaulay said, smiling a little, "is that whatever it is has migrated with the ice. Considering the location of your berg prior to cracking off, I'd judge that your findings were approximately 29 or thirty miles 'inland' from the 'coastal ice shelf', which suggests that the original location relative to the West Antarctic land mass might have been on the littoral itself, like a sea port. How long it was there prior to the most recent beginnings of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet redux, no one can guess; but it must go back to the Jurassic at least, which means we're talking 60 million years or more. And as pressure from the core of the ice sheet mounted up and eventually began moving its outer edges toward

the perimeter of the continent, it slowly began to slide remnants of the land surface along the basal till, moving things slowly along in back of the faster moving ice streams. In other words, like a slow freight instead of a streamliner - something like that.

“And then of course,” he said, “assuming your discovery is carbon based, Judo, which it is very likely to be, we’re talking animal bones, not fossils; and perhaps some form of protein stripping. In other words, Judo, an abattoir – a slaughterhouse!”

Whoa! What the hell was *this* whirlygig?

What’re you talking, the sea captain blurted out. Maybe they’d all blurted it out together. Then they’d laughed.

“Well, we’re just... talking about it,” Macaulay said. “We’re just trying to deal with very limited information, and since we may not have a chance to confirm very much of it, if your ice lady decides to ground herself rock heavy on the island and starts to self destruct, we need to construct a follow up. Your trove’s in a damned vulnerable position, Judo, so maybe we’ll have to guess at some of its possibilities. We’ll try to construct a follow-up, you see. That’s all we can do.”

Easy to say, the sea captain thought now. Sit on your ass in the middle of Chicago and conjure up meat packing operations inside the biggest ice berg ever seen. No wonder nobody’d said anything, had just gaped at the tv monitor. You’d just looked at it. You’d just stood there looking.

“Okay,” said Macaulay, “I know you’re wondering where in hell this idea came from and how it can possibly stand up. But I’ll tell you how, and maybe you’ll understand as we go along. We’ll handle it this way as long as it doesn’t leak out to where Laurie’s media blitzkreig can get a mouth and ears on it.”

More laughing. The sea captain wondered in all his pain why the worst and most terrible subjects always seemed to provoke a dark humor. There’s nothing funny, he thought, about dying.

“I’ll guarantee our silence,” he’d replied. He’d been through shit before. “But what about Wheeler – the cutters?”

“Same goes. If you start imagining things without discipline, you’ll create a firestorm – or maybe an ice storm. So let’s talk in secret, okay?”

They’d agreed. They’d looked around at each other and silently sworn it.

“Well,” the Professor said, “it’s all got to do with where you are and what we can see from the satellite scans. Where you are is fairly close to latitude zero. And even with such scant evidence of some kind of intelligent operation at the coastal area in the West Antarctic, it suggests a processing center, much as the Inuits might set up today - a seal skinning operation on the North Slope – only far more elaborate. See what I mean? The location is important because it suggests a lack of randomness, suggests some kind of deliberate processing and shipping center. Bones are the by-product.”

“Who the hell would be slaughtering dinosaurs?” the sea captain asked him.

“Well, that’s why I was asking about the size and variety of the bones. They can’t have been anything else.”

“They were all big,” said Judo.

“Certainly, all big. And varied. So it suggests that whoever was there knew what they were doing, and that they left.”

“And who might that be?”

The Professor paused. He took off his glasses and held them up and looked through them as if at something he was trying to remember. “That’s what I’ve been thinking about,” he said. “Seems to me, it must have been Martians.”

Whoop! No fuckin’ way!! They all felt it.

“Yes,” the Professor went on, “that’s what I’ve been thinking about. Because we didn’t exist then. And so, since we’re looking at evidence of the top rung of the food chain, it must have been someone *like* us. And what I’m thinking is that the Martians were probably like us, perhaps not very much more advanced, but certainly willful and in command of their technology. There is no evidence of them today, unless for some reason *we* are that evidence. But what I’m saying is that there’s no reason not to suppose it, unless we refuse to unlock our understanding from a linear universal time function. And there’s no reason not to do *that* either.

“And so the reason for the south latitude location is that it was much easier to align space vehicles with the magnetic lines of force in order to find the designated landing zone, easier to automate this than to rely on any kind of dead reckoning for a spot farther north on the surface of the earth. The freighters would probably come in to the poles, and set down with minimal effect from the earth’s spin. Probably had navigational aids spread out along the surface to orient the four quadrants, like coming in from north to south, and pinpoint the landing. The animals could then be processed routinely and shipped efficiently.”

Food!! The earth was a farm!! The Martians were farming the earth!!!

They’d been stunned.

“You’re probably wondering how Martians could have navigated here from such a distant orbit,” the Professor said. “I mean, how they could do this on a regular basis.”

The Professor’d stopped as if to wait for his audience to egg him on. They were completely stupified, and the sea captain thought now it must have been because of the bones. No bones, you’d laugh yourself silly, he thought. But there were bones. Throw in the bones, you were stunned serious.

“Well, I’ve got an hypothesis for that, too,” the Professor said. “It would work out if Mars had not always been in its present orbit, you believed that somewhere in the really long ago, Earth and Mars were probably orbital twins, each in the same orbit on opposite sides of the sun. This would have made transport between them a very simple matter, and of relatively short duration.”

More silence, gaping.

“Well, don’t you see, such an orbital arrangement would have allowed different development on each planet – for example, the Martian climate might have been initially more conducive to carbon vertebrate development, and the Earth might have abounded more in water and vegetation – heavy carbon plant formations supporting large eaters. So the Martians might well have farmed the earth, bringing on or developing the large animals for food stock. They would be slaughtered and packaged without the bones in order to save the weight.”

The sea captain was feeling the nausea rising in his gorge, almost evolving out of a suppressed snicker, and he hoped it would pass but he couldn't fight it anymore. His mind started wandering in and out of memories of all this crazy talk that went on. But there was more. Now he remembered that Macaulay had paused and waited for some kind of reaction, and it had seemed like forever. Finally the sea captain himself had said:

*"I'm sorry but none of this squares with where things are now. Mars isn't where you say it would have to be in order for all this to make sense. No?"*

*"Yes, but then something else, of course, would have happened too."*

*"What?"*

*"If Jupiter and Saturn had arrived in the solar system at just about the right time and at the right angles and speeds, they might have sucked Mars out of the original orbit and left Earth where she was, protected by the intervention of the sun. And this would explain why Mars lost her atmosphere and why her people disappeared. Then, later, but not too much so, you might figure a third interloper arrived and blew apart to create the asteroid belt, and one large piece of it hit the Earth and started the cycle of the ice ages. Or perhaps it was just a Martian moon that was caught in the gravity eruption. Either way, that explosion exterminated the Jurassic operation and its livestock."*

*"Why would any fuckin' body eat a dinosaur," said Judo.*

*"Why wouldn't they?" the Professor shot back. "They were probably warm blooded, easy to breed and terrific providers of protein. One Brontosaurus might kick in two, three hundred tons of meat. If you'd get that from a Black Angus, the world's entire meat production would be in Scotland."*

*Oh, they'd laughed again.*

*Finally Judo asked him, "Hey," he said, "you really believe this shit, boss?"*

*"Yes, I do," Judo, for a lot of reasons. We know the fossil record in the Antarctic speaks to us of Martian life forms. We know this from rocks. And we know that some phyla or other, some microscopic life form came out of stellar space. So we know the theoretical possibilities. The reason we don't want to believe is that we've trained ourselves to think of time in a certain way – in a way that precludes life's development from occurring more than once or in repetitive modes. We think time started somewhere and everything progressed with it in orderly fashion – or even in chaos. We don't like to think the solar system was ever anything other than what it is, based on a singular beginning. So we're open to surprise when we finally leverage ourselves into larger and larger universal sight lines."*

*And Judo just looks, and shrugs.*

*"What we need to do, Judo, is develop the right questions. We don't need to believe anything, as far as all this goes; but it helps to say things that point us in every direction. We need to go on top and reexamine your original observations. It's not about eating dinosaurs, or about the legendary lost Atlantis for that matter. It's about fitting square pegs into round holes."*

*"What are you suggesting, specifically," the sea captain had asked.*

*The Professor shrugged, like he didn't know.*

*"Don't you know?" the sea captain asked him.*

*He shrugged again, with that signature, laid back smile. "Sure I know," he said. "What I'd like you to do, since you ask, is mount an exploration from the top of the berg down, and along the face of the fissure inward to the shadow line, at least. And since we may not have much time before she collides with the island, I believe to do any good you'll need to take just about everybody you can spare on the away team."*

*The sea captain felt a shudder of remembered shock. The gravity had not eluded him, or his reckoning. If some kind of tremor accompanied the island grounding, the fissure could rip apart, endangering both the Ibi Maru in her precarious "beaching" and the team that spread out to explore the fragile face of that ice berg along the already fragile fissure across her beam. No, there wasn't much time. He felt that. The Professor had said so and they all felt it, felt so.*

*"What about the cutters," he asked.*

*"We're communicating with both of them," Macaulay told him. "Piper's handling the links, but they're corrupted. I think we'd be better off leaving them out of this."*

*"What about our owner?"*

*"I've talked to him, the small fellow. Very bright guy. He's for it."*

*So they were for it even if they were also up against it. Go out on top. All of them but Judo and one other hand. And why not Judo? Because, the sea captain remembered now, Judo could do anything. He could handle the highly automated Ibi Maru.*

## Chapter thirteen

On top they'd had their first look at the expanse of the greatest ice berg ever carved off the West Antarctic Ice Sheet. The surface was undular, wind swept, cold and bleak in the faltering light of the Antarctic spring. To the south the gray Antarctic expanse was dense and hovering like a gloomy cloud, dark at its center. To the north the sky was brilliant, deep black and punctuated by stellar fireworks so distant that all they could do was wink through the terrestrial atmosphere. The Southern Cross was sharp and bright, as always, and the sea captain had wondered whether that was the key to celestial navigation between twin orbiting habitats. Funny, yes, he thought now, you'd wondered in spite of yourself how they got here, and maybe where they went, what they did when not even seeing it, their own world had been ripped up by its orbital roots and transplanted farther into the firmament, held captive by a menacing Jupiter. Funny, yes, and what did they do, where did they go, and was there a retreat say, to an Atlantis, and a fight for survival of such a magnitude and ferocity, man against nature, that its very conduct would spawn legends for the offspring of a hundred thousand millenia to remember?

*Whoa! The assignment was to survey the top, as far as the shadow line. They'd reckoned it less than five miles onto the plateau, and had begun trudging along the rim of the fissure eastward, sighting along the opposite face. The ice wall rose about fifty meters on average straight above the crust which filled the crevasse. The crust sat on perhaps eight hundred meters of block ice, or whatever. You were to look for signs of structure, he remembered this now, which meant essentially unusual shadows or protuberances, really anything which told your eyes that falling snow had not caused what you saw.*

And out along the far side they'd begun to see such evidences, shadows that looked like bulking protuberances, some jagged like they'd been exposed when the fissure had cracked open. Or maybe it was supposed to be open, he thought, and the catastrophe had merely filled it. The mind wanders on about things like this.

By relayed communication they were able to keep in touch with Professor Macaulay. The team had spread out and formed a line at what they'd deemed a safe distance from the precipice beside them.

Who were these gods who faced such annihilation, he thought. What did they do and what did they say to each other? Was there an Atlantis, a refuge? Was it overcome by one battering ram tsunami after another? How were the seeds of future life preserved, and in what? The Earth became so hostile that no traces of intelligent beings were tolerated in its alternately frozen, desert-like hot or totally submerged conditions. Yet something prevailed, no? Sulfur eaters, whatever, something had. There were the bones, man. He started laughing to himself, gurgling, then aching with it. Funny, funny, he thought, how would you eat a "Dinoburger?" What size bun? Or a steak. It would be the size of a truck! Were they that big – giants? He decided against it because they would hardly have had

to be muscular, given their capabilities and tools. Storing meat at the poles, processing – Jesus, maybe they canned it, he thought, Cambells Dinosaur! The aching was hurting his chest and he fought to stop it. Nurse Charlotte noticed and came to him, and began massaging his chest softly and rubbing his face. She brought it under control and he thanked her without having to. She knew.

## Chapter fourteen

*He heard the low, protracted "hunph" and looked over. The sidewall had just collapsed, taking five of the men with it. He saw the far side begin to crumble, great calamitous hunks shattering into the fall, cracking off more as they accelerated down. Clouds of ice began to white out the intervening gulf. Then the radios sqawked into action – what the hell's going on?*

*Judo's voice, calm and excited, saying, "We've hit the shoals, cap'n, Macaulay doesn't know which way she'll turn." Then it was obvious which way. She was breaking apart along the fissure, pulling herself open where the Ibi Maru was stranded, and the Ibi Maru was dropping off her foothold like a shoe off the bed, clop-wham! rocking violently with tons of splintered ice crashing down on top of her. "She's taken a hit," Judo informed him, just short of screaming. "One of the fuckin' outriggers's gone, sheered off. But she's righting and we'll make it." He was too excited to say that the ship had shot backwards too, with her bow submerged.*

*Good. At least that particular horror wasn't on. The other, indeed, it was – men overboard, Jesus, over the side of that ice cliff. There were eight of them left, roped together in a line at an angle to the edge of the sidewall, just so that if one or two went over, the rest would pound in their ice picks and hold. The others who'd gone had roped in a line parallel to the edge and he hadn't noticed. They were a good hundred feet back when she let go.*

*They were paralysed, watching in frozen, stupefying horror, not daring to move near what was left of the jagged edge to see the outcome.*

*And he knew then that he'd been foolish not to use the small chopper to reconiter the fissure, wrong not to have kept his crew on board instead of stranded on top of a wild ice berg that was breaking apart. "Judo! Can you raise the cutters?"*

*"Yes."*

*"Can they organize a chopper lift?"*

*"I think so."*

*"We've lost five. They're over the side. How far in are we?"*

*"Maybe two, three miles."*

*"Can she cut her way in here? Any chance of moving up to mount a rescue?"*

*"Sure can. We lost one outrigger, and one a the loco-engines has derailed, and we're over maybe two, three degrees list to sta'b'd. Otherwise, boss, she fuckin' ready to go. We'll burn a hole!"*

*Jesus almighty, yeah, that was Judo, all right. Burn a hole!*

*"Judo, see if you can manoeuvre into the gap. It seems to be widening, at least from up here. I can barely see across. It should open up some water."*

*"Yeah, boss, I see. Jesus, there's stuff hangin' out!"*

He'd seen it too. Stuff that looked like parts and maybe even whole animals coming in chunks out of the fractured ice face on the opposite side of the gulf that was opening up along the fissure. And other, indiscerible stuff, like box parts, tubes, no, rails maybe, hard to say. Suddenly fascinating, he thought. He's been

stranded on top of a moving world of ice, watching a counterpart move slowly away in the distance. And then he'd seen the strip, the long, polished expanse stretched between the halves like a magnificent sword being unsheathed by an invisible hand buried in the ice like a dead man anchor. "Judo! You see anything up ahead?" It had been twenty minutes or so, and he could hear the whump, whump of the big Coast Guard chopper circling to set down.

"Yeah, that shiney thing!"

"Yes, that's it. What is it, can you tell?"

"Looks like a fuckin' sword."

"No, no, can't be that." He'd risen to his own bait. Stop it, he'd told himself. Get a grip on!

But no grip could have prepared him for what happened next.

## Chapter fifteen

Sometimes the mind refuses to accept what the memory serves to it. Sometimes it wants to go away on its own hook, forget about "it". Sometimes it represses the visual part and goes with just the cold knowing what happened, like a bald recitation of history. Sometimes it spins, turns it this way and that to fill a void, and yet sometimes it lies to itself. He knew he'd started that, started up that way, because they'd taken them, gathered them up, the survivors taken off of that cracking, crumbling precipice of faulty ice, and just flown away. Jesus, he thought, the guilt from that discourtesy was instantaneous. *You lure a captain off his ship while she's still afloat and his own man is aboard and you transport him like a sorry ass to McMurdo because the big chopper can't land on the cutters, either one. Like taking a man out of town to tell him his house's burned down, something like that.* The pain of it resembled shock, and the response was deeply shocking. He'd yelled, screamed, bug-eyed himself in rage – and they'd listened, somewhat horrified themselves, and had then taken him back in a small chopper to the ----- under Wheeler's command.

The interval was foggy at best – how long it actually took, what happened in the meantime, what he'd felt being delivered to a scene of complete chaos, a scene where he should've been smack in the middle, commanding.

And then it refocused, and at that point his mind returned it all, like a gift. He now remembered Captain Wheeler turning away from the ward room locker with two large snifters of brandy, holding one out. He looked like the apparition of a brother officer, vaguely unreal. He looked like he cared but was disembodied. Sure, he remembered now, with the recognition twisting into him like a stab wound, it was a full flood of the old Japanese "shocku", as the small fellow would've put it, one dynamiting revelation blowing out the remains of another. The Ibi Maru was gone, and Judo was gone with her, squashed by a trillion tons of glacial ice clapped together like a couple of gods screwing in heaven. He laughed silently. Steve Wheeler had explained it as a miscalculation – gently implying that the sea captain should've kept Judo and the Ibi standing off where the fizzle had spit, standing off to await the sea captain's rescue. He'd gone in, grinding through the icy detritus, and whatever, sliding ever deeper into that widening crack with everything from ten thousand years falling into it. And then came the sudden warning from professor Macaulay: recalculation said the ice island would graze the bottom shoals and start snapping back together, a reversal of his original expectation. There was something else, something holding. And there might not be much time and there wasn't, but by then no one knew what the hell Judo was doing in there, on his own. He'd had one crewman on hand, a chopper man, and they'd assumed, expected at least to see the small chopper appear over the rim of the ice wall and bring both of them out. It did appear, rose like the very dead itself at the last moment, but no Judo. Judo was not in the chopper.

They'd then interrogated the chopper hand and the man had been incoherent, babbling. He'd stumbled out and kept on mumbling, "... those... those Things!"

*You asked to see him, and they told you he'd already been airlifted - to Auckland.* Some kind of bullshit, he thought.

"Well I don't suppose you know that either," Wheeler'd said to him, turning with the sniffers more than half full.

"What? Know what?"

"That you were set up, old boy. No, I don't suppose you knew that at all." Wheeler's demeanor was truly puzzling, but sympathetic now. He lifted the snifter to glance at the carmel liquid before placing it to his lips and taking a sip without taking his eyes off the sea captain.

*You just stood there, blank.*

*What set up? Why would there be a set up?*

"What do you mean?" he'd asked Wheeler. He'd been too dumbstruck to raise his own glass.

For a long moment, they confronted each other, and he could visualize this all over again, the seeming silence of the barren ward room. Then Captain Wheeler smiled knowingly, as if that would signify his benign intent.

"Well," he said, "as you probably *don't* know then, you were eased into this commission in the first place, old boy. It was important to know exactly what that breaker of theirs could do, and to know it from the inside. They figured you were the one. You'd earned a big bit of fearlessness credit over that rescue thing off the Jersey coast, and you'd been burned – sorry – I should've said scabbed by a couple of tough duty tours in Nam. You were vulnerable to the idea of this command, and they correctly figured the Japanese would be favorable."

*Whoa! Who? What?*

"What're you... talking about, Wheeler? And don't call me 'old boy'."

"Sorry, old boy. I think of you as a friend. I didn't mean to trespass."

*And you'd just said forget it. Maybe you should've hit him.*

"No, you see," Wheeler'd told him, "the Allies have been spying on each other for some time, and sometimes they collaborate too, especially when something hot jumps up in the private sector, like this mammoth ice breaker of yours. The Japanese were unofficially just as curious about her as we were, when we heard about it. They do some amazing things on their own, you know, like that floating airport in Tokyo harbor. But since this here job was secretive and private to boot, a 'keibatsu' kind of thing with an international flavor, the Jap officials called in our NSC guys, and they talked it over.

"By the way," Wheeler interrupted himself, "did you know they can listen to any damn phone call anywhere on earth? They do that, you know."

The sea captain felt a memory returning of the nausea he'd begun to feel in the pit of his stomach, listening to this. He could hardly respond.

"...listen," he's said.

"Yes. And more, they anticipate and conspire."

"What the hell? To do what!"

Captain Wheeler smiled, as if he really knew. "I don't know," he said. "I just said that."

"No, come on."

“Yes, for real. That’s what they say. So you’ve been on a visible track all the way along. I don’t know why.”

“And you knew?”

“No, of course not. We’re not in a need to know loop. But I found out. When this giant berg business kicked in, they decided to lure the Ibi Maru down the peninsula coast, see if we could thrust her into some really awkward conditions. See what she really could do, which was their way of figuring why she was built, you know? Ramming her up on the shelf crust was my idea. Hope you didn’t mind.”

He was so god damn matter of fact, the sea captain remembered. So bloody normal.

They’d stared each other into a silent standoff, and then finally the sea captain had responded, quite simply, “... no.” Why the hell should he have minded being manipulated?

“I don’t suppose Macaulay was in on it,” he ventured.

“No, not really. But they got him into it because he’s the expert on these big chunks of ice. They thought it would kind of lend weight to the lure.”

“I see.”

Then, after more staring at each other, the sea captain remembered, he’d tossed off the brandy neat and wiped his lips and said, “So what happened to Judo?”

## Chapter sixteen

What the sea captain had then been forced to learn, standing in an empty ward room aboard ship with his former navy colleague, was that Judo had “gone down” with the Ibi Maru. Gone down, however, enveloped in a crush of ice. The small chopper secured on the aft deck of the ship and was seen suddenly to rise above the crest of the two colossal sheets of ice as they closed in for a mega collision at a rate of perhaps eight to ten knots, each half half the size of Delaware. *Try to imagine the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal snapping shut on a fleet of barges, as if Pennsylvania and Maryland hated each other.* He snickered, silently, working the image. But nothing suggested or even compared to that impact, he thought. He held to it in disbelief. And yes, Captain Wheeler told him then, it must have resembled something like a titanic clam shell cracking shut on a speck of grit, hungry. It was like the Empire State Building falling on a bicycle.

“Sure, we’d had ‘ol Macaulay on the conference line,” Wheeler said, “had him there steady on. And like almost while he’s explaining to us that the tip of this damn berg is going to ground on the shoal reefs near Ross Island and could back-whip, and all the while we were preoccupied with you being whisked away from those ice top Perils of Pauline perches you were on before you slipped into what we thought was the widening, crumbling crack, the damn thing just did happen, just as he said it would, only it came on in some kind of surreal quick-time. Apparently there was a spring-like effect, I mean it fucking turned itself around, or maybe I should say just snapped back on itself, if you can imagine the Grand Canyon bouncing off Utah and slamming shut - like there was some kind of flex going on. And by this time old boy, Judo had your Ibi so far up the opened fissure he couldn’t hope to get her out. He was gonna save your ass if it killed him, and it did. Neither one of you were thinking that through because if you’d realized...” He broke off, looking down, embarrassed. “Sorry old boy, didn’t mean to say that. It wasn’t your fault, none of it was. If we’d had a couple more small choppers, that would’ve helped. If Judo had been tuned in to the professor, maybe that would’ve too. It was going to trap him and crush the Ibi like a dry gourd whacked between two huge mortar balls. And sure enough, we were communicating on broadband when he finally told us what it was like in there, the sea rising like an enormous tide, sloshing the huge calving ice boulders against the ice walls and popping them up and down like corks in a bath tub; and finally he just said it was all up, and so we naturally expected to see him aboard that small chopper when it took off with the other crew hand and came up above the cloud spitting fissure. And then, when we saw the chopper come up, we thought he was out of there, but he wasn’t. He was still in, on the old Ibi, when those separated ice sheets, that goddam berg clanged shut on itself, and nevermind what you saw from two or three miles away, the cloud rising behind the little chopper like an ominous ice-ball, the chunks leaping into the air and the front of that great berg splitting like so much kindling - it made sounds like I don’t ever want to hear again - a protracted, low, now rising sort of whump-crunch growl and then sharper cracks like lightning going off right on top of you and then

deeper whumps and grinding like you could only imagine with two gigantic ice blocks half the size of Delaware putting their combined momentum into a frenzy of heat energy. The mist was a fog, and the frosty detritus rose and rose, spit up like a huge plume, and these great, huge chunks of berg were being spewed up and down out of that fizzle and popped out airborne into the sea, and a colossal wave was spiking in front of us and the noise of all that just rising into an ungodly pitch and never seeming to end - until it did end, ended with a sea full of ice and danger with ourselves in the middle of all that, especially the ----, which was right opposite the fizzle when she collapsed together, and took that wave spike full brunt, even though it was already being dampened by the sea ice, and the first mate actually glimpsed the Ibi Maru struggling for her life down that collapsing lane of water between the halves. Oh, yes, and after a near capsized they picked up the small chopper with your surviving hand aboard, and he told them he'd seen it too, from above, how that trillion ton mass of glacial ice had come clapping together and the Ibi had just disappeared inside, like a flea squashed between two huge hands."

The sea captain stared, had stared at all this, just... incredulous.

"He's..."

"Yes. That was it, old boy. So, rescuing you and your remaining crew was a bit of an anti-climax, I'm afraid. A bit of an anti-climax to one helluva situation, one helluva maiden voyage. And now the conspiracy guys won't even have to wonder what the hell you were up to."

"Me!"

"Well, you know. Your owner..."

So, flat on his back on the gurney, tubes all over him and things pinging, he finally realized he'd been eukered, sucked in and then taken away from his own command not even knowing she'd gone down in a cataclysm, with Judo on board. What else, Jesus, he thought, could go wrong in his life.

"Don't feel so bad," Wheeler'd tried to console him. "I mean, I know how you feel, I'm not trying to minimize that. But it was out of your hands, old boy, out of all of our hands. They'd come up with some theory that the maybe Ibi Maru was designed to cut permanent lanes through the Arctic icepack, open up a true Northwest Passage. Seems like a Japanese supertanker had tried and actually made it through on the cusp on winter, before the ice flows were grounded in the Bering Strait. So in their infinite wisdom, they, whoever they are, were apparently convinced that your owner was scheming to cut a path with this super ice breaker of yours, and that every goddam maritime financial interest in the world would suddenly go on full alert. Kill off the Panama, that sort of thing. And control bulk cargo transit like no goddam OPEC ever thought of doing. That's it, you see. Kind of too bad you never got up there."

Wheeler had grimaced sympathetically.

"And Macaulay was part of that, I suppose."

*You hadn't even meant to say that. Hadn't meant even to think about it. But it just came out.*

Wheeler'd fixed you with a stare. "Don't know, old boy. But there was some sort of a relationship between him and your Judo."

*And suddenly you were thinking about it.*

"I know that. It doesn't mean he was in on it though, does it?"

"No. But I feel sorry for that guy. Not that he died, but that he was used."

"You mean Judo."

The sea captain had just shrugged, resigned. "And I suppose," he'd said, "the bones and all that... that was part of the story, part of the cover."

*It was like you'd hit him upside the face, not aggressively but not friendly either.*

"What?" Wheeler had a surprised, puzzled look, and the sea captain suddenly realized that all of their communications with Macaulay about the berg had been on the secure channel. Perhaps no one else knew about it.

"The bone yard," he repeated, a flush of satisfaction started up in him, a rush of excitement like he'd caught his adversary with an uppercut.

"The what?" Wheeler said it again. He was slack jawed.

"Jesus," the sea captain had told him, "you didn't know about the discovery?"

"What... discovery?"

## Chapter seventeen

What discovery. It sent a chill down his spine just to remember it now, how he'd informed Wheeler of something so stupendous it simply dwarfed the cataclysm of the ice berg. Ancient life, no, intelligent life, far deeper into the past than anyone could calculate. Scant evidence, but unmistakable, of huge, warm blooded creatures roaming the earth, a plentiful supply for meat eating humanoids from space, creatures who not only were not unlike yourself but might even be ancestral to you, glimpses of an anthropological past so tantalizing that you could almost believe anything, just as Macaulay had pointed out. And the band of metal, the anomalous strip they'd sighted just before the calamity, what was that? Had it somehow contributed to the disaster? Maybe it had acted like some sort of spring, fixed with dead man anchors at either end.

And what were they watching from on top of the berg? It crumbled away and they saw something, saw a lot of somethings. What did the chopper hand see afterwards? What was it like down there in the calder of ice?

His body was electric with feeling, like some animus was trying to control his outer movement, something instinctive and worresome. They'd seen parts all right, parts of limbs, maybe whole critters, frozen and then spit out like gristle after countless icy millenia. What's a fucking million years, he thought. What's sixty times that. What the hell.

The chopper hand had said, "those... those THINGS!" What things? He'd been hauled off like he'd seen something he wasn't supposed to talk about. Maybe humanoids, sure, maybe the Martians. Jesus, who knew? He'd bagged Wheeler on that discovery issue all right, shocked him to the core. So even though they's hauled off the chopper hand, they had virtually nothing to go on. What did he mean "those... those THINGS!"

Was it something alive and moving? Draped all over the Ibi in her death struggle? According to Wheeler, the mate on the ---- who'd witnessed a glimpsing death of the Ibi, the sea captain's ship had been listing to port, one of its outriggers partly shorn off, with dark ice all over her superstructure. It was a wonder the chopper'd been able to lift off at all, he marveled. And he wondered how horrified Judo must have felt watching the great ice walls close in. Like the giant rock that crushed Gagool at the mouth of King Solomon's Mine, he conjectured. *Yeah, like that, a fiction.*

Yet it was a fiction that burned his memory, agitated his brain. To be left with questions of such enormity, to be denied inquiry, to be sidetracked and pointed in the direction of yet another failure, that was the sickening part. And to put it all in a journal, a captain's log, that seemed like it was the only way to hold off the final conclusion, especially since the final conclusion wasn't final.

*Oh, yeah, you'd rocked 'em all right. There was something in that ice berg more important than any fucking Northwest Passage, and they'd completely blown the opportunity to find out by enticing the Ibi Maru into obvious danger. And professor Macaulay had shut them out. They were, indefinably, the enemy.*

It wasn't final, oh no. What was final was so shocking that not even he could believe it. What happened then was so shocking, nobody could believe it.

## Chapter eighteen

It was resurrection! Dear mother of god, he thought, you're standing there in an anti-climax, dishing out a new reality to Wheeler, when the radio chatter starts in again, this time the ----, calling frantically. *You fairly jumped out of the ward room onto the bridge, barging into the wheel house. "Cap'n to the bridge, Cap'n to the bridge", yeah, something was going on.*

*And Captain ---- of the ---- was saying "Wheeler, for god's sake can you see this? Off your port quarter." You were maybe three miles off, drifting in the ice. Wheeler takes the binoculars and looks, then hands it your way. You looked and you saw it, indistinctly at first. Wheeler's already calling the helm over and to power up to half flank. You would close in twenty minutes. Seemed like forever.*

But if you could, if you could possibly imagine, he thought, trembling on the gurney, an *aurora borealis* of such strength and magnitude that it's flashing, rolling shapes would penetrate dense high cloud cover, actually peer through cloud banks, you'd only half understand what was going on. The ---- was ahead, dead in the water about half a mile off the wall of ice where the fizzle had clapped shut. And now you could see increasing spot of light, *moving within that wall!*

The sea around was calm, and yellowing with a pale glow emanating from the wall. It made the stacks of calved ice look menacing, almost evil. The short Antarctic day was quickly fading, and it began to look like lightning going on *inside that ice berg!*

And then it happened. The wall exploded. They were headed right for it and it suddenly seemed to disintegrate, blasting ice and mist outward, like a huge fist punching through. *Blam!!* Out came the Ibi Maru, a ghostly sight, covered with ice, frost, detritus, mist and – *what?* Jesus, he thought, *it was crawling with Stuff!!*

And she veered and wobbled and staggered in the roiling sea, pushing a bow wave that rocked the ---- sideways, almost to capsize. Staggering on under full power, *and you and Stephen Wheeler are standing beside the helm on the --- looking at a resurrection, a crushed hull still fighting mightily, valiantly, pounding ahead, veering again heading north...*

And then she just disappeared in the mist and the dark of night, vanished. She had cut her way out somehow, someway, with super, inconceivable power, had blasted her way through the fault line of the crevasse formed by the tightly clamped fizzle, had maybe somehow bounced free inside with the reaction of the ice walls to each other. Jesus, he still didn't know. And those things cluttering her superstructure! There were no internal lights visible, at least from that distance; and the clutter seemed half dead and... *Jesus, half almost alive. There was movement, and it wasn't Judo. What the hell was it?*

They never found out. The Ibi Maru disappeared going north, and was taken by the Antarctic waters just as Endurance had been taken before her, but not without an incredible fight for survival, and not without an equally incredible "resurrection" at the hands of an indomitable Judo.

And he always suspected, would always suspect, he thought, cursing his own pain, that the professor had been closely in touch, and that Judo and he had been talking – damn it, had been talking all the while about those *THINGS!*

Yes, he'd been trying to record it all, had put as much as he could muster into the captain's log, but his hand and mind rebelled at the details. And he suffered for it, and had finally collapsed. And now here – here and now – it was fading, fading away. He looked over at nurse Mae and wondered if Shackleton's bravery was really ever understood, or if Judo's could be imagined. He wondered if it would ever be possible to drag Professor Macaulay out into the open. He wondered now why he was rising again, higher and higher to the ceiling, and he thought, *quick now, it's got to be quick.*

end