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Mimi, Captain's Log

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November 20, 2047, 57°S 14°E
Here there is no stillness. There is only motion. Change is our constant.

The steel cloud presses into heaving, abstract clashes of saltwater whipped by screaming wind.

And through this dense meaning of cold, the shape, sound and texture of minus degrees: an icebreaker. *My* icebreaker. Mimi and her crew, on a mission to liberate some packs and pancakes.

In this heated world, what commodity is more precious than ice?

November 21, 2047, 59°S 23°E
The Ice-Cold War started when the Antarctic Treaty was broken. Five years ago, today. We each toasted a whiskey-finger in the galley, to mark the grim anniversary.

2042: nuclear warships from three belligerent nations crossed the 60th parallel south. It started as a show of adventurous military might. "Our RIGHT to Explore!" was the cocky catchphrase, but soon enough the real motives shone through. Ice prices were surging. With none left at the north pole, all the extractocrats looked beadily south. The nouveau-populists, those fascist fuckbois who rigged and jigged systems to take over erstwhile democracies, wanted a new slice of the south polar pie to stick a flag in. First, they jostled, then they scratched each other's backs and drew up new imaginary

lines across the White Continent and the Southern Ocean, keeping the conflict on ice if everyone stuck to their own shelf.

Five years later, the war has crystallised into this rigid pattern: the subs and warships flex at each other from a distance, patrol and harvest their parcels, and collaterally damage whatever creature is in their way. Their fire power is rarely discharged, but always in view. While they war over the right to chisel the fast ice and scoop the floes, our nimble, clever boat dodges, nets, retreats, quietly picking up crumbs from the edges.

With sailorly savvy and the ageing but solid tech on our trusty, sharp-bowed ship, our blue-green-grey razzle-dazzle, we've dodged the subs' crosshairs. So far.

November 22, 2047, 60°S 31°E

Ice-mining is illegal.

That is, if anyone but the masters of the nuclear subs does it.

They call it the 'International Ice Extraction Partnership' but if you ask us, IIEP is just another front for claiming the commons.

According to this "law"—as unjust as any other robber baron diktat—we're "stealing" ice because only licensed "partners" can "harvest". The real muggers are those brutes with gaudy epaulettes stuck to their Gore-Tex shells, carrying AKs and RPGs, stomping snow off their golden pumpkin boots, kicking penguins, brazenly overseeing the forced calving of tonnes of ice and its loading onto the megabreakers, which then heave mercilessly back through the shuga, towards home country ice markets. There, prices are set centrally, and supply is controlled at ice-ration stations.

Mimi and her crew? We're free to steal and trade. We were lucky to have been out on the open ocean when everything changed. The scientists overwintering when the treaty was shattered are now indentured with unforgiving martial commanders, their expertise forcibly extracted, their labour captive to this military-industrial freeze economy. As soon as we learned about the ice-rush, we went sub-comms to reorganise our lines of command. We debated for days until we agreed on our modus. They voted me Captain. My

fourth re-election now. I've told everyone I'm retiring once this year is up.

High winds bawl, heavy waves batter this line that touches no land. They offer cover for our stealth.

I hold Mimi on the 60th for now. We'll ride this side, following the silver twilight east into the horizon, letting the wild westerly backwind our engines. Though fuel is low I can stretch what remains to last this mission.

November 23, 2047, 60°S 42°E

Beyond: ice disks float in startled geometry, trading shades of pale blue. Beckoning.

My pretty ship, my brave little icebreaker, safe in her clever dazzle dress. Gently nudging these floes until it's time to start netting.

The polar nights are long enough and the swell high enough to hide behind. We've been tracking the subs, mining-ships and megabreakers. I'm confident that we're in unpatrolled sea ice. Mimi's been dark since sunset. When the ice fog arrives deep past midnight, we will unwind the winch and drop the nets. On average we catch two dozen pancakes a shift. Tonight, we'll aim for three. The team is silent, practised. Everyone knows their role, their place.

We're ready. In two hours, we go.

November 24, 2047, 58°S 39°E

The damned nuke-sub surprised us as we were hauling out the last batch of pancakes. We gave as good a shock, I know. They must've just been coming up for a moonrise—no way could they have read past our sonic-shield. It was a strange stand-off. Mimi's whole crew froze in the act.

The sub opened comms on its loudspeaker with an aggressive missive to identify. Torpedo turrets swivelled our way.

I loudspeakered back that we were allied indentured scientists. I announced their confidential vessel code, which my crack team had hacked and read into my earpiece, signalling that because we knew their identity, location and reporting structure ahead of time,

we outranked them. Working undercover, I said, top secret mission, need-to-know basis. They could check back with HQ to confirm.

The gun sights blinked. I told them we'd be done shortly, and that there would be hell to pay from the Commander for whoever delayed us. That he'd strip the brass of any low-ranking subsailor captain who'd squealed.

They floated firm, watching. We finished netting fast.

I gave the signal to raise the nets, and within three minutes the winch and team were back on board. We saluted the sub, then powered unhurriedly but fast as we could north-east. When we were out of sight into the slush, we zigged directly north-west, sending off a decoy signal in the other direction.

By the time they confirmed (if they were savvy enough to try) we were not what I'd said we were, we'd be long gone.

It was too close a call.

I'll call a special meeting. The crew needs new leadership.

And yet: three hundred kilograms of ice in the store. A decent bounty to end my tenure.

December 10, 2047, 40°S 23°E

We live off this white market trade, up-ocean well north of the 50s, where the hot and sweaty brokers meet us in warmer waters on their shiny superyachts, ready to pay top dollar for our polar bounty. Sales are swift. We slice and saw chunks in the freezer, weigh, cost and take air-cash, then transfer the goods in insulated boxes marked "FINEST SOUTHERN SNOEK". They sail home, ready to re-sell at eyewatering markups.

Our takings are evenly split. Each crew member converts, encrypts and banks their share. I'll do the same, then pack my gear and say my goodbyes. My brother will meet me in international waters two days sail west of here, with my beloved 30-foot *Cami*.

Then, we'll meander back to my mooring in the plastic barrel jetty that's replaced the sunken harbour, and I'll settle in to rub off the salt and reacquaint myself with the heat simmering off the flat-top mountain.

Mimi and her new Captain (Crystal: excellent choice) and old crew will head back towards the Antarctic circle to liberate a new load from the Ice-Cold War. Perhaps someday I'll come back out to see them in the guise of a buyer. That's if the well-heeled yachties leave any ice slabs for the likes of me.