

THE LAST WARM PLACE

CHAPTER TWO · REACHABLE



15 September. Day One.

ENGINEERING. PROCEED TO
SURVIVAL CONFIGURATION.



Reactor A carries the
ship.

Reactor B comes
down clean and
remains ready.



Hotel, ventilation, water, refrigeration, navigation,
and minimum propulsion are stable on A.

Independent
confirmation.



Essential bus stable. Reserve bus
available.



REACTOR A — ONLINE
REDUCED SURVIVAL
LOAD

REACTOR B —
CONTROLLED SHUTDOWN
IN PROGRESS

Unload B's turbine generator.



Open B generator breaker.

A has the essential load.
Margin confirmed.



CHK—THUNK

B generator open.

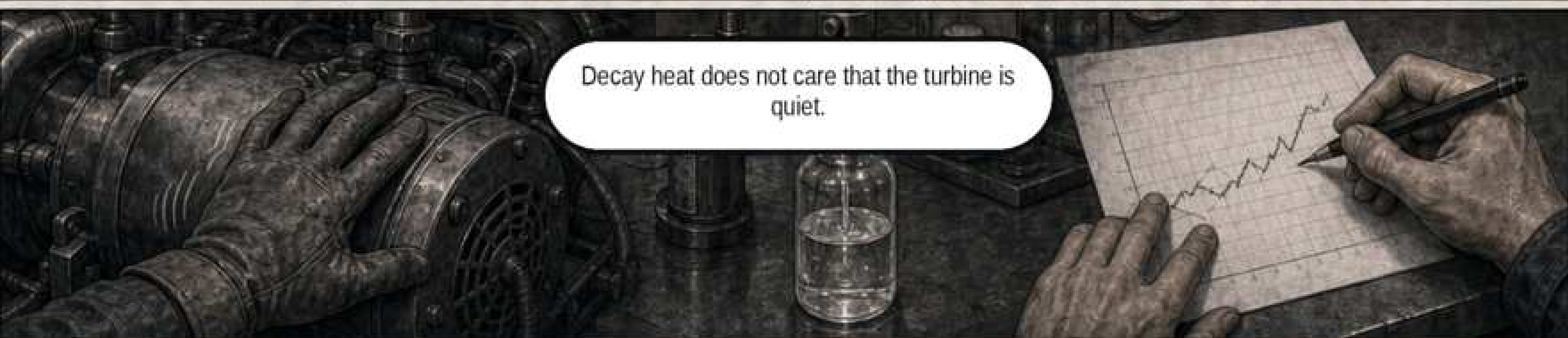


NNNNNNnnnn...



Controlled shutdown. Confirm
rods and temperature
response by channel.

Responding normally. No
disagreement.



Decay heat does not care that the turbine is
quiet.



B is shut down. It is not dead.

One heart at a time.

Cooling, chemistry, and watch continue.



Three hours later.

Power-control module. One listed.



The shelf says zero.



Installed during the April maintenance period.

Replenishment request closed with the job.

The request closed. The shelf did not refill.

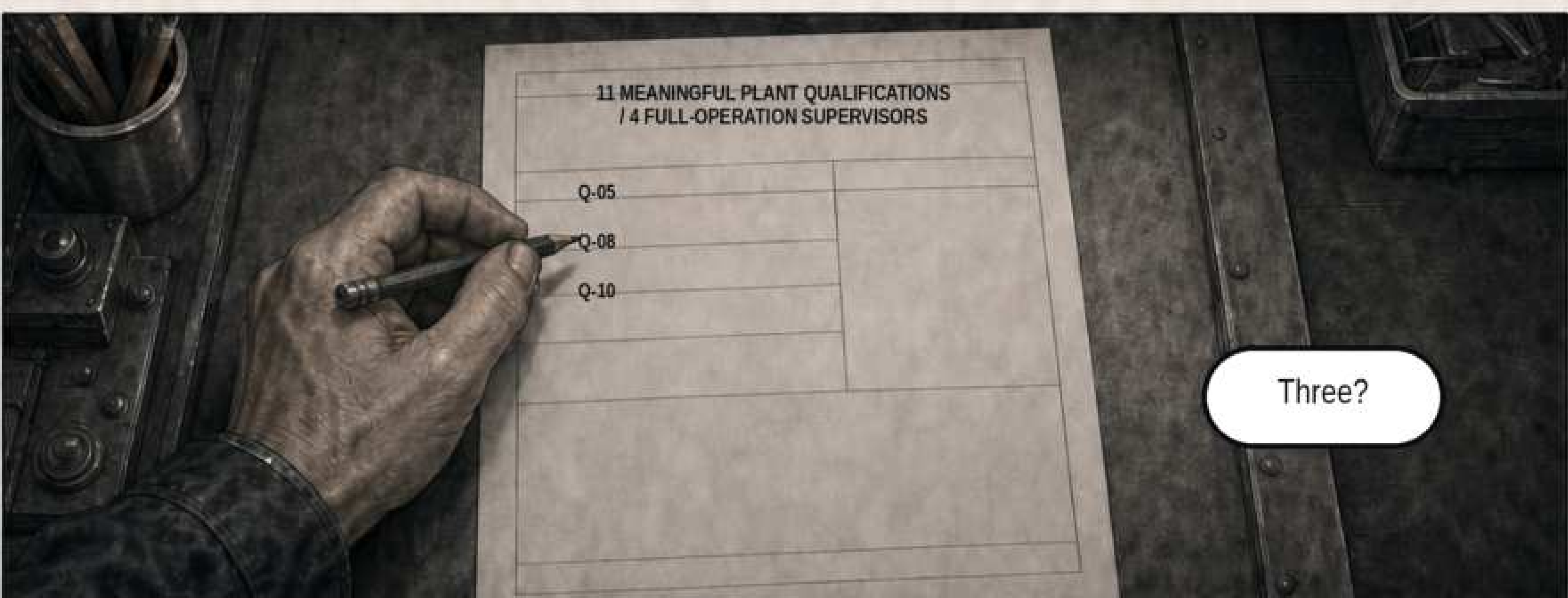


An entire redundancy existed only on paper.



Nothing is broken.

Then this is when we learn what breaks next.





Low-power emergency carrier. Three bursts in eleven minutes.

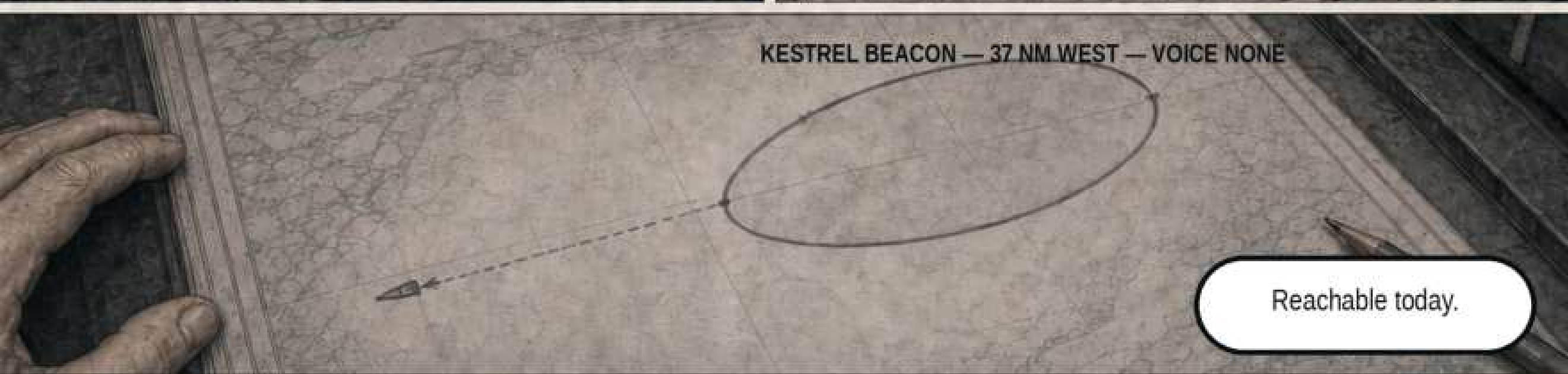


No voice. No data beyond the beacon identifier.



Kestrel drift station.

Its retrieval schedule put it west of us.



Reachable today.



A beacon is not a survivor.

It is a place to look.

pip... pip... pip...



Known costs.

A day off course. Aviation fuel. Ice exposure.
Unknown medical demand.



Unknown casualties. Unknown contamination.
Our sickbay has twelve beds, not twelve cures.



Every person changes
the ration horizon.

By how much?

Not until we know a
number.

Give me the variables you
can defend. I'll test the
dependency.

With the galley
worker beside you.

With whoever can prove me
wrong.

Public assumptions. Public
corrections.

Agreed.



The camp may hold bodies, fallout,
or more people than we can support.

It may hold living people whose signal
will be under that ridge tomorrow.



What can we learn without
committing the ship?

Helicopter
reconnaissance.

With a contamination survey
before anyone lands.



One aircraft. Approximately thirty-one safe flight hours before this launch.

Weather window: less than two hours at Kestrel.



Survey from the hover. If it passes, we land.

I count living, injuries, and what can be moved.



Reconnaissance is not rescue authorization.

Correct.



No landing until the remote sample is inside limits.

No loading plan until we know every living person.



Launch.

Reachable now.

WHUP—WHUP—WHUP—



Survey first. Nobody steps
onto the ice before the result.

Understood.



AIRBORNE. TURNING WEST.

pip... pip...



Report what is there.
Not what we hope is
there.



KESTREL IN SIGHT.



Runway broken. Ridge through the sleeping module.

Movement at the orange shelter.



No contamination rise outside our current operating limit.

That clears landing. It does not clear the people medically.



KESTREL TO AIRCRAFT. NINE LIVING.





Fourteen on station.

Nine here. Five in the sleeping module when the ridge moved.



Names?

I have all fourteen.



I can feel the heel.

Keep telling me if that changes.

Crushed forefoot. Open wound. She needs the ship's sickbay.

Can you save it?

I can keep her alive and control infection. I cannot promise the foot.



ZVEZDA, KESTREL
COMPLEMENT FOURTEEN.
NINE LIVING. FIVE DEAD.

ONE LITTER. EIGHT
AMBULATORY WITH
INJURIES.





With the litter, team, gear, fuel, and reserve: five survivors.

Not nine.

SAFE THIS LIFT — 5 SURVIVORS
SECOND LIFT OUTSIDE WEATHER MINIMUM



Ceiling reaches flight minimum before a second safe return.

We can take the litter and four.



Then four watch it leave.



No partial lift.

Aino needs sickbay.

Samira stabilizes her. The aircraft leaves its field supplies and returns before the ceiling closes.

All nine?



We bring the ship.

All nine.



Come left to Kestrel bearing.

Safe speed for the ice we can verify.



The diversion costs the day and puts the western ridge under our bow.

Log both.



A can carry the verified propulsion load with hotel and refrigeration intact.

No sprint. No borrowed margin from B's cooling watch.



KRUMM—KRRRSH



Thirty-seven nautical miles was a coordinate. The ice made it a route.



Six hours into the diversion.

Next antibiotic time is marked. No one changes her dressing without me.



This lane held the crawler yesterday.

Yesterday's ice gets a new test.



**KESTREL, ZVEZDA.
RADIO CHECK.**

**KESTREL READS. NINE
LIVING. CONDITION HOLDING.**



GRRNNK—KRAK

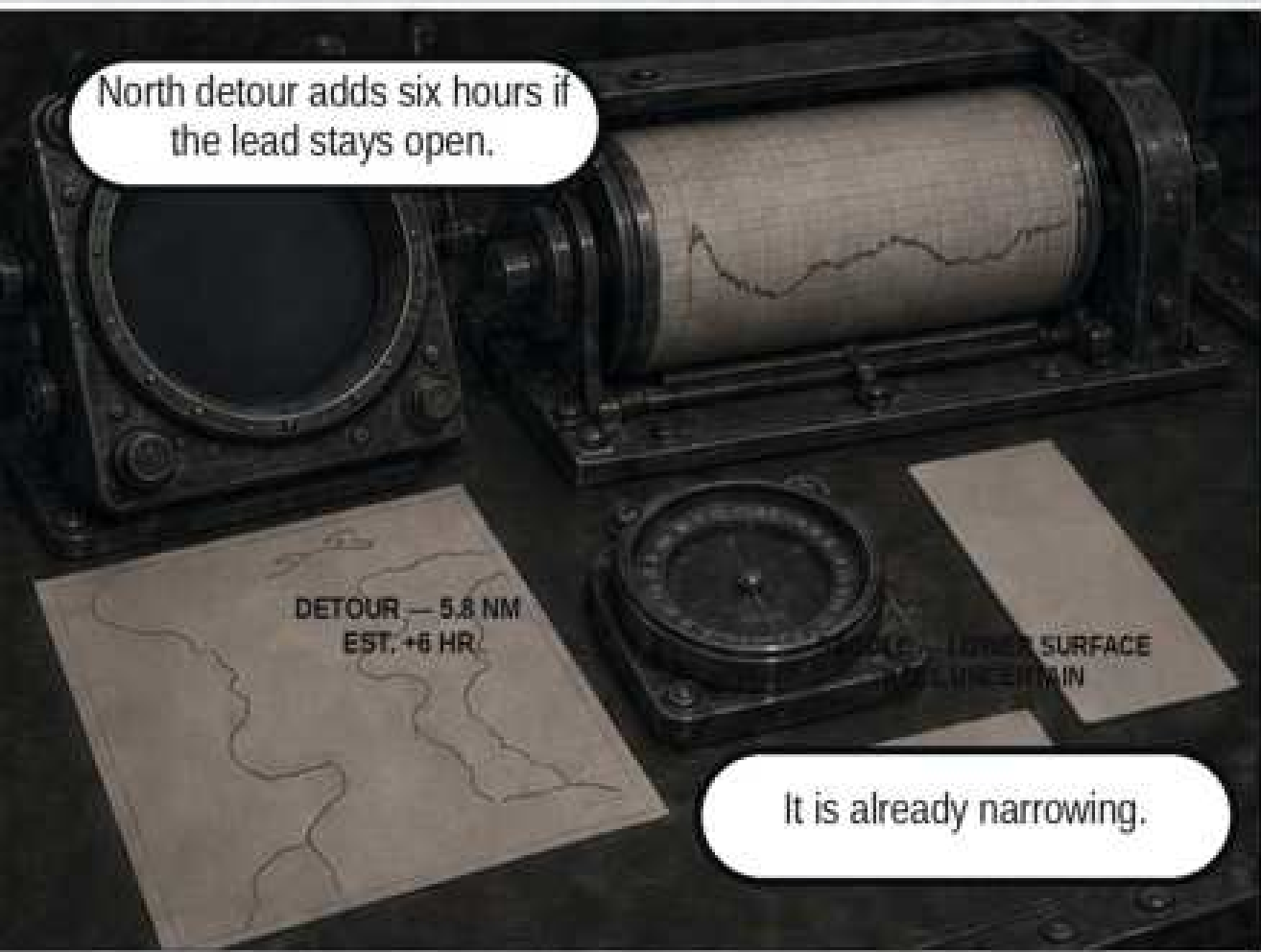


At present progress: after midnight.

Tell Kestrel the estimate and the uncertainty.



Fourteen hours after the course change.



North detour adds six hours if the lead stays open.

DETOUR — 5.8 NM
EST. +6 HR

It is already narrowing.



The saddle is the shorter risk.

Not the smaller one.



A stable. Shaft loads ready for controlled backing and ramming.

We stop if vibration or current leaves the band.



Take the saddle.

One controlled run at a time. The limits do not move because people are waiting.



THRUMMMM—



WE SEE YOUR LIGHTS.



Closer puts the floe edge under the starboard quarter.

SHIP TO CAMP — 10 KM
MARKED ICE ROUTE REQUIRED

We stop here.



Primary vehicle makes both runs. Backup does not move unless recovery calls.



Five seats with one litter first run. Six seats second run.

No loose passenger. No roof load.



Route marked. One suspect seam has a bypass.



cltr-cltr-cltr



First run: Aino, Erik, Priya, Mikhail, Zofia.



Lift on three. Keep the left foot clear.

One. Two. Three.



Five survivors secured.

Return by the marked line.



cltr... cltr...



Five in. Five named.

Four remain with us.



Luc. Hye-jin. Thomas. Liv.

Four survivors. Two rescue team.



Beacon secured.

Leave the dead named
and the station visible.



Six. Seven. Eight. Nine.

Rescue team clear.



KLANG—CHNK—CHNK

Kestrel living aboard: nine.

Total aboard?

One hundred seventy-three.



I can remove dead tissue, stabilize the bones, and fight infection.

Reconstruct?

Then tell me each choice before you make it.

Yes.

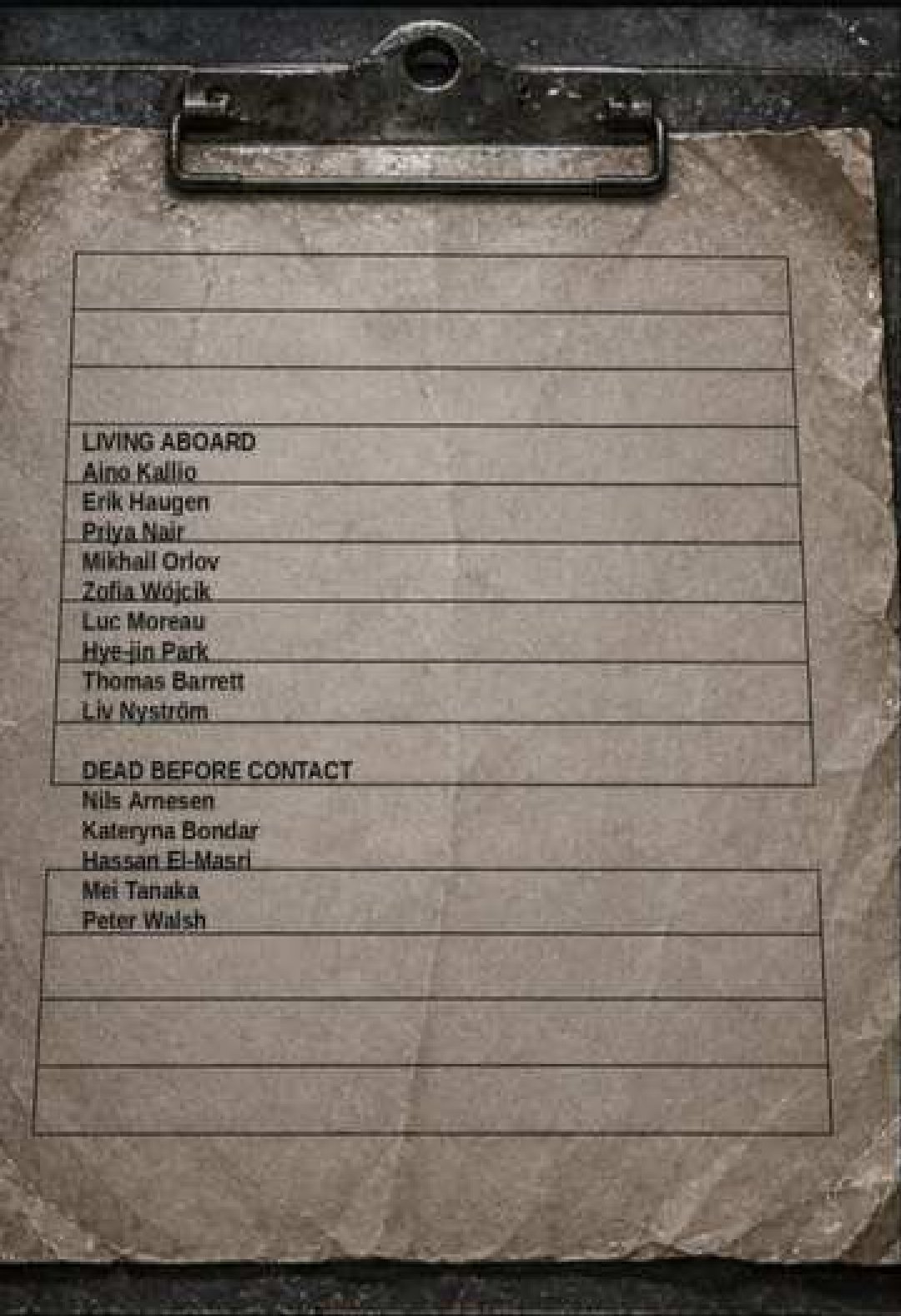
Not here.



Until identity, exposure, and medical intake are complete, movement stays escorted.

We understand quarantine.

This is verification. If it becomes quarantine, Samira names it.



LIVING ABOARD

Aino Kallio
Erik Haugen
Priya Nair
Mikhail Orlov
Zofia Wójcik
Luc Moreau
Hye-jin Park
Thomas Barrett
Liv Nyström

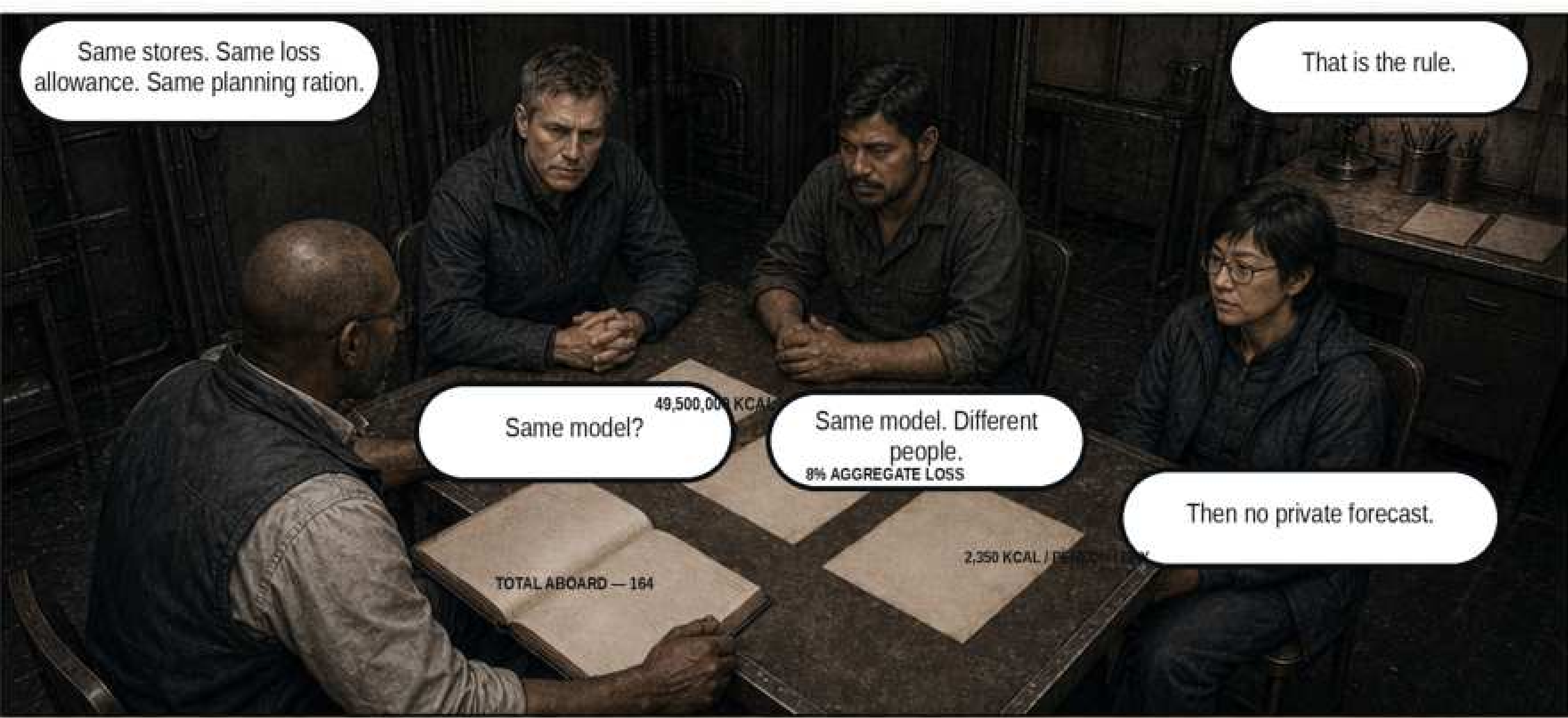
DEAD BEFORE CONTACT

Nils Arnesen
Kateryna Bondar
Hassan El-Masri
Mei Tanaka
Peter Walsh



Every resource.

Every person too.



Same stores. Same loss allowance. Same planning ration.

That is the rule.

Same model?

Same model. Different people.
8% AGGREGATE LOSS

Then no private forecast.



It was one hundred eighteen point one six.

At one hundred sixty-four people.



Duration change: six point one five ration-days.

Calendar?

The displayed date moves six days.



Five January.



Kestrel held fourteen people.

Five died before contact. Nine are aboard and named.



The diversion used one point six helicopter hours and one day of route.

At unchanged food assumptions, the planning date moves six days.

Nine people.

And six days.

Both stay in the ledger.

KESTREL COMPLEMENT — 14

DEAD BEFORE CONTACT — 5

RESCUED ALIVE — 9

TOTAL ABOARD — 173

DURATION — 112.02 DAYS

DURATION CHANGE — 6.15 DAYS

~~11 JANUARY 2025~~

PLANNING DATE — 5 JANUARY 2035

DISPLAYED CALENDAR CHANGE — 6 DAYS