

THE LAST WARM PLACE

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ICE DECIDES





29 September. Day Fifteen.

SOUTHBOUND PROGRESS — 3.61 KT AVERAGE



Bearing temperature is six degrees above its last stable band.

And the flow signal disagrees with itself.



Local pressure and temperature are steady.

The channel may be false. The bearing trend is not.



Reduce propulsion load. Maintain verified water astern.

THRUM—nnnnn



Two indications. One limit crossed.

Trip the train.

Trip initiated.



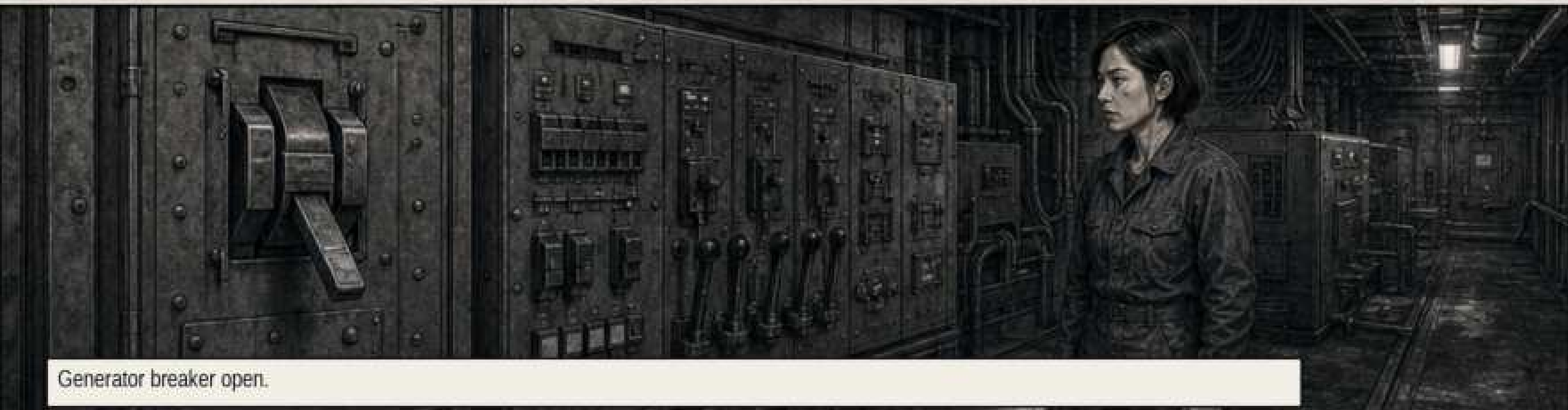
Reactor A tripped. Control insertion confirmed.

Confirmed. Neutron power falling.



Decay-heat path one available.

Path two ready. Chemistry watch notified.



Generator breaker open.

Emergency buses carrying essential load.



All shafts answering stop.

Keep us square to the verified lead.



KRRRRM

The road did not trip with us.



Reactor B reserve-start procedure. Two-person verification.

You are the controlling operator.



Nikolai, cooling. Vera, chemistry. Leena, electrical boundary.

Confirmed.



Cooling state within start limits.

Chemistry within reserve band.



Reserve plant can accept essential load in forty minutes.

Take the forty.



Essential-load transfer ready.

Transfer by blocks. Verify every block.

No borrowed certainty.



No debris at the inspection point.

Temperature is falling at the expected rate.



Flow transmitter enters through channel C.

Same control-module family as the missing spare.



MODULE INSTALLED — 18 MAY 2034

REPLACEMENT STATUS — NOT RECEIVED

The paper redundancy failed before the hardware did.



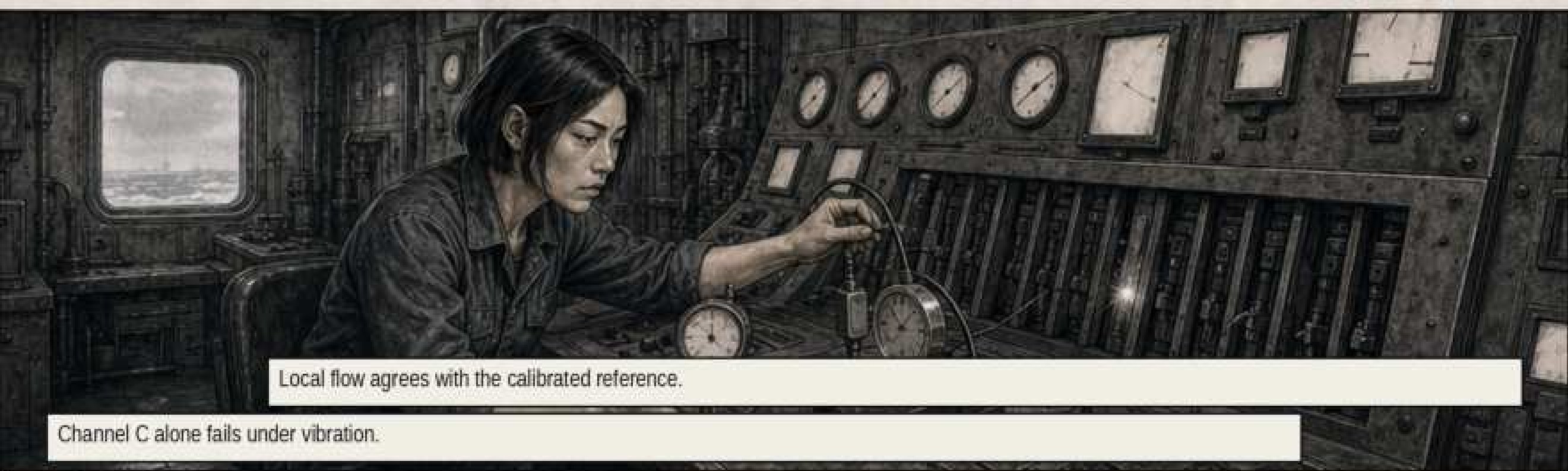
Off my console.

I know this family.

Then let me prove which member failed.



Proceed, Chief.



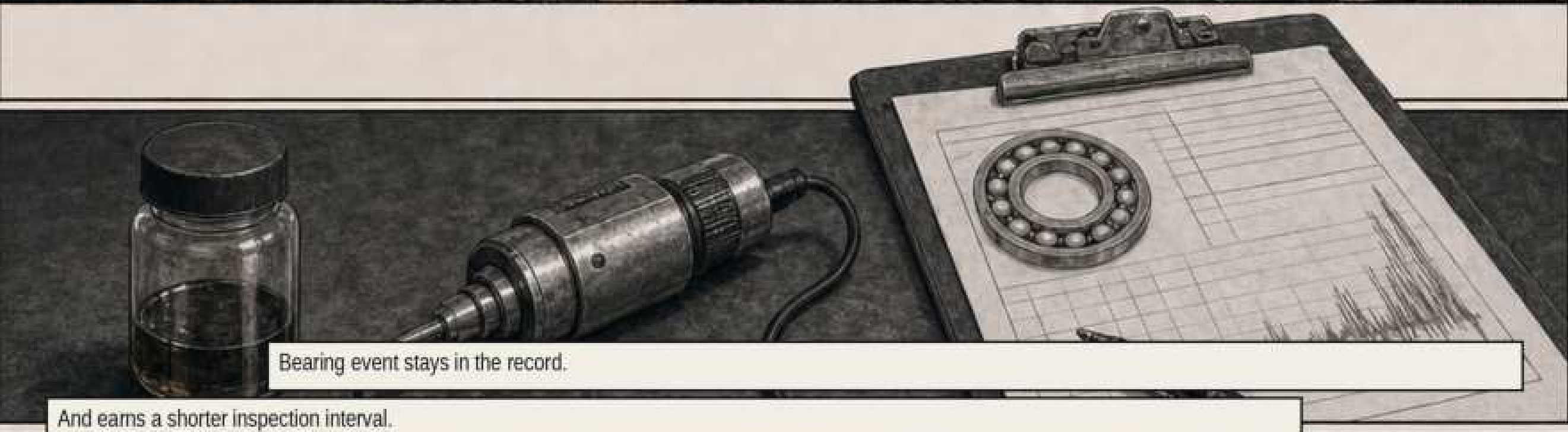
Local flow agrees with the calibrated reference.

Channel C alone fails under vibration.



CHANNEL C — ISOLATED / DO NOT RESTORE

One indication removed. No false indication declared healthy.



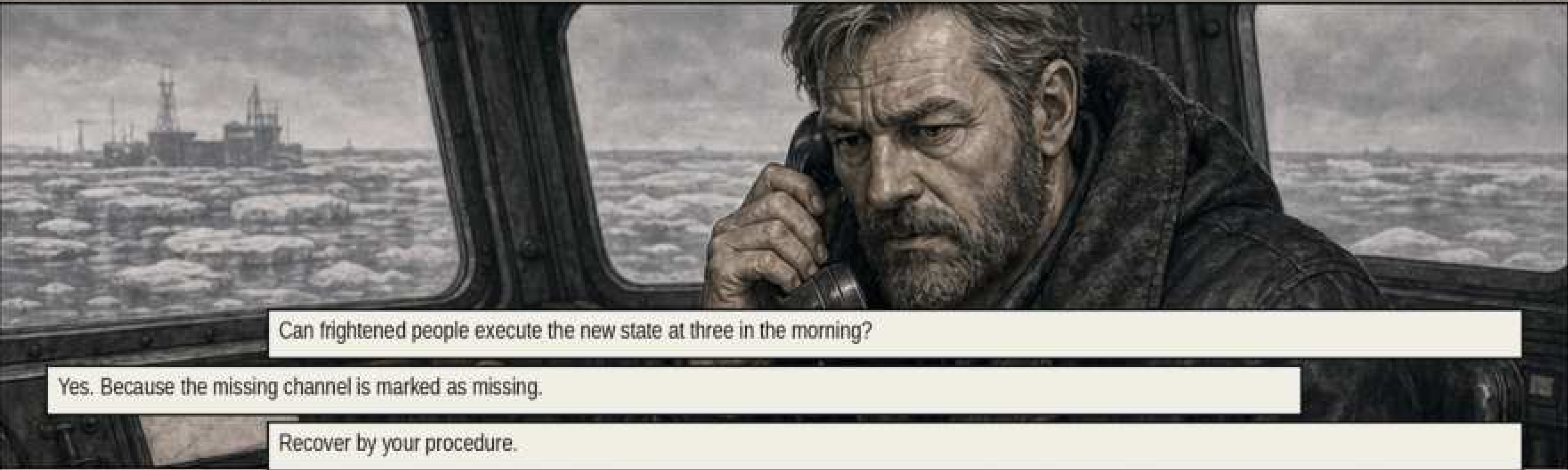
Bearing event stays in the record.

And earns a shorter inspection interval.



Reactor A may return at reduced load after electrical and chemistry concurrence.

Channel C remains isolated. We have less redundancy than yesterday.



Can frightened people execute the new state at three in the morning?

Yes. Because the missing channel is marked as missing.

Recover by your procedure.



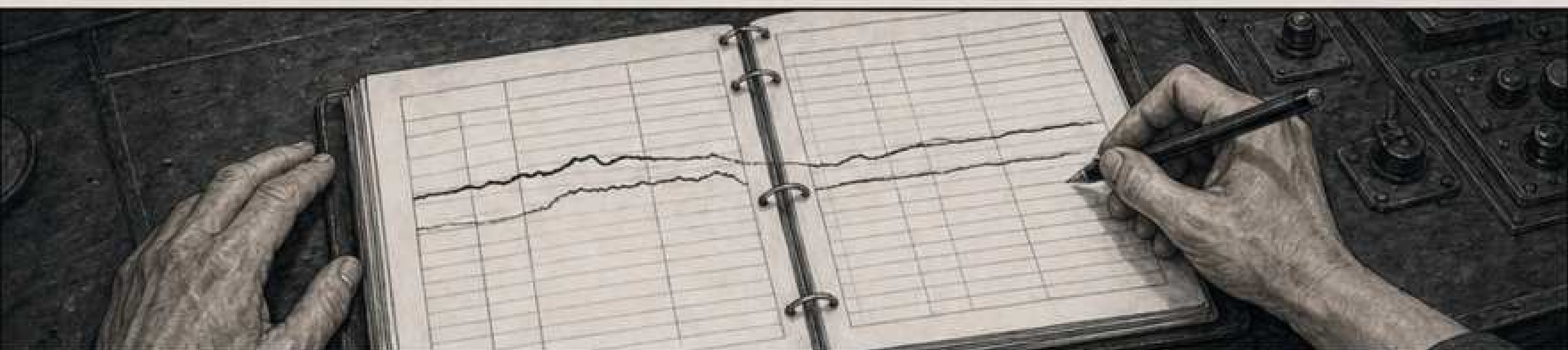
REACTOR A — ONLINE / REDUCED SURVIVAL LOAD

Stable thirty minutes.



REACTOR B — SHUT DOWN / COOLED / RESERVE

Reserve returned without pretending it was free.



PROTECTIVE TRIP TO PROPULSION RECOVERY — 12 HR 05 MIN

SIGNAL CHANNEL C — ISOLATED



Our old road is now a white wall.

Detour adds nineteen miles if it remains open.



Safe ahead. Dead slow.

The repair cost twelve hours. The ice charged interest.



The radar gives surface texture, not bearing strength.

Then feet and drill tell us what radar cannot.



Harness stays closed. Tether stays live. No wheel crosses an unverified drill.

Repeat-back complete.



Abort authority belongs to either of you.

Ice gets a third vote.



RRRRT—CHK



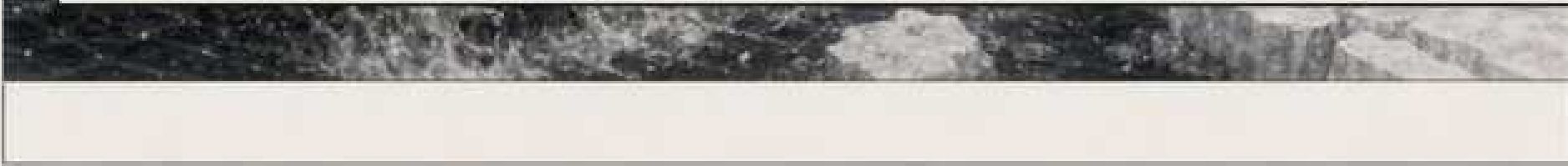
Turn five degrees toward the ship.

Turning five.

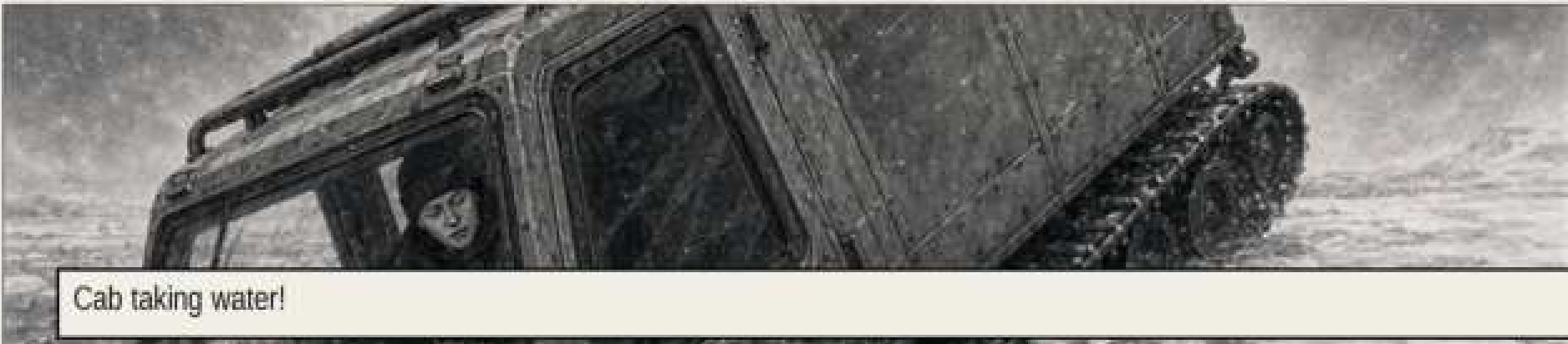


Stop—

KRAK-KRRM



Cab taking water!



Harness closed?

Closed!



Take strain on my count. Not before.

Line ready.



Sofiya, turn your face away.

CLANG—CHK



Driver clear!

Tow her first.



Both patients moving. Vehicle abandoned.



Pain?

None. That is not good news.



Wet layers off by cutting. No rubbing. No direct heat.



Driver first for immersion and trauma.

Correct priority.



No vehicle recovery attempt today.

Mark it and bring everyone inside.



Thirty-seven to thirty-nine Celsius. Circulating water.

Tell me when pain returns.



Now.

Good. Breathe. Do not pull it out.



The thumb and palm are responding.

Two distal fingertips are not yet declaring viable tissue.



Cold keeps its answer until it wants you to hear it.

Then it has joined command.



You are off exterior duty until I release the hand.

The ice will appeal.

Denied.



EXTERIOR ROUTE WORK — HOLD PENDING REVIEW

TWO ABORT AUTHORITIES / VERIFIED RETURN PATH / BACKUP TEAM REQUIRED



The rules failed to account for a changed seam.

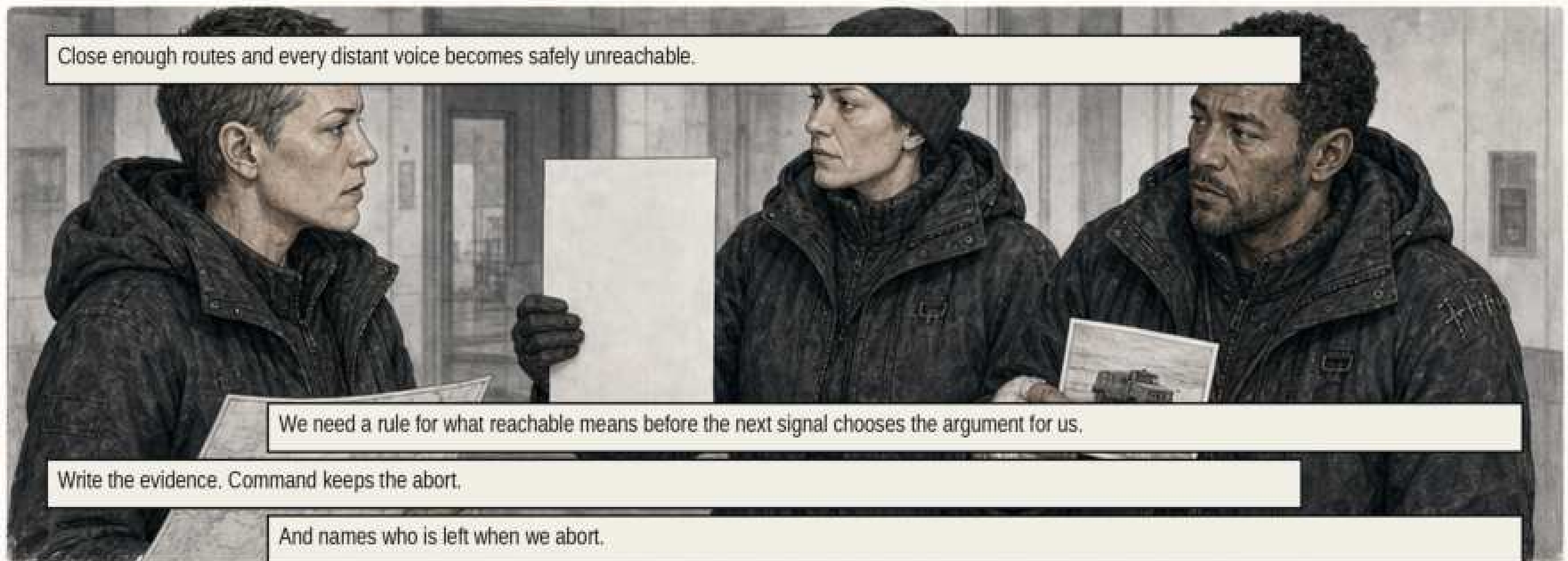
The rules saved Sofiya after the seam changed.



Then the next rules preserve what worked and close what did not.



Close enough routes and every distant voice becomes safely unreachable.



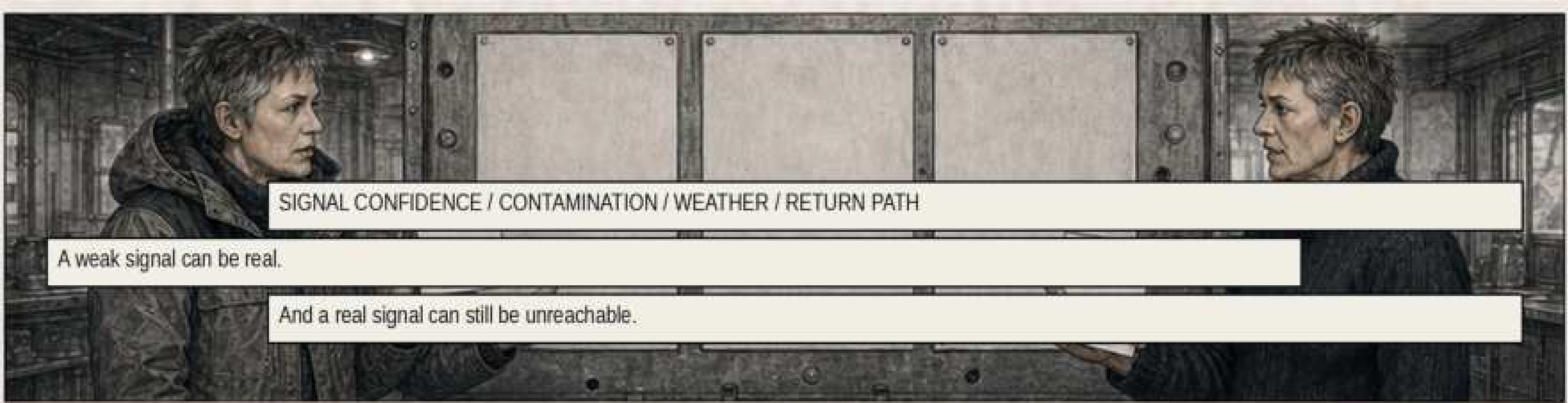
We need a rule for what reachable means before the next signal chooses the argument for us.

Write the evidence. Command keeps the abort.

And names who is left when we abort.



This is a decision record, not an automatic promise.



SIGNAL CONFIDENCE / CONTAMINATION / WEATHER / RETURN PATH

A weak signal can be real.

And a real signal can still be unreachable.



EXTRACTION CAPACITY / MEDICAL LOAD / WHO REMAINS / ABORT AUTHORITY

Do not call five rescued if four are abandoned by the same lift.



POPULATION / FOOD / MEDICINE / ROUTE AND TIME DEBIT

Record the cost of the attempt and the cost of refusing it.

Both belong in the same ledger.



Mercy without a return path is another casualty plan.

A return path without named people is an excuse.

REACHABILITY RECORD — ACTIVE / CORRECTABLE / COMMAND RETAINS NAVIGATIONAL ABORT



Burst carrier. Environmental store-forward family.

krtr-fssss-krtr



Header is old. Payload has one recoverable image band.

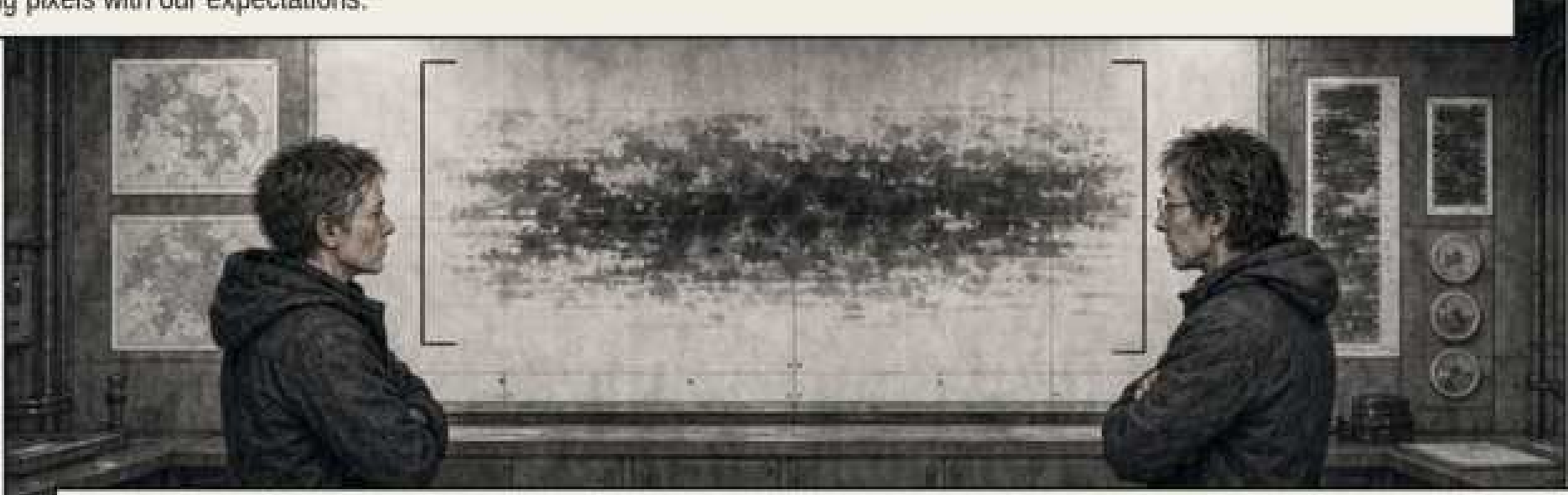


Original sealed. Working copy logged.

Camera time synchronized to the paper log.



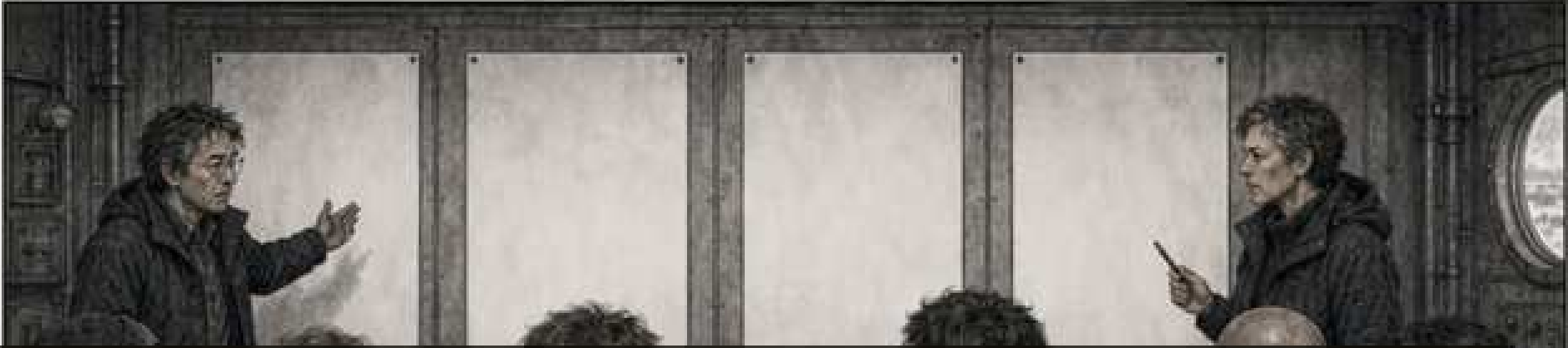
Do not fill the missing pixels with our expectations.



It supports a hemispheric soot band.

Supports, not completes.

Correct.

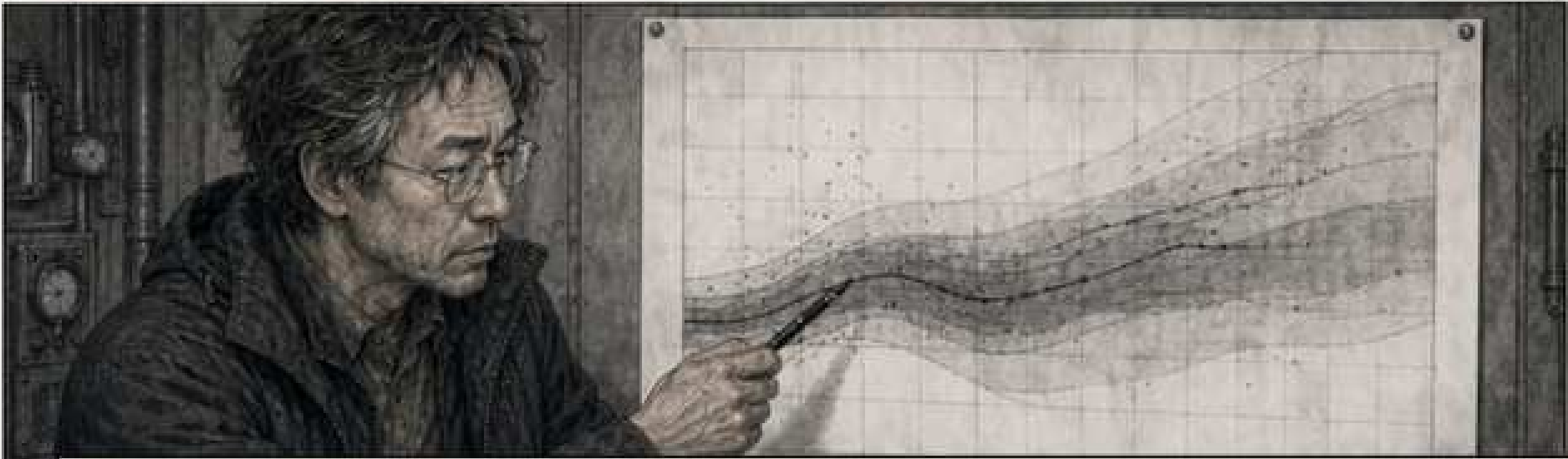


MEASURED HERE

CACHED BEFORE 03:17

RECEIVED AFTER

UNKNOWN



The severe case now fits the ship measurements and the recovered satellite band best.

Best supported does not mean exact.



Less light. Shorter growing seasons. Lower crop yields.

Ocean productivity also falls. Stored food becomes time, not a bridge to the next harvest.



We cannot identify who fired, total yield, or who survived on land.

We can stop planning around an ordinary harvest.

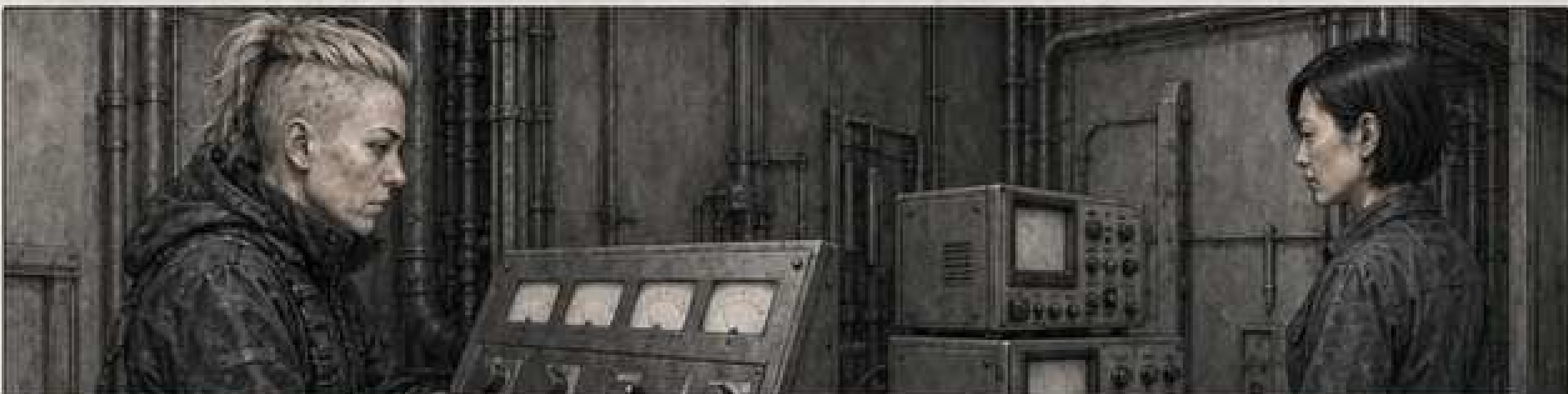
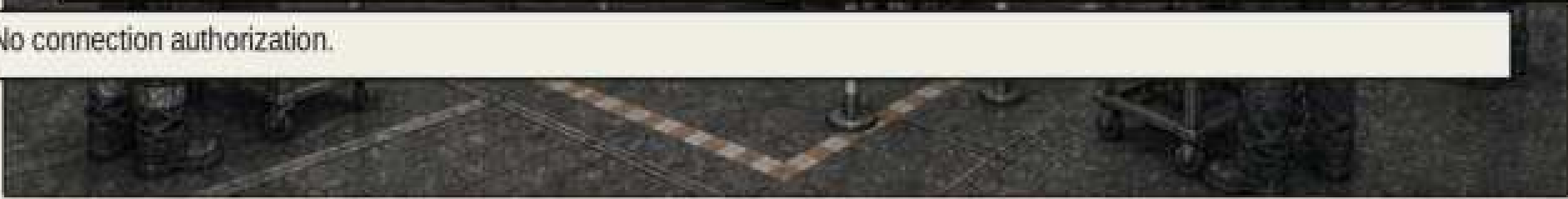


113.16 DAYS / 17 JANUARY 2035



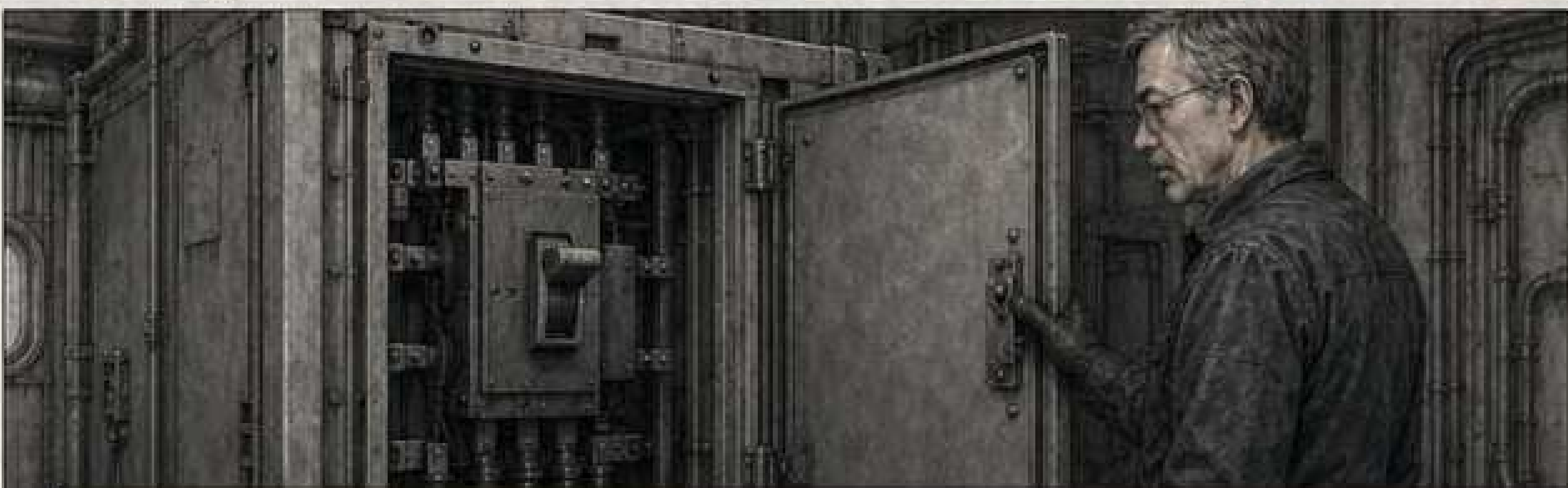
Test source isolated. Dummy load only.

No live shore bus. No connection authorization.



LOAD STEP ONE — STABLE

LOAD STEP TWO — STABLE



PROTECTION TRIP — HARMONIC CONDITION

KLAK



Same intermittent fault. Now repeatable.

A repeatable failure is better than a hidden one.

It is still a failure I signed past.



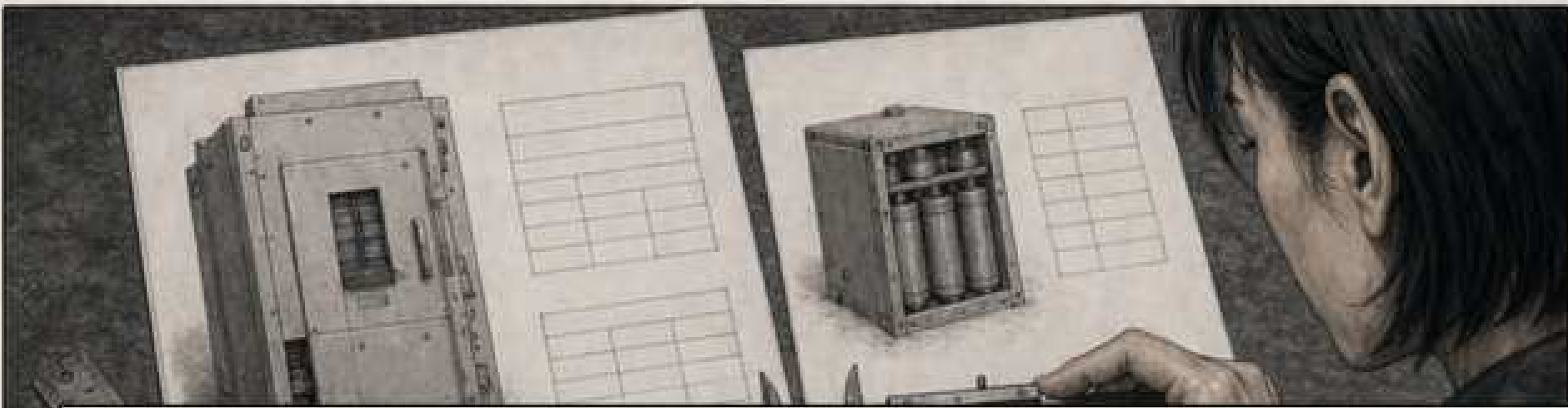
Test complete. Package remains unproven.

CONNECTION NOT AUTHORIZED



This breaker family appears in the SvalSat maintenance list.

Appears. No serial, condition, or present location.



Electrical range is plausible.

Compatibility is not established.



We can design a test for the right hardware.

We cannot design the hardware into existence.



EXPORT PACKAGE — UNPROVEN

BYPASS — NOT ACCEPTED

SVALSAT BREAKER / FILTER CABINET — SALVAGE CANDIDATE ONLY



Possible equipment is not available equipment.

And available equipment is not a safe connection.



The sun stopped rising.



SHIP MORNING — 07:00



The clock has become optimistic.

Eight portions short.

Record bread, time, and rack. No names we do not have.



RETURN WINDOW — ONE HOUR / NO QUESTIONS / DAILY TOTAL WILL BE RECONCILED

One window. Then controlled stores.



Six returned.

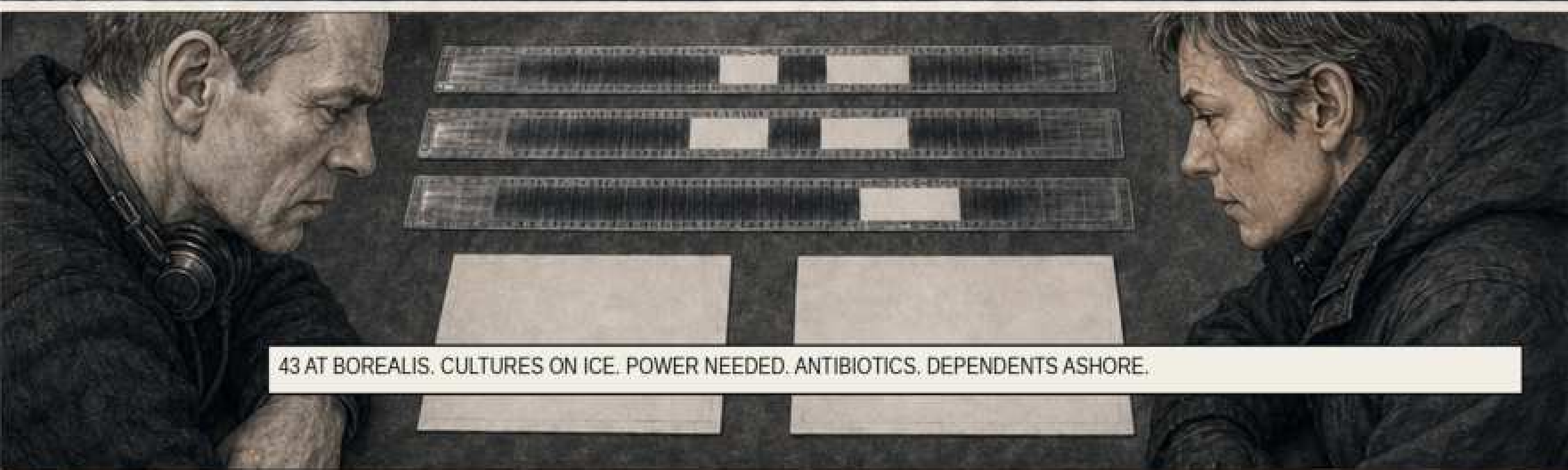
Then the ledger says six returned and two consumed or hidden.

Mercy does not require false arithmetic.

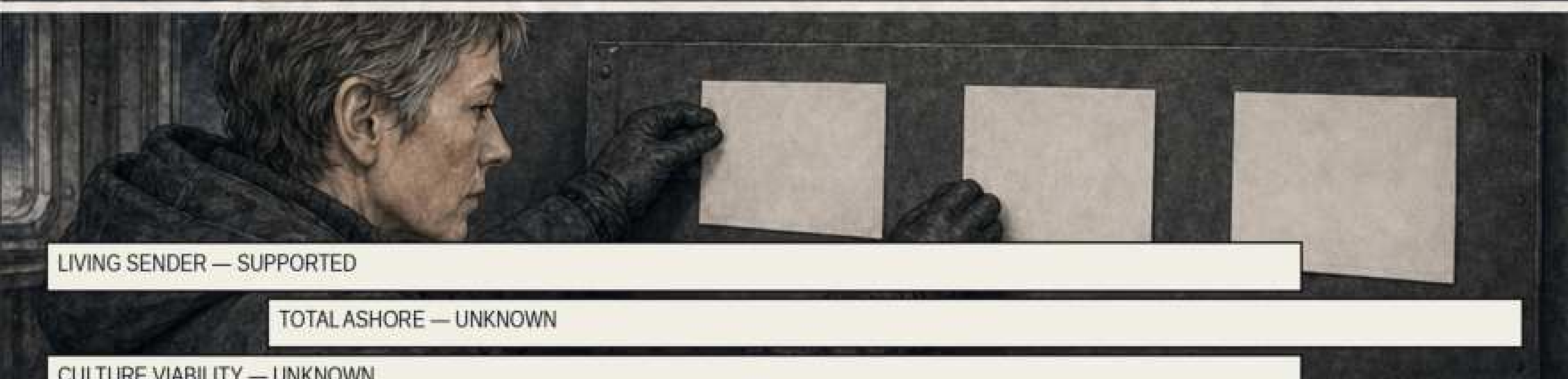


fssss—KRT—fssss

Borealis schedule. New payload.



43 AT BOREALIS. CULTURES ON ICE. POWER NEEDED. ANTIBIOTICS. DEPENDENTS ASHORE.



LIVING SENDER — SUPPORTED

TOTAL ASHORE — UNKNOWN

CULTURE VIABILITY — UNKNOWN



No promise to a population we cannot count.

No refusal because the count is missing.



Does dependents mean children?

It means someone depends on someone. Nothing more is proved.



Land return bearing one-eight-seven true.

Svalbard, unless an island learned to move.



First visual land since the silence.



APPROACH LIMIT — OUTSIDE UNVERIFIED HARBOR

SHORE POPULATION — UNKNOWN



Land does not stabilize the command question.

No.

Then do not let shore contact become an endless condition.



Guide signal ahead. Weak and repeating.

Hold outside the harbor line until it earns our hull.



12 October. Day Twenty-Eight.



GUIDE PULSE — REPEATING / SOURCE UNAUTHENTICATED

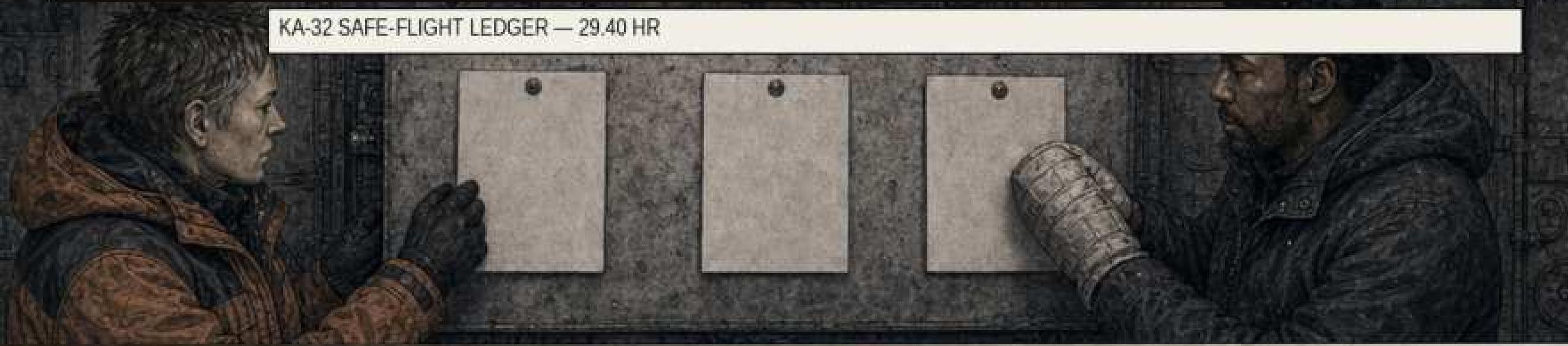
Pulse agrees with the charted deep-water turn.



TOTAL ABOARD — 173

REACTOR A — ONLINE / REDUCED SURVIVAL LOAD

REACTOR B — SHUT DOWN / COOLED / RESERVE



KA-32 SAFE-FLIGHT LEDGER — 29.40 HR



RATION HORIZON — 113.16 DAYS / 17 JANUARY 2035

EXPORT PACKAGE — UNPROVEN / CONNECTION NOT AUTHORIZED

SHORE POPULATION — UNKNOWN

Steady outside the harbor line.

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

The ice had not brought them to safety. It had allowed them to arrive.