

THE LAST WARM PLACE

CHAPTER FIVE · THE ICE DECIDES



29
SEPTEMBER.
DAY FIFTEEN.

HOW MANY IN THE
ENGINE ROOM THIS WATCH?

ELEVEN OF
SIXTEEN. TWO IN
THEIR BUNKS.
THREE IN THE
CREW MESS,
STARING AT THE
RADIO LIKE IT OWES
THEM SOMETHING.

LET THEM STARE.
NOBODY GETS
WRITTEN UP
THIS WEEK.

I WASN'T GOING
TO WRITE
ANYONE UP,
CAPTAIN.

CENTER-TRAIN
BEARING IS SIX
DEGREES OVER ITS
BAND. AND CLIMBING.

AND THE FLOW
SIGNAL DISAGREES
WITH ITSELF.

TWO SICK
INSTRUMENTS. OR
ONE SICK BEARING
AND ONE LIAR.

WHERE'S
SERGEI? I WANT AN
ELECTRICIAN ON
THAT CHANNEL.

CREW MESS, CHIEF.
HE HASN'T MOVED
SINCE THE TUG.

SO THE FLOW CHANNEL'S LYING.
THE BEARING ISN'T.

...LEAVE HIM.
I'LL DO IT
MYSELF.

LOCAL GAUGE SAYS FLOW
IS FINE. PUMP
TEMPERATURE'S STEADY.

BRIDGE TO ENGINE
ROOM. REDUCE LOAD.
KEEP OPEN WATER
ASTERN.

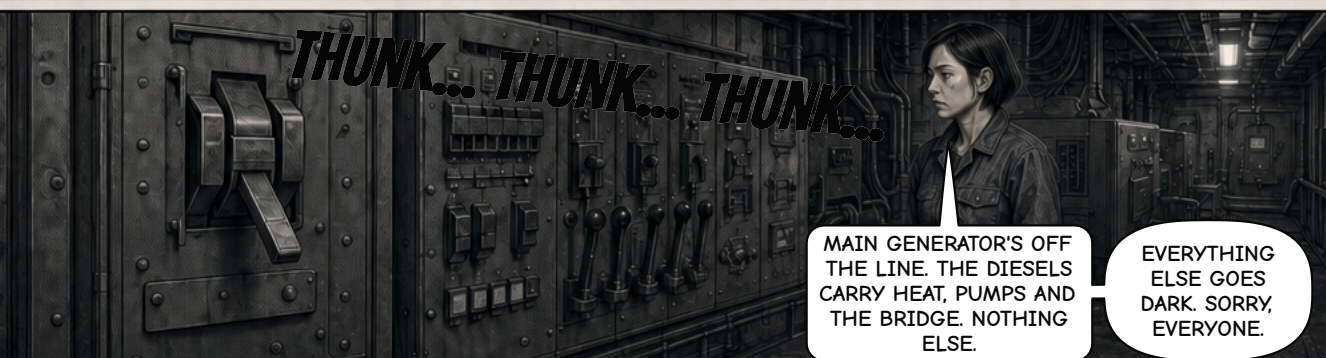
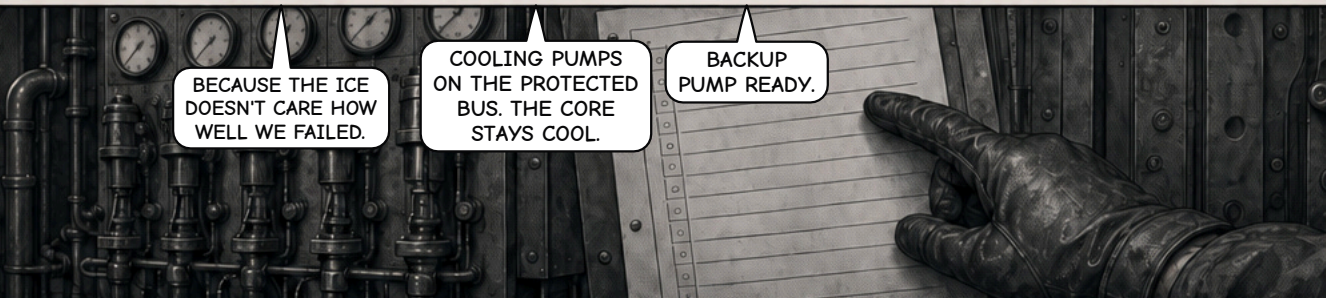
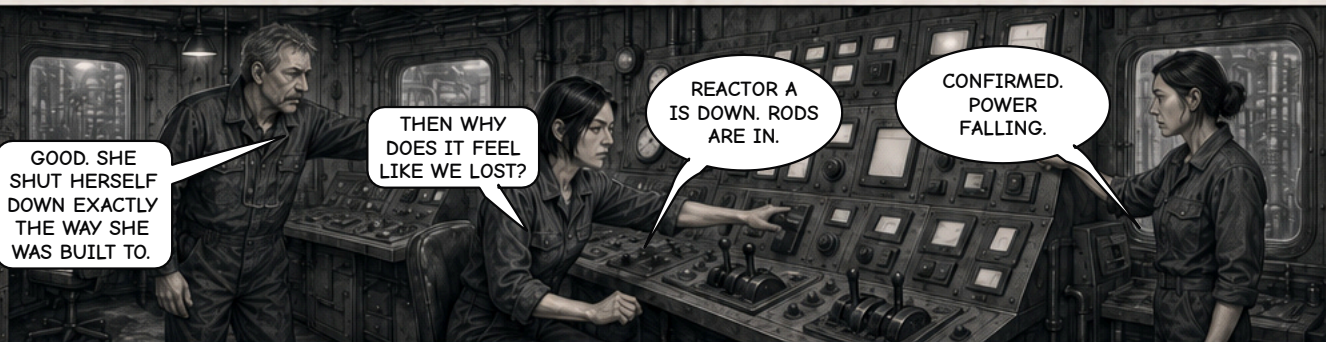
THRUM—NNNNN

BEARING'S AT
THE LIMIT.

TRIP THE
TRAIN.

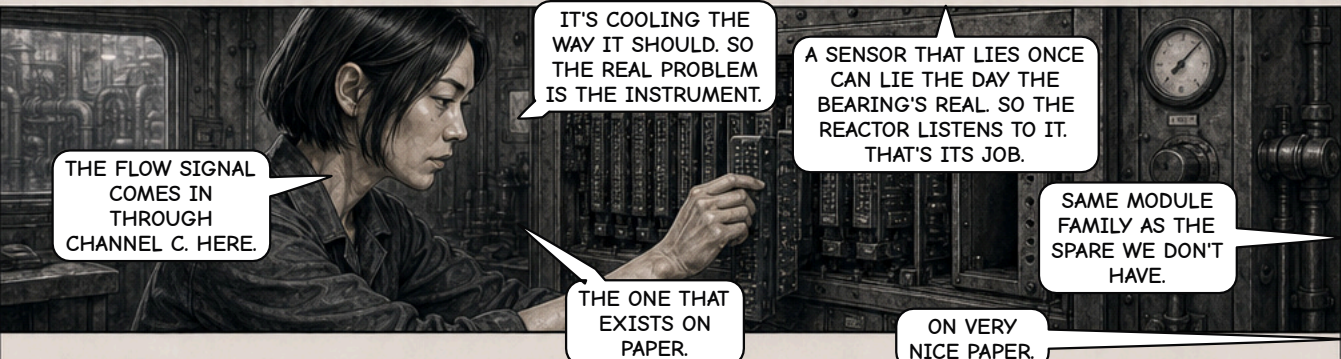
TRIPPING.

KLAK





NO METAL AT THE INSPECTION PORT. THE BEARING'S HOT, NOT BROKEN.



IT'S COOLING THE WAY IT SHOULD. SO THE REAL PROBLEM IS THE INSTRUMENT.

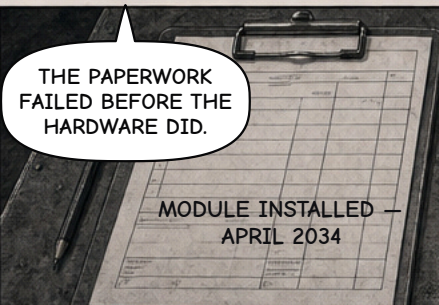
A SENSOR THAT LIES ONCE CAN LIE THE DAY THE BEARING'S REAL. SO THE REACTOR LISTENS TO IT. THAT'S ITS JOB.

THE FLOW SIGNAL COMES IN THROUGH CHANNEL C. HERE.

SAME MODULE FAMILY AS THE SPARE WE DON'T HAVE.

THE ONE THAT EXISTS ON PAPER.

ON VERY NICE PAPER.



THE PAPERWORK FAILED BEFORE THE HARDWARE DID.

MODULE INSTALLED —
APRIL 2034



SPARE — NOT
RECEIVED



I KNOW THIS FAMILY. JUMPER CHANNEL C, RESTART A, AND WE'RE MOVING INSIDE THE HOUR --

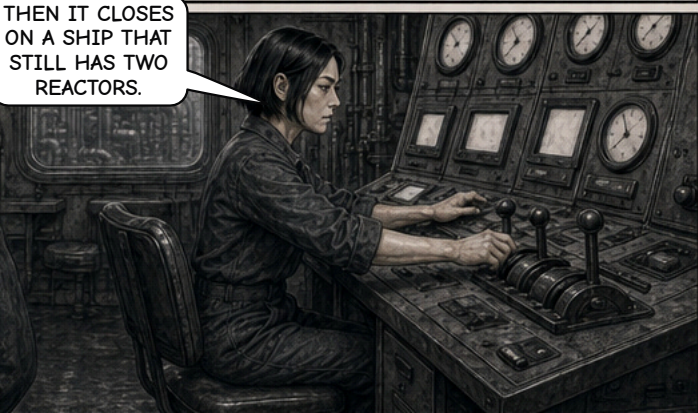
OFF MY CONSOLE.

WE BRING UP B BY THE BOOK, AND I PROVE WHICH BOARD FAILED. NOBODY JUMPERS A SAFETY CHANNEL BECAUSE THE ICE IS IMPATIENT.



DASHA. THE LEAD IS CLOSING.

...PROCEED, CHIEF.



THEN IT CLOSES ON A SHIP THAT STILL HAS TWO REACTORS.



RESERVE START, REACTOR B. TWO SIGNATURES ON EVERY STEP.

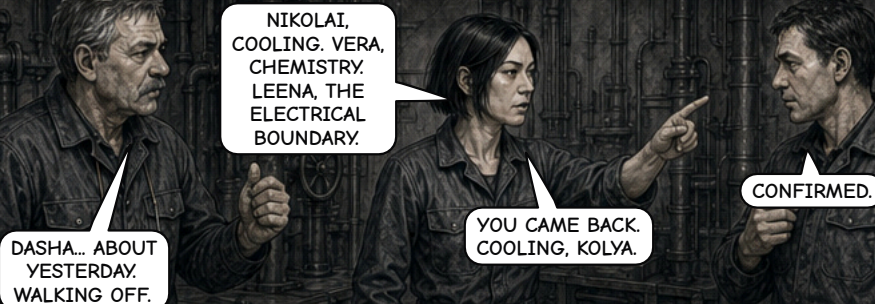
I KNOW. PAVEL USED TO SAY YOU SLEPT WITH THEM ON A CONSOLE.

YOU'RE THE CONTROLLING OPERATOR. I'M YOUR SECOND PAIR OF EYES.

THESE HANDS HAVE BEEN DOING THIS FOR THIRTY-FOUR YEARS.

THEN USE THE EYES. NOT THE HANDS.

...READ ME STEP ONE.



NIKOLAI, COOLING. VERA, CHEMISTRY. LEENA, THE ELECTRICAL BOUNDARY.

DASHA... ABOUT YESTERDAY. WALKING OFF.

YOU CAME BACK. COOLING, KOLYA.

CONFIRMED.



COOLING INSIDE START LIMITS.

WATER CHEMISTRY'S GOOD.



BRIDGE, ENGINE ROOM. REACTOR B TAKES LOAD IN FORTY MINUTES. NOT THIRTY-NINE.

FORTY MINUTES. THE LEAD'S HALF GONE ALREADY.

IN FORTY MINUTES IT'LL BE A RUMOR.

TAKE THE FORTY.

A REACTOR STARTED IN A HURRY IS A SECOND EMERGENCY.



DIESELS TO REACTOR. READY TO TRANSFER.

TRANSFER IN BLOCKS. CHECK EVERY BLOCK BEFORE THE NEXT.

REACTOR B HAS THE SHIP.

THUNK... THUNK...



TWO GAUGES AND A REFERENCE METER AGREE. ONLY CHANNEL C DROPS, AND ONLY WHEN THE HULL SHAKES.

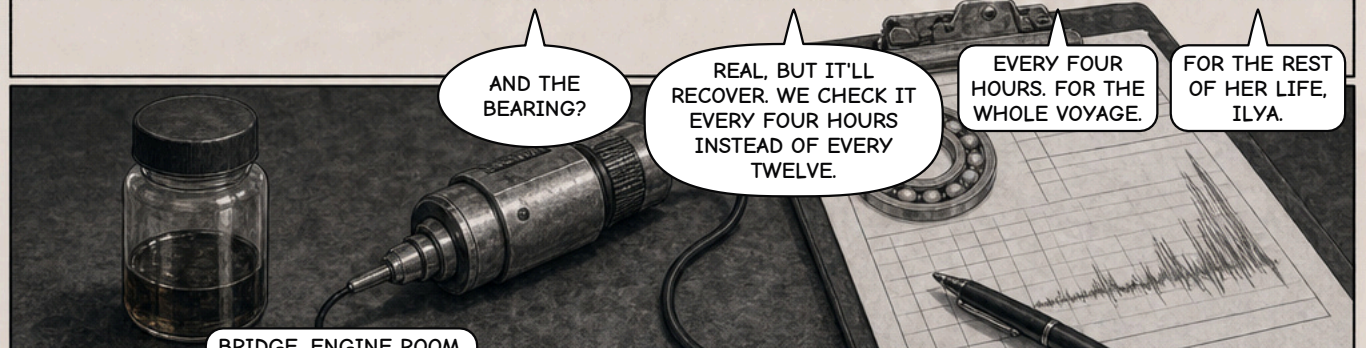
SO EVERY TIME WE HIT ICE, IT LIES.

WE'RE AN ICEBREAKER. IT'LL LIE A LOT.



CHANNEL C — DEAD. DO NOT RESTORE.

NOBODY AT THREE IN THE MORNING MISTAKES THIS FOR A WORKING CHANNEL.



AND THE BEARING?

REAL, BUT IT'LL RECOVER. WE CHECK IT EVERY FOUR HOURS INSTEAD OF EVERY TWELVE.

EVERY FOUR HOURS. FOR THE WHOLE VOYAGE.

FOR THE REST OF HER LIFE, ILYA.

BRIDGE, ENGINE ROOM. WE RESTART A AT REDUCED LOAD, WITH CHANNEL C DEAD AND TAGGED.

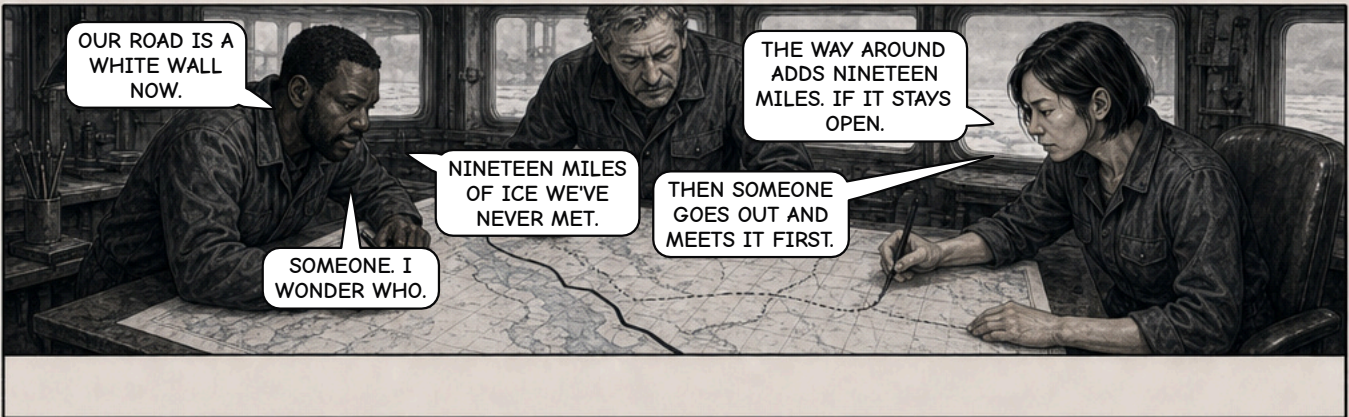
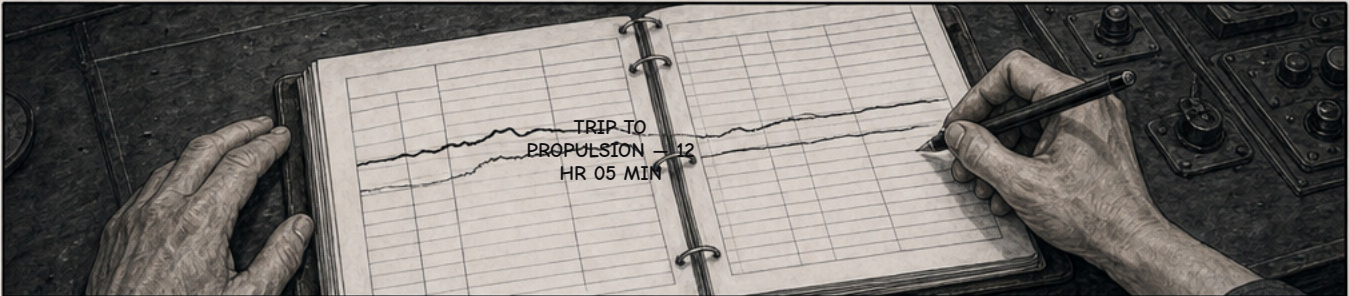
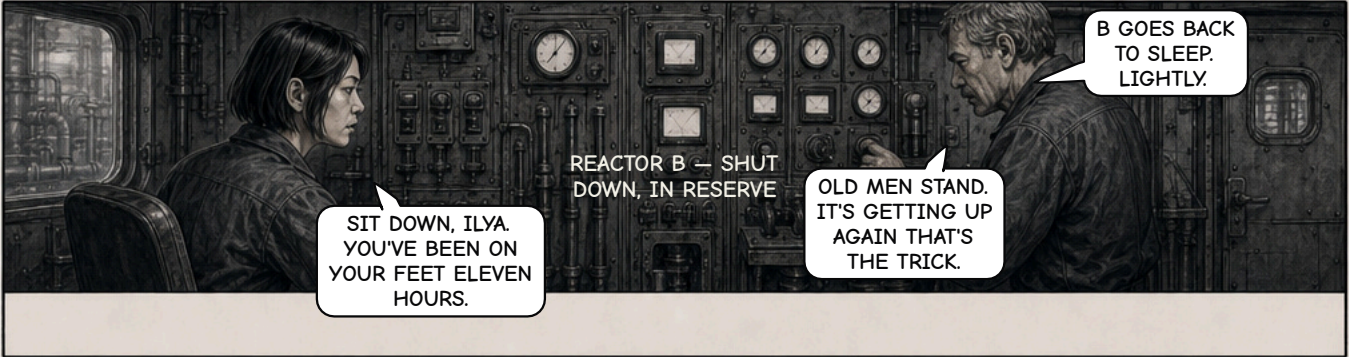
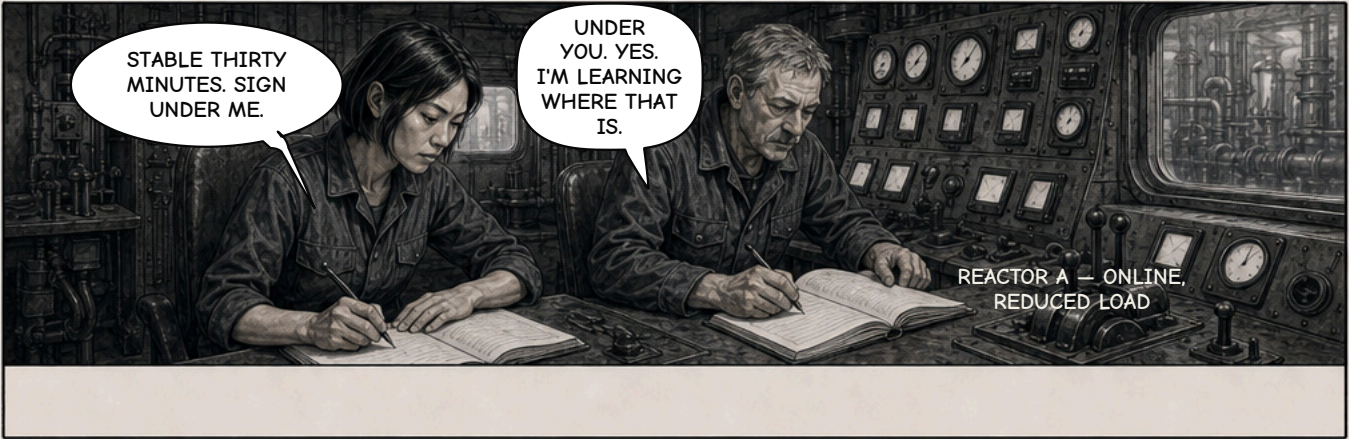
WE COME BACK WITH LESS PROTECTION THAN WE LEFT WITH. I WANT YOU TO HEAR THAT BEFORE YOU SAY YES.



CAN A FRIGHTENED CREW RUN THAT AT THREE IN THE MORNING?

YES. BECAUSE THE MISSING PIECE IS MARKED MISSING.

THEN BRING HER BACK YOUR WAY.



30 SEPTEMBER.
DAY SIXTEEN.

SO WE WALK
IT FIRST.
DRILL, STEP,
DRILL.

THREE HOURS
IS A LONG TIME
FOR YOUNG ICE.
IT'S A TEENAGER.
IT CHANGES
ITS MIND.

RADAR
SAYS FLAT.
NOT
WHETHER
IT HOLDS
ELEVEN
TONNES.

THE PHOTO'S FROM THIS
MORNING. THREE HOURS OLD.

A black and white illustration showing three people in heavy winter clothing sitting around a table. They are looking at various items: a circular radar display, a large map, and a photograph of a tracked vehicle on a snowy landscape. The person on the left is a man with a beard, the middle is a woman, and the right is another woman wearing a beanie.

HARNESS CLOSED. TETHER
LIVE. THE TRACKS CROSS
NOTHING I HAVEN'T
DRILLED.

HARNESS CLOSED.
TETHER LIVE. ONLY
YOUR HOLES.

YOU MAKE IT
SOUND SO
ROMANTIC.

A black and white illustration of a tracked vehicle on a vast, flat ice field. Three people in winter gear stand in the background. A man in the foreground is talking to the driver of the vehicle. The scene is desolate and cold.

EITHER OF YOU
CAN CALL IT OFF.
NOBODY ARGUES
WITH AN ABORT.

THE ICE GETS
A VOTE TOO.

A black and white illustration showing a man and a woman in winter gear. The woman is sitting inside the cab of the tracked vehicle, looking out. The man is standing outside, holding a rope or cable, looking back at her. They appear to be in a tense conversation.

RRRRT-CHK

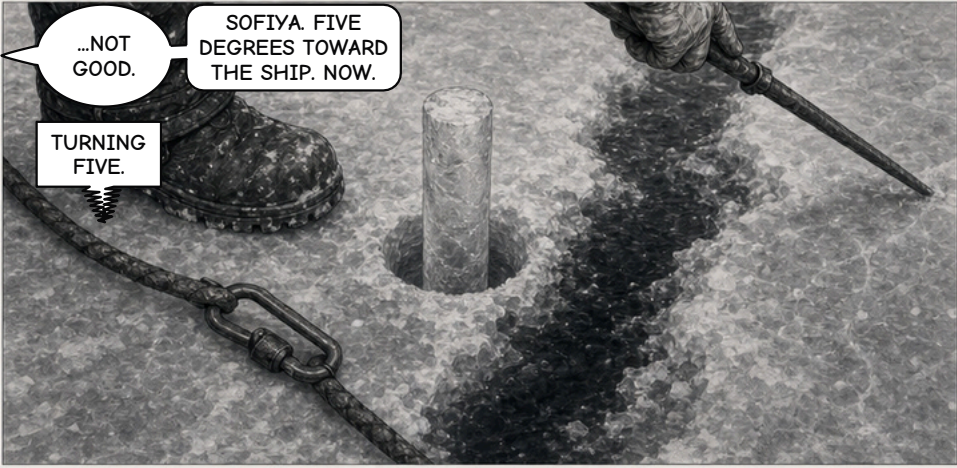
FORTY
CENTIMETERS.
GOOD.

A black and white illustration showing the tracked vehicle moving across the ice. A man is standing next to it, holding a rope. In the background, three other people are watching. A large sound effect 'RRRRT-CHK' is written across the scene. A speech bubble indicates a measurement of 'FORTY CENTIMETERS. GOOD.'

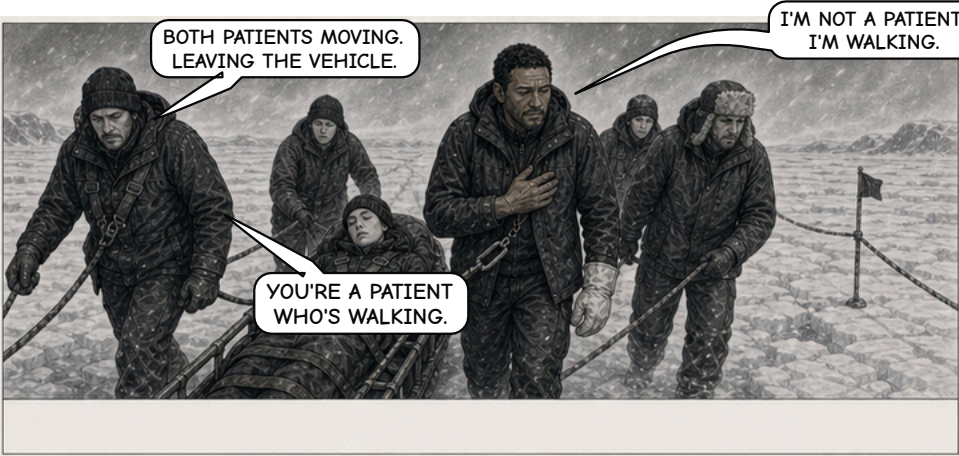
...NOT
GOOD.

TURNING
FIVE.

SOFIYA. FIVE
DEGREES TOWARD
THE SHIP. NOW.

A black and white illustration showing a close-up of a drill bit or a similar tool being used on the ice. A hole has been drilled into the ice. A speech bubble says '...NOT GOOD.' Another says 'TURNING FIVE.' A third says 'SOFIYA. FIVE DEGREES TOWARD THE SHIP. NOW.'





THIRTY-SEVEN TO THIRTY-NINE DEGREES. MOVING WATER. THIS IS GOING TO HURT.

TELL ME WHEN THE PAIN COMES BACK. THAT'S THE HAND TELLING US IT'S ALIVE.

HOW MUCH WILL IT HURT?

I'VE SEEN BIG MEN CRY. CAPTAINS.

GOOD. BREATHE. KEEP IT IN THE WATER.

...NOW.

THUMB AND PALM ARE COMING BACK. TWO FINGERTIPS... I DON'T KNOW YET.

WHEN WILL YOU KNOW?

WHEN THEY DECIDE. DAYS.

THE COLD KEEPS ITS ANSWER UNTIL IT'S READY TO GIVE IT.

SO IT'S JOINED COMMAND.

I'VE WAITED TWO WEEKS TO HEAR ABOUT MY FOOT. YOU GET USED TO IT.

I HOPE NOT.

YOU'RE OFF WORK OUTSIDE UNTIL I SAY THAT HAND IS HEALED.

DENIED.

THE ICE WILL APPEAL.



MALIK. I WANTED TO SAY THANK YOU. IT'S A STUPID WORD FOR IT.



5 OCTOBER. DAY
TWENTY-ONE.

THE NIGHTS CAME BACK.
EVERY ONE A LITTLE
LONGER THAN THE LAST.

TWO OF MALIK'S FINGERTIPS TURNED BLACK.
SAMIRA WOULD TAKE THEM ONCE THE LINE WAS CLEAR.

GOOD MORNING.
SHIP TIME IS 07:00.

THE CLOCK HAS
BECOME
OPTIMISTIC.

EIGHT ROLLS SHORT.
THE RACK WAS SEALED
AT MIDNIGHT.

WRITE THE RACK,
THE TIME, THE COUNT.
NO NAMES. WE DON'T
HAVE NAMES.

WHO'D HIDE FOOD
ON A SHIP LIKE THIS?
EVERYBODY CAN SEE
EVERYTHING.

ONE HOUR. AFTER
THAT THE STORES
GET LOCKED AND
GUARDED.

GUARDED BY WHO?
THE COOKS?

BY ME, IF IT
COMES TO THAT.

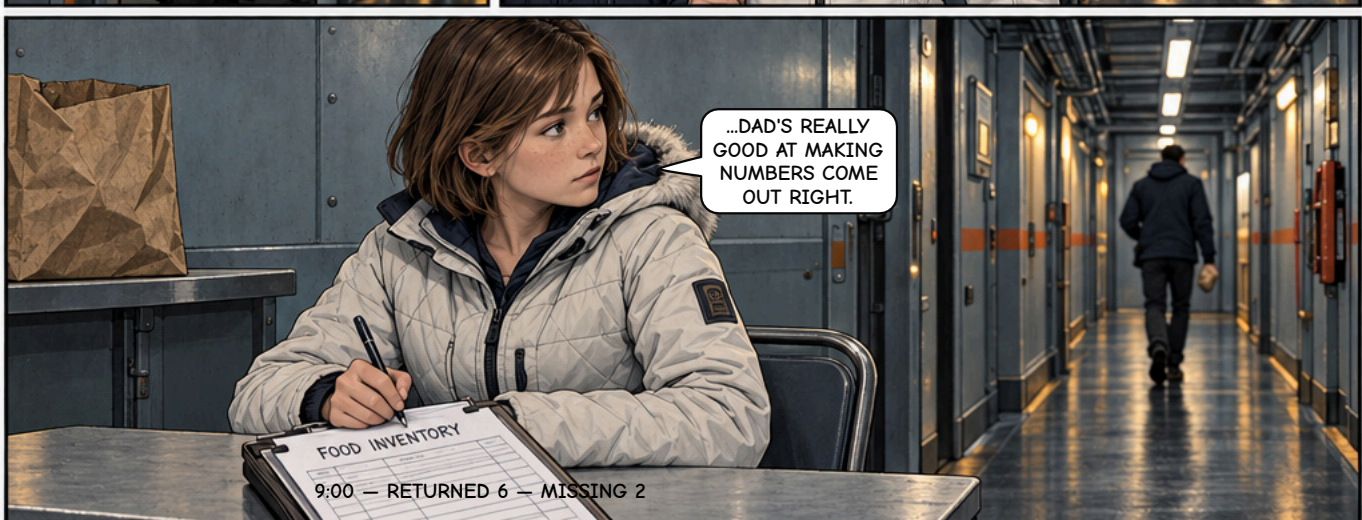
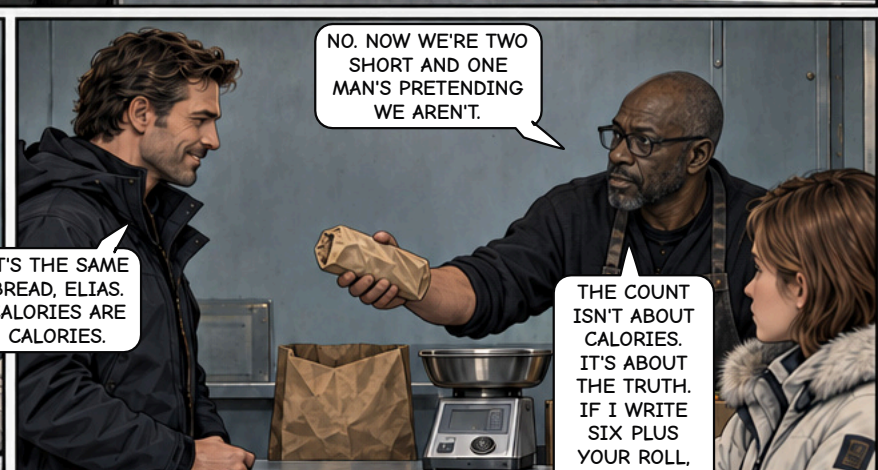
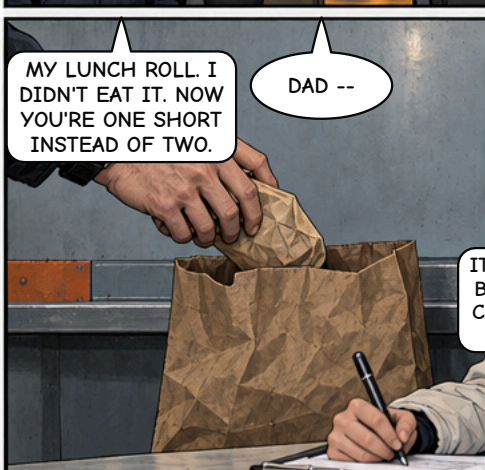
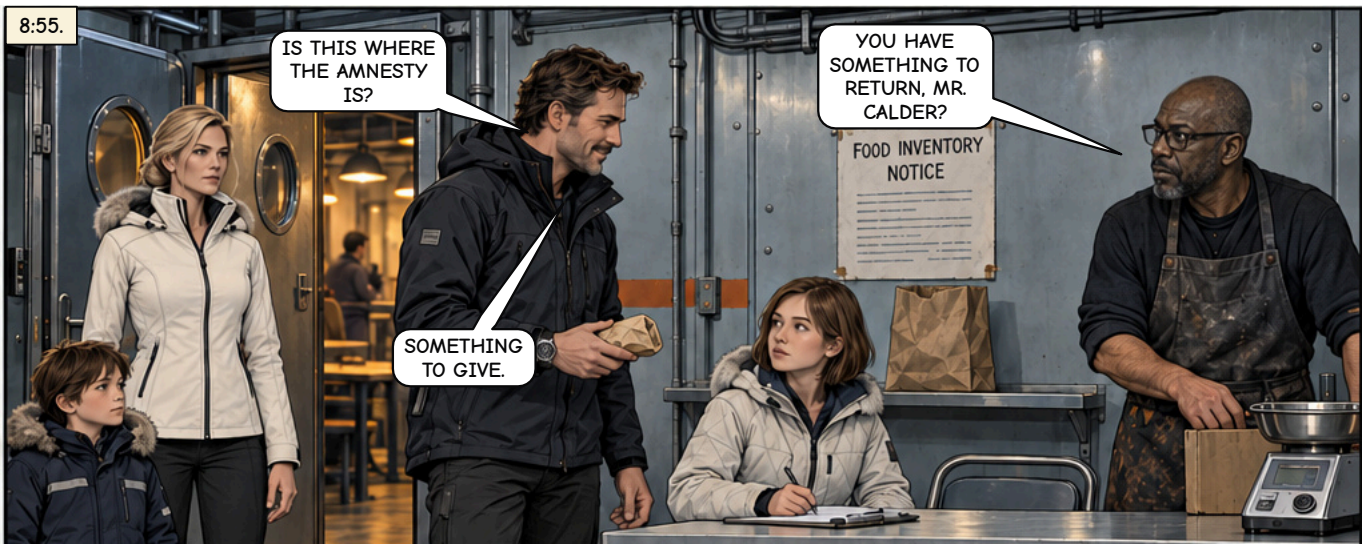
PUT IT BACK IN
THE BAG BY NINE.
NO QUESTIONS.

SIX. WRITE
IT DOWN. TWO
EATEN, OR STILL
HIDDEN.

SIX PEOPLE
WERE SCARED OF
OKSANA. I'LL TAKE
IT.

SIX
CAME
BACK.

THAT'S KIND OF
NICE, ACTUALLY?
SIX PEOPLE FELT
BAD.



8 OCTOBER. DAY
TWENTY-FOUR.

22:00.

MALIK SAID
YOU'D BE
OUT HERE.
HE SAID
BRING TWO.

YOU ACTUALLY LIGHT IT.

OUTSIDE, WHERE THE RULES ALLOW.
FORTY YEARS I'VE CARRIED IT.
LIT MAYBE ONE NIGHT IN TEN.

MALIK
SHOULD BE
ASLEEP.

...GIVE ME
THE CUP.

WHAT'S
TONIGHT?

THE FIRST DAY.
THE WOMAN ON
THE RADIO.
"SHELTER
IMMEDIATELY"

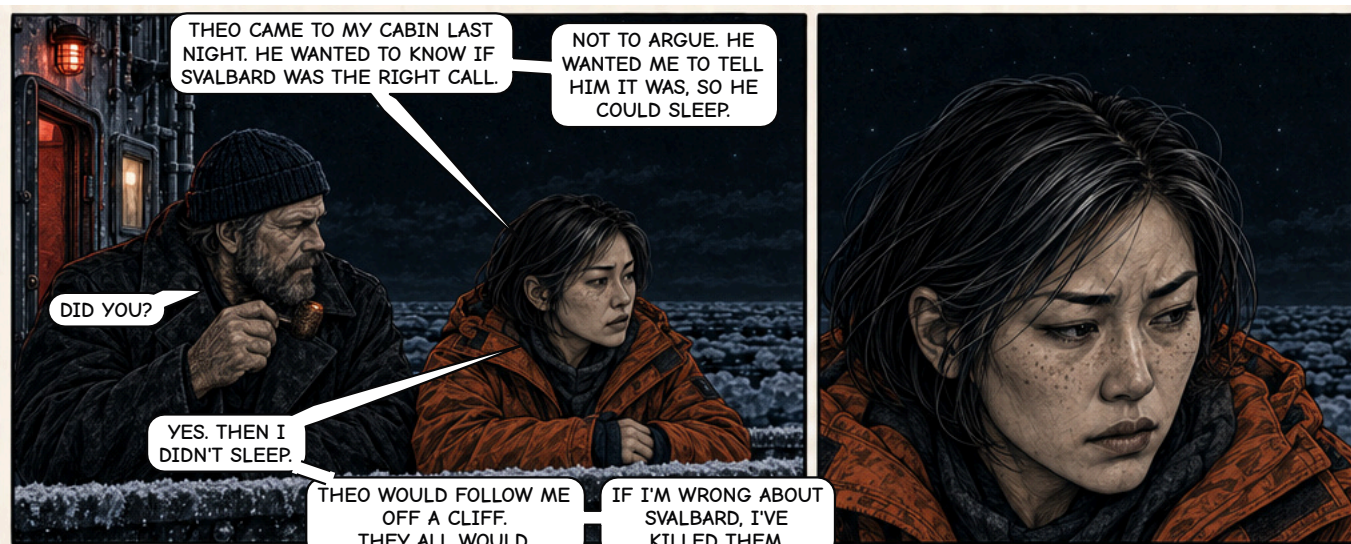
YOU NEARLY
SNAPPED
YOUR PIPE
IN HALF.
I SAW IT.
I DIDN'T ASK.

YOU WERE
POLITE. I
COUNTED ON IT.

IN TROMSØ,
THE NIGHT
WATCH IS
JUST
COMING ON.

HER NAME IS
ANIA. SHE'S MY
DAUGHTER.





FSSSS-KRT-FSSSS

QUIET,
PLEASE. BOREALIS,
OFF SCHEDULE.
NEW WORDS.

THEY'VE NEVER
CHANGED THE
WORDS. NOT ONCE
IN THREE WEEKS.

THEN SOMEBODY
OVER THERE JUST
DECIDED
SOMETHING.

ANTIBIOTICS.
SOMEONE'S SICK.

OR SOMEONE'S DYING,
AND THEY'RE BEING
POLITE ABOUT IT.

43 AT BOREALIS. POWER
NEEDED. ANTIBIOTICS.
DEPENDENTS ASHORE

IT GOES ON THE
CORRIDOR BOARD
TONIGHT. WORD FOR
WORD. AND WHAT WE
DON'T KNOW GOES
UP BESIDE IT.

"DEPENDENTS."
EVERYONE'S GOING
TO ASK ME WHAT
THAT MEANS.

HOW MANY
ASHORE?

43 AT BOREALIS — POWER —
ANTIBIOTICS — DEPENDENTS

NO PROMISES
TO PEOPLE WE
CAN'T COUNT.

IT'S A SIGNAL,
OKSANA. NOT A
BOARDING PARTY.

"DEPENDENTS" MEANS MOUTHS,
CAPTAIN. OUR FOOD RUNS TO
JANUARY FOR A HUNDRED AND
SEVENTY-THREE. NOT ONE MORE.

KESTREL WAS
A SIGNAL.

DOES
"DEPENDENTS"
MEAN CHILDREN?

IT COULD.

...IT DOESN'T
SAY.

HOW MANY
CHILDREN?

12 OCTOBER. DAY
TWENTY-EGHT.

LAND ON RADAR.
BEARING
ONE-EIGHT-SEVEN.

SVALBARD.
UNLESS AN
ISLAND LEARNED
TO SWIM.

YOU'VE BEEN
SAVING THAT
ONE.

SINCE
THE POLE.

LAND. THE
FIRST LAND SINCE
THE SILENCE.

SOUTH OF EIGHTY, THE SUN
CAME BACK FOR AN HOUR A
DAY. IT BARELY CLEARED
THE MOUNTAINS.

THE FJORD'S
STILL OPEN.
TWO WEEKS,
MAYBE THREE,
AND IT WON'T
BE.

THEN WE'RE
JUST IN TIME.

"JUST" IS DOING
A LOT OF WORK
IN THAT SENTENCE,
PROFESSOR.

ISFJORDEN

ADVENTFJORDEN

RACHEL ASKED ME
WHAT TO DO WITH
THIS. THE
CHART-ROOM TAPE.

KEEP IT.

WHY?

AND IF I
FORGET?

THEN I'LL
PLAY IT FOR
YOU.

SO SOMEBODY
REMEMBERS I HAD TO
BE MADE TO TELL THE
TRUTH. IN CASE I
FORGET.

LIGHT AHEAD. LOW
ON THE WATER.
BLINKING.

HOLD OUTSIDE
THE HARBOR UNTIL
IT'S EARNED OUR
HULL.

IT'S A GUIDE
LIGHT, CAPTAIN.
SOMEONE'S SHOWING
US THE WAY IN.

SOMEONE'S
SHOWING US A
WAY IN. WE'LL SEE
WHOSE.

ISFJORDEN.

LONGYEARBYEN LAY AT THE END OF IT, UNDER THE MOUNTAINS. DARK.

THE LIGHT'S RIGHT ON THE DEEP-WATER TURN. EXACTLY ON IT.

SOMEBODY THERE KNOWS THIS HARBOR.

SOMEBODY THERE WANTS US IN IT.

DEEP-WATER TURN

FORTY-THREE PEOPLE. A COLD MACHINE. SOMEBODY SICK. AND "DEPENDENTS."

FOUR WORDS. EIGHT HUNDRED MILES.

I'VE CROSSED OCEANS FOR LESS. NEVER ON PURPOSE.

AND THE THIRD SHEET?

WHATEVER'S WAITING ON THE QUAY.

YOU LEFT IT BLANK.

I DON'T WRITE DOWN WHAT I DON'T KNOW.

HOLDING OUTSIDE THE HARBOR LINE.

ONE LIGHT IS HONEST.

FORTY-THREE PEOPLE. ONE LIGHT.

PIP... PIP... PIP...



PIP... PIP...
GUIDE LIGHT
STEADY. NOTHING
ELSE ASHORE.



...THAT'S
TWO.



CAPTAIN
--

NO.

DOZENS OF LIGHTS.
THEN MORE.

THAT'S NOT
FORTY-THREE.

FAR TOO MANY FOR
FORTY-THREE.