

After the Flood

Hush

As the water come rushing in

Like the sea

As the water come rushing over

Dream of the flood

It may come but it will pass

Some say we will fall

Dream of flood

In a flood of your tears, in sackcloth

And ashes and ashes

And ashes and ashes

And ashes and ashes

And ashes and ashes and lies

As the water come rushing in, rushing in

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Foreword

This small chronicle of some of the humbler achievements of Captain Dilver is written in honour of his most loyal servants, Team WTF

I: The World of the Flood

Adventures in a Flooded Earth

In the novels *Flood* and *Ark* Stephen Baxter describes a natural disaster that leads to the complete inundation of the earth by a massive flood. This flood is not a global warming horror story, but a completely new disaster in which oceans of water leak out of fault lines in the earth's crust, submerging the continents and ultimately all land on earth. The first novel ends with a gathering at the peak of Everest, as it finally sinks below the waves. Ultimately the new oceans stop about 7 or 8 km above the old sea level, and the earth has officially become a water world.

The survivors of this flood are mostly trapped on rafts and boats, bereft of any natural resources that might enable them to retain a civilized existence, and over the generations of the flood these survivors slowly change to a new and more primitive form of humanity, eking a subsistence existence from the sea and slowly forgetting all that they had been. The only remnants of civilization are a few arks, which maintain some semblance of the pre-flood societies. We only see three such arks in the novels: a replica of the Queen Mary cruise liner, an inter-stellar colony ship, and a deep-sea arcology.

The post-flood world would also be dotted with *pelagic kingdoms*, remnants of pre-flood societies that had taken to arcologies floating on the ocean, but linked to deep-sea arcologies that serve as industrial and resource extraction centres. The effort of building these arcologies in the two generations over which the flood submerged the land would mean that they were tiny compared to their pre-flood societies, and many people in attempting to escape the flood would make their own societies – on rafts and ships and old oil rigs and all manner of makeshift homes – and in the eras after the flood these societies would slowly drift across the globe, creating whole new settings and strange encounters. Furthermore, the strange weather and new ecologies of a submerged earth, and unexpected remnants of the old world, would create mysterious and intriguing adventure scenarios and settings. The main remnants of modern civilization in the post-flood world, these Pelagic Kingdoms take many forms, and form the central setting of the adventures in the second section of this chronicle.

Pelagic Kingdoms

These central kingdoms of the flooded earth are the lynchpins of human survival in the post-apocalyptic world, because they have solved the three problems that inevitably beset any attempt to create a sustainable human society in a world without land. These three problems are access to natural resources, energy, and diversity of food supply. In Baxter's novels human society fails to solve these problems fully, instead fleeing to a new world where they can find the resources they

need or settling into a remnant city on the sea floor, where they can survive but never prosper, but in the campaign setting of the Flood a more diverse and creative response to the submergence of the earth led to a plethora of floating societies.

In the era leading up to the flood the biggest societies on earth were able to solve their food, resource and energy problems to some extent, though the pressing time scale and the challenges of adaptation mean they would not do it well and only a tiny percentage of their population would escape the flood into these official post-flood kingdoms. To rescue one's society in such an era of social, economic and ecological collapse, with rapidly diminishing physical territory and resources, would only be possible for the largest, wealthiest and technologically advanced societies. This is because to do so they would need to simultaneously create floating arcologies and a functioning deep-sea city, capable of existing permanently at 4-6 km beneath the surface, but able to extract resources from the sea bed and ship them to the surface to exchange for food with the arcologies. The result of this would be the new, pelagic kingdoms of the US, Europe and China/India – kingdoms composed not so much of physical territory as of a large number of scattered, floating islands orbiting just one or two seabed mining communities.

The Arcologies of the Pelagic Kingdoms

As society realized that the flood was going to consume the earth, they would move to desperate measures. Old ships would be turned into floating apartment blocks and set free to drift, dependent on the diminishing land for food and increasingly needing to grow their own in rooftop gardens or fish for their sustenance; some of these arcologies would be set up as research centres or industrial towns, to continue producing the needs of a rapidly shrinking population base. As the situation became more desperate, governments would realize the need to build specialized arcologies rather than converting ships – with increasing numbers of their own internally displaced populations needing to be accommodated in a shrinking territory, they would realize that they needed to start building land on top of the sea. Thus would begin the project of building real arcologies, purpose-designed to float like oil rigs but cover the area of small towns. Whatever size technology enabled, they would begin to build, far enough away from the encroaching flood to be completed in time to rise with the sea waters when they came. These arcologies would be designed to be at least partially self-contained, proof against storms and the ocean salt but containing in their centre at least some small farms, intensive agriculture of some kind, power plants, and even manufactories. These arcologies, once they floated, would be populated with the elite of the old world and left to drift amongst the converted hulks and jury-rigged floating hamlets of a previous generation. They would trade with each other, try their best to feed themselves and

their fellows, as they circled the diminishing landscape of their old nation. Perhaps some, equipped with deep sea salvage equipment, would mine the abandoned cities of the old world for ever scarcer resources.

The Deep-Sea Manufactories

Once it became obvious that the land was going to be forever extinguished, the problem of sustaining these arcologies beyond the next two generations would obviously present itself. How can one repair a solar panel without sand? How can one supply a nuclear fission plant without uranium? Obviously the only realistic solution is to build a deep-sea mining base, somewhere with resources that can be harvested. Such a base would perhaps be built entirely underground, with just a few carefully-constructed entranceways to allow ships in and out. It might be built in the last high points of the nation – the Rocky Mountains or the Himalayas or the Alps – with docks carved into mountain sides and deep mine shafts stretching far enough down to give access to the key requirements of industrial society. These undersea bases would be designed to include manufactories, so that crucial engineering equipment could be built, ore smelted, and perhaps even ships repaired. Robotic machines would travel far into the old world under the sea, scavenging the remaining organic detritus of the old earth, or digging up mud from the new seabeds to transport to the surface as soil for the arcologies. Perhaps they would build huge wave-power generators in the valleys of their old mountain ranges, entirely robotically made and controlled, to ensure that the world would have energy even after the uranium ran out. Food would come down from the floating arcologies above, and the fruits of industry and manufacturing would rise to the surface. But survival in such societies would be highly dependent on a fragile social contract between the submerged and the pelagic, whose fates are intertwined despite their very different settings.

Society and Survival in the Pelagic Kingdoms

The social order in the pelagic kingdoms would be harsh, built around keeping strict authoritarian control over population growth and resource use. Those people who floated out to sea in the first hulks, crammed together like prisoners in apartment blocks that offer little better opportunity than survival, would soon come to be judged as an expendable burden on the dwindling resources of their nation; even once the purpose-built arcologies floated and the undersea manufactories began to function, these people would be seen as a burden, first to suffer calorie restrictions as arable land disappeared, last to be allowed to breed, always required to do the hardest and nastiest work.

They would spend much of their lives without energy, would be moved from hulk to hulk as the need arose and treated as a slave population in a world of harsh demands. These would be the slums of the floating world, where everyone vied for a chance to get out to one of the arcologies or to a specialist dormitory ship – one that sat near a resource zone or had some industrial or defense or cultural function. Otherwise the only work on these ships would be security, fishing, and farming shellfish or seaweed in the area around the ship.

On the arcologies, life would be better, but still tough. Some arcologies might have a specialized industrial or farming purpose, others might play a mixed role providing energy, education and housing. These arcologies, being purpose built, would also be able to host proper docks and shipping, perhaps enabling them to trade between countries and with occasional visitors and develop a little real wealth. But even the largest arcology using the most advanced genetically engineered crops would only be able to grow a small amount of food, of which the entire surplus would be needed to keep the dormitory ships alive and functioning; life here might be better but it would still be harsh, and some of the chemical or industrial arcologies could be hellish indeed. In the world after the flood, no one would be allowed to rebel against their lot – find a way out, or be ground under.

Despite the harsh life in the arcologies, these would be the wealthiest and the best places on the planet, and through their combination of resource extraction, limited agriculture, and energy production, the Pelagic Kingdoms would form the central component of the human race's recovery from its near-extinction. Everyone else living outside of these kingdoms would view them with only three goals in mind: to live in them, to trade with them, or to raid them. In such a world the Kingdoms would always be seeking adventurers – as would their enemies. It would be this world that player characters would interact with – performing dubious missions for the masters of the arcologies, fighting raiders, or raiding them for specialized goods that make the difference between death and survival for the less fortunate peoples of the flood. These Pelagic Kingdoms would also hire adventurers to scour the ocean world hunting out old resources and finding new trade opportunities. Beyond these pelagic kingdoms, though, smaller and more creative enterprises might flourish, offering the chance at a better life on the waves, though with a high risk. What form would these communities take?

OTEC Cities

In the first chaotic years after nations ceased to exist, before the last of the land disappeared, many people would have set out on their own, by whatever means they could secure, to make a new life on the waves. These people would have formed small bands and taken whatever they

could find on shore and off, and after they set out to sea they would have raided and fought and traded for whatever would make them better off. Over time the most successful of these survivors would have formed into communities, either static or mobile, who live as best they could as independent city states in the new world. These states survive by trading with strangers and defending themselves against anyone who would try to take what is theirs – or by amalgamating with other states to form new and stronger collectives. Not as stable or as strong as the pelagic kingdoms and dependent on trade with them for new resources, these independent kingdoms offer their citizens greater freedom than the pelagic kingdoms, but at the risk of a precarious existence that may be subsumed by raiders or sink beneath the waves at any time. If such a city-state does not have its own special property to trade upon, it will no doubt disappear, becoming living space for the pelagic kingdoms (who exterminate residents of any property they subsume to make way for their own suppressed masses) or losing its populace to other, more stable economies. Ocean Thermal Energy Collection (OTEC) platforms are one of the greatest possible prizes for such fledgling communities.

An experimental technology before the flood, OTEC platforms use differentials in the ocean's heat to produce electricity. Anyone who could seize one of these after the flood has guaranteed themselves a tradable commodity – especially if they can somehow secure a supply of batteries to trade, or develop an industry in converting water to hydrogen and oxygen for fuel cells and combustion engines. City-states built around OTEC platforms typically consist of many small ships, many no longer capable of independent movement, roped together to form a permanent floating colony based around their central power source. On the edge of the colony will be a few archaic patrol boats and the other mobile trade ships of the city, all converted to run on hydrogen-oxygen power and sails, and intended for trade and defense against attackers. The city itself trades on a special property that very few societies after the collapse can offer – abundant electricity. This means karaoke bars, game centres, concerts, and all the night life of a real city of old earth, all taking place across a wild and floating city of rafts, barges and yachts bound together and heaving and sighing on the wild deeps.

Such a community is a great prize for any pirates or conquistadors who want to add a stable source of energy to their possessions. As a result, these city-states change hands often, and defend themselves ferociously... or make very dubious deals with any neighbouring kingdoms in exchange for their security. They may also offer special deals to the Pelagic kingdoms in exchange for their independence and security, but more likely they will develop a strong close-defense navy, and possibly even a primitive air force, to ensure they remain independent. Adventurers may be employed to help defend a platform, or to infiltrate it and take it over, but the most likely role of a platform in a campaign is as a rest and recuperation city, a place where mercenaries from many

communities meet to find work and to sell the ill-gotten gains of their dubious profession. Here, adventurers will likely find an environment free of repression, where they can cut dubious deals and find new and sinister work, and where a strong but morally flexible industrial sector is able to provide them with equipment suited to a range of dubious tasks.

In the world of the flood, OTEC cities hold one of the keys to power – energy. Life after the flood is determined by who has access to energy and who can control its use, and anyone who can find an OTEC city and make themselves useful to its leaders is guaranteed safety and success. This makes OTEC cities a much sought after location – and a dangerous nest of scheming, backstabbing vipers, to boot. The perfect adventure setting!

Raft Cities

During the later years of the flood, many people took to the water independently, taking to ships and rafts and trading with the remaining parts of the land for food. Rather than developing communities through the seizure of large facilities, these formed communities over time through accretion. Small boats might gather around an abandoned collection of flotsam, or a small failed arcology; to these would be attracted random communities living on rafts, loners who are sick of plying the seas on their stolen boat, or raiders who want a permanent base to return to. These communities will not survive unless someone can come up with an industry that will hold them together, but such industries are not impossible to create, even amongst the flotsam and jetsam that naturally accrete to such places. Perhaps it would be prostitution in a raft city near a well-plied trade route; or a group of rafts and raiders congregated around a collection of barges that are used for scrapping stolen ships and selling the parts. Maybe someone will establish a shellfish farm on a partially-submerged ship, and then turn the shells into glass that is in turn ground into lenses; or turn unwanted glass from passing traders into valuable lenses. Perhaps the raft floats near a rich fishing area, and can sell preserved fish to traders in exchange for raw materials.

Life on raft cities is harsh, and even if they have some central industry or focus these communities will always have a sense of impermanence, of being a precarious gathering of wind-tossed rubbish that will soon be washed away. Indeed, when the ocean world's great storms hit they often are, or only those who live near the centre survive, with the rafts on the edge serving as nothing more than human barricades against the fury of the sea. If these communities want to survive they will need to attract larger ships or rebuild themselves around abandoned arcologies and flotsam; and indeed, if a better opportunity appears the raft community will rapidly disperse to take it on. The landscape of a raft city is always changing as newcomers enter and leave, ships are cut free to sink or drift away, or storms wipe out neighbourhoods. Adventurers may find that a whole city they

once knew well has gone, or that people they knew have disappeared and all who knew of them have gone as well. In the shifting world of the waves, it is often impossible to know whether they have gone to the deeps, or to a better chance.

In his book, Baxter describes one of the few pieces of useful bioengineering that are of value after the flood: a type of genetically modified seaweed that hardens into a plastic-like material as it grows in seawater, and can be shaped over time to form raft-like structures. Through the use of such biotechnology, perhaps connected to an original large base such as a floating wind power farm or larger river barges, raft cities can establish a central space on which they begin to pin some hopes of permanence. A wind-farm might be jury rigged to provide power again, connected to a ship that will form the administrative centre of the new city, and the plastiweed slowly grown around it to form a kind of island, raised from the water far enough to offer opportunities for farming and shelter from the worst storms. These raft cities will then attract less secure suburbs and exurbs, boats and rafts docked together in a higgledy-piggledy fashion, neighbours who change by the week or the month. The city as a whole will be impossible to catalogue or sustain, but its core will be permanent, and as that core grows over time – or as other parts of the city form their own stable plastiweed bases – the city will slowly take on a permanent character. As the plastiweed subsumes new ships and rafts, a floating island of chaotic colours and shapes and sizes will grow into being. These cities will often be filthy, poor and dangerous, but they represent the only legacy that the original raft communities have any hope of leaving the world.

For adventurers such cities always offer opportunities. The factions within the city will always have some nasty job they need done, and there will always be individuals who have been wronged and need to find their own justice. Though unable to offer much, many of the rafts and ships in these cities hail from before the flood, and may contain relics of technology that the rafters have no use for, but which the adventurers can use or take to a place where they can repair it. A householder looking for the return of their children from hostage takers might offer the adventurers the radar equipment from their long-immobile yacht, or a radio communication set, or a night-vision camera they have not needed since they ceased roaming the ocean. The adventurers may also be able to find more exotic work, chasing old treasure maps or taking on security work for passing traders. The bars and brothels of a raft city will be full of travelers with tales to tell and jobs to share, so a good sized raft city will always have a surfeit of work for intrepid adventurers. But it will also be full of thieves and bandits, looking to steal a good ship with its weapons, or to lead the adventurers to a pirate trap. These cities also offer repair work and resupply opportunities, though they may be overpriced and unreliable, but with the distances between communities often great, adventurers may find they have no choice.

The raft cities of the flood are like the hard scrabble colonies of intergalactic frontier settings. This is where Serenity-style adventures unfold on a yacht, and where the lowest tier of adventurers and scoundrels hide out while they wait for their chance to make their fortune. Raft cities, then, are a place all players will be familiar with, and an excellent setting to start a campaign from.

Ziggurats

As the world flooded, communities desperately tried to build floating structures that were cheap and reliable. Some people gathered together fallen trees and old boats and bound them together; others used purpose-built structures such as Arcologies; but as time began to press, innovative design became impossible. Instead, people needed to find ways to build floating structures rapidly, cheaply and en masse from existing systems. One of the most popular methods was to adapt plastic modular dock systems to build huge structures that were guaranteed to be buoyant. These plastic dock systems were designed to float and to lock together; it was just natural that they should be converted into huge immobile structures that would float when the ocean reached them. By loading the bottom-most layers of these plastic blocks with concrete or water, or building them around steel super-structures, huge floating structures could be mass-produced, laid out on land and prepared. When the flood reached them they would rise gently with the water, and people could float safely on the ocean. Most of these structures were built with an outer pyramid structure surrounding an inner bowl, in which people lived and food was grown. The bottom-most blocks were built to be heavier than water, and buoyancy carefully balanced so that a large portion of the structure would be underwater. A 100m-high structure might have 40m above water, with the inner area close to sea level but protected from the ocean by 40m of plastic wall. The whole structure would float, and being made of 1000s of blocks built in many layers it was highly unlikely to ever sink. The huge underwater structure provided strong substrate on which to build an ocean environment, and the whole thing was so large as to be proof against even the strongest of storms.

Unfortunately these structures had one major problem: they were too large and too cumbersome to move, and eventually they would encounter a current that was heading either north or south, and drift into polar regions where all their occupants would die. Those that were lucky enough to become trapped in a circumpolar current might remain on the edge of temperate lands, able to survive in some bare fashion; others might get caught in one of the great oceanic currents, and move in huge, slow, generational circles around the edge of a vast patch of open ocean. Life on these ziggurats could thrive, and they would come to form an important component in establishing some sense of permanence and continuity in the life of all the scattered communities on the oceans. People living in freely mobile ships could guess roughly where one of these drifting Ziggurats might be, and aim to return to it for repairs and rest, and communities on the edge of

such currents could count on the Ziggurat passing near them some time in the future, to trade, swap people, and renew ties with the rest of the human race.

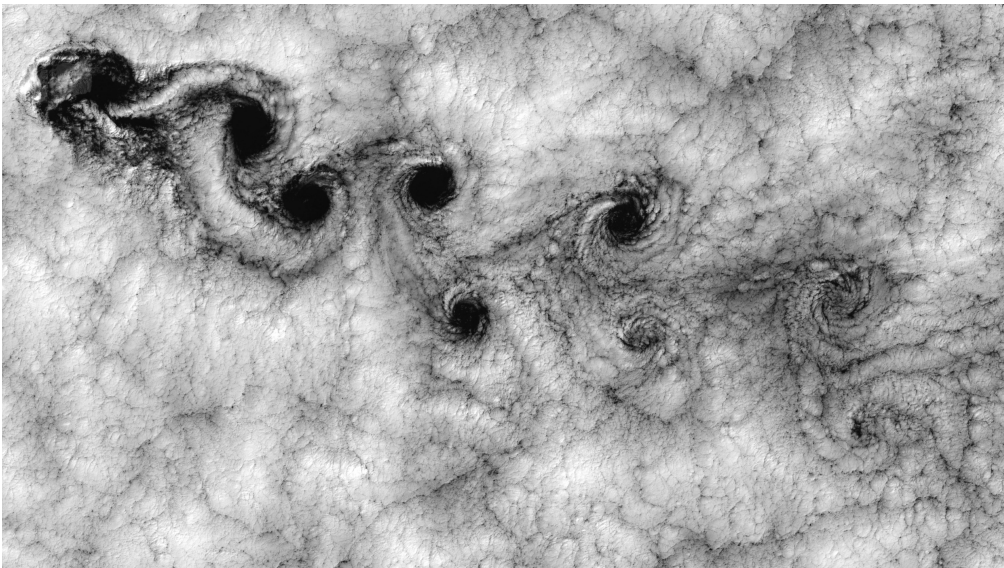
Ziggurats were the ubiquitous form of escape colony by the end of the pre-flood era, and they are often encountered on the oceans of the flood, though the societies clinging onto them may be dangerous, desperate or depraved, and many have collapsed, becoming just drifting lumps of plastic, open to looting and repopulation. Others have become frozen in the widening sea ice, their populations starved and frozen, their riches lost to the peoples of the ocean. In every Ziggurat lies the potential for wealth and hope; coupled with adventure and the threat of death.

Perils of the Flood

The world as we know it is defined by boundaries between water and earth, and the power of the earth to keep the waters in check is what enables our societies to thrive and grow. Rain-clouds sweeping out of the ocean rise up mountain ranges and dump their precious contents to watersheds and forests; ice expanding out of the arctic meets the cliffs and rises of the earth and stops, recedes, allowing life to continue; the difference in temperature between land and ocean creates the weather we are used to; and the life that dies and washes away into the sea creates zones of rich life and fertility in the surface of the sea.

After the Flood this tension between that which is above the sea and that which is below has disappeared, replaced with a single surface of unremitting, calm blue. The ocean's dominance changes weather patterns, cools the planet, and reshapes currents and even the ebb and flow of life itself. Out there in the blue are vast deserts of open ocean, where almost nothing lives and breeds, great sterile patches of empty clear water; in other places upwellings of nutrients create vast regions thick with fish and whales, easy pickings if someone even knew they were there. Over all this sweep huge storms, while mysterious currents roll with enormous power through the deeps. The ocean has become the world, and its moods and tempers and the strange patterns of life in its depths now determine the fate of all of humanity. Human life has become dependent on the whims of an environment that no one ever properly understood, and as a result new perils have arisen to threaten the future of humanity.

World Storms



After the Flood the oceans' depth doubled. Where before humanity had understood some tiny proportion of that zone at the top they called pelagic, now it had grown so vast, encompassing the world in a shroud of sun-dappled blue mystery that no one could ever hope to understand, let alone conquer. As the scientists of the old world watched this fickle, fluid world rise up to conquer their own they supposed that its surface would be an angry maelstrom, believing that only the land had tamed the sea where it stood in the path of currents and broke up the ocean's mercurial tempers. But this was not to be. With the land finally vanquished and submerged the ocean became a tranquil and placid conqueror, its great depths too solid and stable to sustain the tempests of old. Where once the land had broken up currents, and continents had impinged on the ocean's majesty, there was nowhere for heat and cold to go. Large gradients of temperature formed between the shallows and the deeps, unmolested by circumnavigating currents. From these gradients grew winds and storms, as if the ocean flung its anger at the irritations of land and people. But now, with the ocean free to move where it willed, heat dissipated from the tropics in every direction, unconcerned by the petty barriers of continents and undersea mountain ranges. Its reign uncontested by the earth, the sea grew complacent. With this change in fluid dynamics the nature of the earth's storms changed. Storms still rose up, and winds could travel for thousands of kms across the ocean unstopped, driving waves before them; but these winds were not usually very strong, and for much of the earth's turn the sea was still and quiet. Cyclones still formed in the tropics, and when they did they could travel long distances across huge stretches of warm ocean; but the well-mixed waters of the world ocean ensure that heat cannot gather on the surface, sinking instead to the frozen darkness of the abyss. As a result these cyclones, though long-lasting, tended to be weak, and they never crossed the current barrier of the gyre, where the waters mixed too much to allow heat to gather. But sometimes ... Sometimes, in summer, the ocean would still. Perhaps a circumnavigating current would deviate from its usual path, or break

for a time. Perhaps the deep churn of water would change under some gravitational, tectonic or tidal influence, and for a short time the surface would be becalmed. Not becalmed so as human communities could notice, but becalmed in such a way that the heat gathered under the tropical sun, over a continent-sized expanse of water. Such confluences of currents are rare, and this becalming might only occur once in a generation. But when the pulse beneath the sea stops like this, a pulse stirs on the surface. The storms gather on this great sheet of hot water, and a storm forms whose power was unheralded before the Flood: a world storm. World storms grow beyond anything humans have ever experienced, covering areas much larger than even the strongest cyclone and moving slowly over the ocean. Whichever direction they head, the vast size of the heated ocean will sustain their power, and they can last for weeks before they finally exhaust their generating power. As they travel, smaller cyclones – mere category 3-5 babies – break off from their flanks, spinning away in random directions to cause havoc of their own, or reforming into secondary monster cyclones in the wake of the main one. The world storm has a power well beyond the traditional system of categorizing cyclones, and usually it invokes its own unique fluid dynamic properties that make a taxonomy of such storms impossible. While such storms rage the weather across much of the hemisphere will change, as they distort the whole atmosphere. In their wake will come an unusual calm, as the ocean temperature equalizes across the range of the storm: winds stop, the sea calms, and the world heaves a sigh of relief. Nothing human can stand in the way of a world storm. Raft communities will be shattered and their inhabitants lost to the tempest. Larger structures too large to capsize will be simply broken apart, smashed by waves no human has ever seen or simply consumed whole if they are close enough to the centre of the whirlwind. Around the edges of the world storm, sometimes thousands of kms from its middle, powerful waterspouts and smaller storms will form, or lightning storms that will destroy anything floating. Communities in the path of the storm, even hundreds of kms away, cannot escape, because the winds being draw towards the world storm will prevent any sailing vessel from escaping. Only the largest, most seaworthy vessels with their own power can hope to leave the storm, and indeed this is the only way a community can survive: pack as many people as possible onto a large, powered vessel while the storm is still spinning up, and flee before it can open its maw and suck in everything living on the surface of the ocean. When a world storm forms, communities in its path will face horrible choices, because they are unlikely to possess enough vessels to liberate everyone. The privileged or the most violent few will rise up and grab what they can, fleeing with the colony's most precious effects (and maybe their loved ones) to take their chances on the open ocean, knowing that everyone they leave behind them is doomed. Such are the dilemmas of an ocean-going life... World storms have never touched the gyre, though one or two have passed near it. They usually veer northward before they reach it, but if they do come too close they will usually lose their strength as they approach the broken and mixed zone of water around the gyre. History records that one particularly strong world storm managed to partially cross

the gyre and spawned a minor cyclone inside, but fortunately the Hulks was at the opposite side of the Gyre at that time, and the Arc weathered the cyclone's passing without loss of life. Outside the gyre, however, there are few people alive who can say they have weathered such a storm.

The Miasma



The Miasma is a special type of jellyfish swarm that can only exist in the depopulated aquatic deserts of the world ocean. With almost all land sunk thousands of metres below the surface of the ocean there are very few areas where fish can spawn and thrive, and huge expanses of the earth's surface are too far from these spawning areas for larger fish to be able to survive in them. These areas, too far from fish populations to support any biodiversity larger than plankton, have become a strange and top-heavy ecosystem. Aside from occasional large predators migrating through, these empty wilds have become the domain of the grazers: whales, basking sharks and jellyfish that thrive on the plankton in surface waters. But the most efficient and terrifying of these open ocean grazers are the jellyfish, which sometimes by happenstance gather together into huge swarms, sometimes tens of kilometres across, that dominate the open ocean wherever they drift, and leave a terrible path of destruction behind them, like enormous army ants of the open seas.

The survivors of human civilization live in terror of these jellyfish swarms, which they call miasma. These swarms, though composed primarily of plankton-eating drifters, are also usually heavily infested with giant, slow-moving grazers and a large number of deadly predatory jellyfish. They consume everything in the ocean around them, and are an existential threat to the fishing grounds that most human communities zealously nurture. They also transform the atmosphere and sea around the swarm, turning the ocean into a kind of limpid swamp that offends the sensibilities of drifting raft communities, and is deeply toxic.

Most raft communities float on oceans more than 1000 m deep, and are as vulnerable to the currents as a jellyfish swarm. To maintain a reliable ocean food supply, the rafters carefully and systematically build up local ecosystems, which in turn feed a network of wild distant ecosystems. In areas like the Gyre, where a relatively large number of human communities live in close proximity, this produces a wider network of ecosystems that spread beyond the immediate vicinity of the rafts and support wildlife somewhat akin to the offshore ecosystems of the old world. But these systems are fragile, and require careful stewarding by the rafters. Every human community that floats on the waves has some system of undersea support for local fish life, that may be as simple as a series of sub-surface floating breeding beds made of old tires, or a complex architecture of reed beds and corals under the hulls and keels of the rafts. In the Gyre, where human communities are structurally large and complex, there are a host of shallow underwater structures that are thriving with sea life that once would have only existed at the shoreline: lobsters in nooks and crannies of the rafts, oysters growing on the old submarine superstructure that gives the larger rafts stability, and small fish breeding amongst every chain link, tyre underside, and submerged rope knot in the entire archipelago of floating human life. There is even a small community of sea lions on the Hulks. Every underwater structure is covered in sea weeds, and kelp grows downward and outward from the edges of the rafts. Further out, larger fish prey on the smaller fish, moving nomadically between communities and eating the larger fish that live further out from the human settlements. The residents of the Hulks put a lot of time into the care of these undersea communities, enforcing strict waste disposal rules and carefully tending weedbeds and corals to ensure that the ecosystem is balanced and thriving.

A miasma can end 100 years of this careful management and stewarding in a few days of insensate gorging. When the miasma overwhelms a human community it will consume everything that floats free in the water. All plankton and feeder fish will be sucked up by the filter feeders, and the larger fish will be found and killed by the predatory jellies. Sea mammals in the open water when the miasma hits will be entangled and drowned, or slowly paralyzed by the accumulation of stingers. The water the miasma carries with it is devoid of oxygen and highly acidic, and if the miasma is moving too slowly on the currents the effect of this tide of pollution will be to destroy all

corals and weeds in the raft and its vicinity. Lobsters, crabs, prawns and octopuses that might be untouched by predatory jellies will suffocate in the miasma, and once the swarm has passed all that remains will be dead and rotting sea life. Sometimes the miasma does not pass, and the weight of its central parts will drag the raft community with it, leading to starvation and death for all those onboard. If the rafters do not realize the danger, escape may be impossible: small sailing ships do not have the power to escape the weight of jellyfish in the water, and most smaller powered vessels will have their rudders and rotors entangled, stalling them in the water. Once trapped in the sea of deadly stingers, there is no way to swim out. There are many stories of miasmas that are haunted with the ghosts of lost rafts and ships, and many people claim that they are more dangerous for a small raft community than the ocean's storms.



The miasma carries its own meteorological phenomena, that in large part are the reason for its name. On the edge of the swarm freely moving predatory jellyfish hunt anything that moves, but in the body of the swarm are primarily filter-feeding drifters, some of them larger than a small boat. Near the centre of this gelid mass the sea becomes so thick with packed-together jellyfish that it is almost solid, and devoid of any other life. When the jellyfish here become too densely packed or when the swarm becomes too large, they die and rot, creating a fetid and stinking swamp of rot. The largest swarms becalm the sea around them, changing its texture so that waves are dampened and currents stop; there in the middle of this becalmed and dense swamp-like realm, the sun beats down and the sea heats up, giving off a stinking and rotten cloud of steam and heat haze that obscures the surface of the water. Most swarms above a certain size carry with them a thick, swamp-like haze that is impenetrable on all but the stormiest of days. Rumour has it that the largest swarms break up under their own meteorological effects: the heat from the centre creates storm cells that scatter the swarm and cast it about into smaller swarmlets. Usually one can smell

the swarm before one sees it, because tendrils of this rot drift ahead on the currents. If one is lucky the swarm will be large enough and dense enough that the rafts can be moved out of the currents, or some kind of defenses prepared. But for the larger swarms, or for rafts adrift on a strong current, there is no defense: only prayer.

The miasma leaves problems long after its passing. In addition to destroying all marine life attached to the rafts, it will leave polyps on every surface, and every part of the underside of the rafts needs to be scoured clean to ensure that the raft does not, a year later, become the centre of its own swarm. Jellyfish will also destroy nets and befoul important undersea structures, their weight breaking precious ropes and chains, blocking inlets for power and water desalinators, and poisoning the water as they die and rot. Delicate floating solar panels will be damaged or lost, and the acidic water may do irreparable damage to the oldest and most fragile parts of a long-lived raft community. Small boats may be carried away under the pressure of the swarm, or their propellers and other underwater components entangled and ruined. The raft will also find itself floating in an open sea devoid of life, and any community that is used to catching fish in the immediate vicinity of its decks will need to find a way to venture further afield for food until the ecosystem rights itself – if ever it does. Most likely, though, the local ecosystem will be destroyed, and the rafters will need to make a call on other human communities they know to obtain new stocks of coral, shellfish and weed to regrow their precious ecosystem. Usually such help comes with a high price, that many communities cannot pay: they will then break up, and individual rafts will be forced to brave the open ocean as they seek new fishing grounds or functioning communities to join.

The larger communities are the most vulnerable, because they cannot move. These communities have found ways to ride out the miasma, or even to divert it, but their efforts almost always come with a great cost, in equipment and often lives. Where once jellyfish were annoying pests at the beach, they have now become the greatest terror of the open ocean, and for a community like the Hulks the onset of a major miasma is a threat that most of its residents will only ever see once in their lifetimes – if they survive it ...

The Gyre

After the flood sea levels rose by about 6000m, so there is a small swathe of land in one part of the Himalayan plateau that is still above the water, as well as a handful of mountain peaks in the Andes. The areas around these peaks are the new continental shelves, narrow zones of teeming ocean life, and other mountain ranges, such as the Alps and the Rockies, though completely submerged, are perhaps close enough to the surface to support an ecology of sorts, and maybe even to allow undersea arcologies to exist, though life in them would likely not be pleasant. Unfortunately in this version of the Flood the remaining tiny landmasses are or have been warzones, heavily damaged in battles for possession during the final years of the flooding, so although they are rich in land in the new world, the residents of these little archipelagoes live in a constant state of conflict, and are not capable of leading humanity forward to a new world. Life on the open seas still holds some allure to those who wish to escape war and death, but it comes with its own risks – of starvation, thirst and storm. However, some communities, by luck or early design, are able to find a part of the ocean where they can secure some safety and prosperity. By a freak of fluid dynamics and history, the Gyre is an example of such a uniquely fortunate open ocean community, and it is here that the chronicle of part 2 is set, perhaps 100 years after all of human civilization drowned.

The gyre is a huge fluid dynamic phenomenon, which has carved out an area of relatively placid and protected seas in the centre of what was once the Tibetan plateau. After the Flood the oceans are unconstrained by land masses, and huge and powerful currents sweep across the planet, bringing with them powerful storms and huge waves that make life on the open seas difficult and terrifying, but there are spots where strange local phenomena serve to create calmer, relatively storm-free environments. The Gyre is a community of floating remnants built in one such region. Powerful currents flow from west to east above the tropics, but when they reach the Himalayan landmass they separate, and the currents passing the north side of the mountains slow down and curve, like the low pressure eddies above an aircraft wing. Curling off the spur of the mountains, they hit the relatively shallow and even expanse of the Tibetan plateau, forming an arc of swirling chaos around the plateau. A weaker version of the same phenomenon on the northern edge of the plateau completes the circle, and in the centre of this tear-drop shaped border of constantly stormy water is a broad expanse of relative calm, perhaps a couple of hundred kilometres across and maybe 500 kms from the warring states of the Himalayan Archipelago.

Protected by this storm zone from both war and unstable waters, the Gyre has formed into its own small autonomous community. While its stability arises from the protective storm zone, its wealth and relative modernity derive from another fluke of fate: huge flood-survival facilities that were built

in Europe and Central Asia, but drifted on the currents into the Gyre where, stranded, they slowly formed their own covenant. The centre piece is the towering arcology of plastic and steel called The Arc, but there are several others that became stranded in the Gyre and give it its unique prosperity. The Gyre is a kingdom of constantly floating, slowly rotating parts, a constellation of abandoned facilities from the Drowning Time: a floating archipelago of remnants.

Remnants

The facilities of the Gyre float in a constantly evolving and reorienting constellation, always spinning around some unknown central axis in slow but chaotic patterns, and forever trapped within the teardrop boundaries of the storm zone. At their centre is the Arc, to which all residents direct all their efforts, but which in reality few people ever live in or even ever visit. Each facility is unique in its culture and origins, and functions as a kind of independent city within the complex of the Gyre.

The Arc

The most prominent of the remnants is the Arc, a massive floating arcology that was thrown together in desperation by the combined industry of France, Germany and Britain as they realized the Drowning was not going to end. Being low countries they were the first to have to abandon the land, and the least prepared, so their solution was low-tech at first and enhanced later. They bound together six oil rigs in a rough hexagon, the edges of the hexagon formed from abandoned oil rigs, and joined the whole thing together with anything that would float. The walls were initially an amalgam of wood, tires, shipping containers, anything that would float. Near the end someone developed a technology to extrude plastic from sea water and a kind of algae, and all of the industrial power of three nations was devoted to covering the whole structure in extruded plastic. By the time the waters finally took the last of the cities of France and Germany the Arc had been built into a kilometre deep monstrosity of plastic, wood and steel, designed so that much of its depth would be underwater, but enough above water to protect the centre of the space from even the most ferocious storms. Beneath the surface they built wave-powered generators, and on the sides they installed solar panels; inside the structure they dumped hundreds of tons of soil, and planted trees and grass. An army of workers slaved night and day to complete it before the waves took it, but at the end there was a revolution, when those workers realized they weren't going to be allowed to live on the object of their toil. The thing eventually took float half finished, and fighting in and around it lasted for years. It drifted across the new flood plains of Europe, often running aground and then freed as the waters rose, coming into conflict with every new nation that took to

the sea as the waters rose. But it also drifted east, and in the chaos of the final years of the Drowning it was lost to history, eventually reappearing with its lucky surviving residents in the Gyre.

The Arc is an ecosystem all of its own. It has trees and grass above ground, and great plastic and steel strakes protruding from its keel host reefs teeming with fish. The outer walls of the rigs on its corners, pock marked with holes and breaches, are home to thousands of screaming sea birds; their guano keeps the fields within fertilized and provides chemicals for explosives. Near the water line it hosts fields of barnacles, which are harvested for silicates; the corals of its reefs too are recycled for their essential nutrients. The wave generators provide enough power for essential function, and it hosts an array of batteries that can be used to power the many ships that dock with it and feed it. Those generators also maintain a last, barely-functional plastics lab, that continues to extrude plastics from sea water and algae, though in decreasingly small amounts. The Arc also hosts a seed bank and a huge repository of the scientific and historical knowledge of the world before the Drowning, though much was damaged or lost in the battles for possession of its riches. During its drift East the Arc has gathered a wide range of folk from across the old world, so that amongst its few thousand residents can be found perhaps a hundred languages, not all spoken easily, and it has slowly built its own language that is a mixture of all of them. The Arc has never been sunk or even seriously damaged by storm or tempest, but it is too big to move under its own power, and its residents are lucky that it found the Gyre; without power it might eventually have drifted into colder waters, and everyone frozen there. Instead it floats at the centre of the Gyre, moving perhaps only a few hundred metres a year and mostly in a circle. It is the centre of it all.

The Towers

No one knows why the Towers were built. Some contend out of hubris, that the peoples of Europe wanted to preserve their most poignant architecture, thinking that even if it drifted untended on empty seas for an eternity at least some part of their noble past would be preserved; others think that the Towers were simply a desperate gift to the newly stateless residents of whichever place they were built, a kind of offering to the world of the Drowning. Labourers and great machines toiled day and night to throw together a bizarre agglomeration of ships, rafts and crates – all the old oil-powered vessels that would be useless once the last oil rig was torn from its fields and left to drift. Once they had crushed and bound together a large enough base of old shipping, the engineers of old hoisted on top some great tower, for no one knows what purpose, though some guess; the whole was then set adrift. Most likely it was intended to be a permanent floating source of steel and glass, and indeed legend holds that one of the towers held in its base a huge store of wood and coal, and another of chemicals. Two of the towers are telecommunications towers, one

rumoured to have once been emblazoned with the flag of a lost state and both possibly purpose built; the last is the Eiffel tower, listing slightly to one side and partly submerged in the base of ships and rigs that hold it.

Though no one knows why the towers were built, everyone understands their current use: birds and binoculars. Each of the towers has a microwave relay station at the top, a mirror for laser ranging, and a small communications room. The towers themselves swarm with birds, and provide the Gyre with three breeding colonies for one of its main sources of food and fibre. The ships at the base are covered in guano and now also bound together by accretions of seaweed, coral, rust and salt. Some of the ships are partially broken in order to fit them together well, and the whole structure is unstable, constantly battered by waves, and full of unsafe structures. The Towers are not for living on, but for harvesting; one of them (named "the Russian" after its fading flag) even holds a breeding colony of oysters, and the eels from beneath the Eiffel are considered a delicacy. Rumour has it that the O2 Tower has not been fully looted even after a hundred years, and deep in the bowels of its complex superstructure one can find treasures still, if one is brave enough to look.

The Towers are the least stable of the remnants, and float rapidly around the perimeter of the Gyre orbiting the Arc at a great distance perhaps once every decade. Occasionally people will live on them temporarily, but mostly people visit them to harvest shellfish and guano, and occasionally steel, though steel is taken only with the permission of the Arc, and in carefully controlled quantities. A small squad of guards lives on each Tower, and anyone caught harvesting anything without a permit is killed without mercy. Some hulks are too precious to leave to scavengers.

The OTEC

The OTEC was built by the Chinese when they realized their world was going to be lost, and is the only remnant that started its life on the Tibetan plateau. The shallow seas of the plateau have a steeper temperature gradient than the rest of the world ocean, and the OTEC was built to harness that heat gradient for power. This power is used to provide energy to a state-of-the-art facility designed house the elite of China's military and political establishment after the drowning. The cold water from the depths that rises through its systems is used in aquaculture, and also separated into hydrogen and oxygen for fuel. The OTEC is huge, the size of the largest oil rig at its centre and even bigger beneath the surface in order to ensure its stability. It was designed to be serviced by several small submarines and ships, and the Chinese built it to last: 100 years after the Drowning it is not a pretty sight but it is still seaworthy and robust, if a little drafty.

Unfortunately for the Chinese their plan did not come to fruition. Starvation, thirst and disease took their toll on the residents, and the difficulties of life on the open seas led to rebellion and chaos. The wars for control of the Himalayan archipelago sucked in what little was left of the Chinese navy, and those who could escaped to what then seemed like the greener shores of the Himalayan archipelago, never to return as the war for land drained their blood and treasure. The OTEC was forgotten, its skeleton crew left to try as best they could to keep it functioning and to feed themselves, until one day outriggers from the Arc arrived and, realizing what they had found, made the Chinese technicians an offer they could not refuse. Now the OTEC powers laboratories and spends a large portion of its energy on charging power cells and filling hydrogen tanks for gas power. It also fuels light industry, and in amongst its sprawling substructure are an array of facilities for electrolysing seawater into metals. Scientists in the OTEC attempt to find new technologies for living on the ocean, and also run a computer facility that serves an essential purpose in the Drowned World: keeping track of the world's slowly falling satellites.

The OTEC is a deep and heavy structure, and barely moves in its place. Some of its prodigious power generation is spent on huge undersea motors to hold it in place over the most promising stretches of water. Still it moves, slowly, and it is the policy of the Arc that it should move into the Gyre not towards the edge of the Gyre where the waters are more mixed and the risk of losing it greater. The OTEC is that little spark of civilization that keeps the people of the Gyre from falling back into barbarism, and also that keeps them independent of any other powers that might rise up in the distant Himalayas, and start looking to the floating world for new conquests ...

The Hulks

If the OTEC is the Gyre's last remnant of civilization, the Hulks are its vanguard of barbarism. The Hulks are a collection of old ships that have entered the Gyre through its currents – ghost ships adrift on the oceans – or whose crew surrendered them to the Gyre in hopes of admission to a better world. These Hulks were lashed together, interspersed with rafts and flotsam, and turned into living space for the ordinary workers of the Gyre. It is on the Hulks that all the grinding soul-crushing labour of the Gyre is performed. Here are the low-grade chemical factories producing fertilizer and explosives; the net repairers and weavers who constantly repair the crucial daily materials of life on the sea; the fishermen and labourers who keep the people of the Hulks fed and rebuild the homes that the sea constantly damages.

The Hulks are always swarming with activity. No one rests, because this sprawling complex of interlocked rafts and ships is at constant risk from the sea, and the bonds that lock them all

together in a great carpet of teeming humanity need constant repair. Children swarm over chains, cables, ropes and anchors, making sure they are fast, rubbing off rust, checking pieces that need reweaving or resealing, reapplying rust-repellent materials and testing for weakness. On the bigger ships, chemical factories churn out compounds and pump waste into the sea; recyclers move from house to house and business to business, picking over every tiny object of rubbish to remake and reuse. What is lost to the sea is lost forever, and even the smallest thing may prove to be a precious treasure during hard times, so no one in the Hulks rests when they could be repairing, recycling or gathering.

Life is cheap in the Hulks. It is a world of power, crime and abuse. The only way out is down, or into “service,” working on the Arc or the OTEC. Even becoming an adventurer is almost impossible on the Hulks, since to be a real adventurer requires that most precious of commodities – a ship – and for all its wealth the Gyre does not have the capacity to make spare ships. In the Hulks, only the fishermen have ships – and only the bravest of folk ride in those. So for most people there is no way off the Hulks, just a life of squalor and hard scrabble. But to the Rafterers, the Delvers and many of the Himalayans, such a life holds riches beyond imagination ...

The Booms

The booms are a complex of nets floating in the edge of the Gyre, near the swirling currents of the storm zone. These currents draw flotsam from far away outside the Gyre, but they also dredge up material from the plateau 1000 metres below, and sometimes this includes that most precious of commodities, soil, or even large pieces of plastic washed free of some ancient town or encampment. Sometimes these wash into the Booms, where they are trapped and gathered by the little colony of workers who always live here. They gather driftwood – especially driftwood – plastic, soil, little scraps of rubbish that might have fallen from a colony 1000 kilometres away, and many small fish, and carefully collect them together. The fish are separated into flesh and bone, the bone to be used in weaving and surgical instruments, the flesh dried and shipped to the Hulks for cheap sustenance. Sometimes a rare treasure falls into the nets – a bottle or a piece of flotsam containing metal, or driftwood, or some large sea animal with valuable bone – and the ever-vigilant workers will quickly claim it.

Work at the Booms is hard. They must be constantly watched for something valuable that might be quickly lost, and they are also constantly in need of repair and cleaning. The nets are an irreplaceable treasure, many kilometres of net of different sizes and weights that have been shepherded through 100 years of use, and they are constantly in need of repair and care. The

people who work them are like a spider in its web, always checking for breaks, fixing damage, and quick to make a judgment about whether a prize snared is more danger to the nets than it is worth. The Booms are privileged work for residents of the Hulks, but they are also hard work, and dangerous. But life in the Hulks is hard, and the Booms offer promise of wealth delivered by the sea, so many come to work here, and work hard for the chance at something special. Work and risk are the essence of life in the Gyre.

The Earthen Geyser

Near the western edge of the Gyre the constant motion of the tides picks up matter from far below and returns the forgotten earth to those high above it. The Earthen Geyser is an area of light brown water under a kilometer across rich in actual soil washed within human reach by an up-swelling current. The actual location varies constantly as the current moves, but is always located too close to the storm zone for a sane sailor's comfort. The Harvesters dare lowering makeshift containers into the choppy waters from some of the sturdiest boats controlled by the Arc. They track the Geyser and dart in when the storm fronts retreat or the current drifts into the safe zone. These advances are matched with desperate retreats with the wind at their back when the clear period comes to its inevitable abrupt end.

Only the precious materials retrieved from the endless dance with doom justifies such risk taking. The silty water retrieved is taken to the Pans, sheets of thick plastics stretched out under the sun, and poured out there for evaporation to leave their reward. This effort provides the single largest source of new material into the community, replacing that lost to the wind or vagaries of chance. It is also critical to enabling the growth of the forest.

The Forest

Actually a series of small artificial islands created after the Drowning, these tree laden refuges are held in nigh-religious veneration by the inhabitants of the Hulks. The most recent structures are built from wood and each is filled precious soil and fertilizer extracted from human and seabird waste. In this soil grows some of the largest non-aquatic plants still alive in the world – swift growing pines and even a single raft with rot-resistant dense woods that won't be usable for another century. The tress are carefully tended by caretakers who possess one of the most desired roles in the Gyre. Once grown to an acceptable size the tree is dug out and cut and carved to a dedicated use identified while the tree was still a sapling.

The Forests are never visited by most residents of the Gyre and drift far beyond the sight of almost all. Despite that, everyone is aware of their presence. 2 new wooden ships have been launched in the last 5 years and all know that for their community to survive the wood must grow.

Life in the Gyre

Life in the Gyre is about what is needed and what should be done. Of course in their personal lives people act according to morality, love and the concerns of daily affection, but on a political level the Gyre is ruled by expediency and efficiency. The world ocean does not care about morality, and all of humanity is powerless before the ocean's force. Living on the ocean means acceding to its whims, and finding ways to live with its power, and the first lesson that this new and harsh world teaches humanity is that society must be organized according to what is needed, and not what is right. The single biggest demand in the Gyre is work – there is always more work to be done – and society is built around the mobilization of labour. No one is allowed to be lazy, and no one is allowed to be unemployed. There is no retirement, and to a large extent no education. The entire society is built on a system of centrally planned and organized labour, and skills are learnt through apprenticeships rather than schooling. Every year the scientists of the labs travel through the stations of the Gyre, seeking out talented individuals to join them for training. So too do the stormguards, the functionaries of the Arc, the fisher guilds ... anyone who is not picked up by these elite societies is left to work as manual labour, working long and exhausting days in service to the Arc, a kind of serf in a post-apocalyptic feudal ocean. Nor is there room for rebellion or resistance, which is punished viciously and quickly by the stormguards – though in reality there is little desire for resistance, because no one who floats on the vast and cruel ocean can imagine a better world where freedom and self-expression matter. There is work, or death.

People in the Gyre are small, because food is scarce. But although food is scarce there is no starvation, and the people of the Gyre enjoy a diverse diet. They eat seabirds, guinea pigs, rats and fish; occasionally they are able to hunt or, more likely, scavenge whale meat. Although their diet is primarily protein, they also eat plantains and potatoes, grown on the arc but also in small amounts on the Hulks. Mushrooms are plentiful, and they have a wide range of vegetables that are grown wherever there is space. Seaweed is, of course, ubiquitous, as are shellfish grown on the outskirts of the remnants, and squid. Vine fruit such as passion fruit, grapes and gooseberries are to be found growing on every structure, and in certain seasons the Hulks blaze with the flowers of these omnipresent vines. Stunted lemons and pineapples grow on the outer slopes of the Arc, and everyone grows tomatoes. Occasionally a trader from the Himalayan war zone passes, selling rice

or buckwheat, and those who can afford it bloat themselves on this exotic food; there are a few sheep on the Arc, mostly used to grow wool, and on special occasions it is possible to eat strong cheese. There is a large stock of wines and spirits from before the Drowning on the Arc, and the leaders of the Gyre will open these once a year to celebrate their continuing survival; everyone else drinks cheap alcohol made from waste plant material. There are many rituals around food, eating and community, and festivals in every season and every month. The people of the Gyre are bound together by their shared experience of the Ocean's bounty; they do not starve, and though life is tough they are confident of tomorrow's meal.

The Gyre's rulers are not selected by any known rule. There is no system of government in the Gyre; a few people run the system, and these people are chosen by those already running the system. The people who rise to rule are ruthlessly selected for talent, because there is no space in the Gyre to appoint idiots or psychos to positions of power, and the ruling clique must choose their successors very carefully. Tradition has it that the ruling clique should always include a representative from the fisher's guild, someone from the Hulks, someone from the OTEC, and a member of the stormguard; beyond this the clique's size depends on circumstance and expedience. They rule with the consent of the governed, and a healthy dose of stormguard violence; no one expects justice, only expedience. What choice does anyone have?

This is the world of the Gyre, one of the best places to live after the Drowning. It is a world without space for complaint, dissent or resistance, a world of work and endurance. It is also a world of sunshine and freedom, a relatively stable society living on the great, free and liberated world of the open ocean. Life is clean, pure and intense, free of war and starvation and hopeful of a future, so very different to the violence of the Himalayas or the slow, sad madness of the Delves; and much, much richer than the bare-naked subsistence life of the rafters. Slowly the people of the Gyre recover from the Drowning and hope to build a society that can grow and be more stable; perhaps one day a real human society can rebuild in this strange storm-wracked post-apocalyptic world. If it does, there is a good chance it will arise from the Gyre – or look to the little constellation of remnants as its main rival ...

II: Chronicles of the Flood

The Old Man and the Sea

This is a report of the first adventure in the world of the flood. This chronicle follows the adventures of a small squad of characters (the PCs) who commit dark deeds in service of the Gyre. It chronicles their initial failings, in the matter of the Old Man and the Sea, and their subsequent rise to success under the kind tutelage of Captain Dilver.

Our adventures start in the Gyre perhaps 100 years after the flood began, and 70 years after the waters stopped rising. There are still people alive who vaguely remember life before the waters rose, though they are few in number - human society has been committed to the waves. When our adventure begins the Gyre has become stable and secure enough that its leaders wish to preserve the history of their society, and they have just completed a five-year oral history project to catalogue the experiences of those old enough to have experienced the world before the Flood. This adventure begins just at the end of that period.

The characters

The first adventure finds us meeting the first three characters in the chronicle:

- *Crimson*, an aging warrior once famous for his military exploits but now gone to seed, slower and past his prime
- *Quark*, a man of genuinely diminutive size (a dwarf, in fact), albino and considered monstrous in the gyre. A technical genius, drone pilot and artilleryist
- *Ryan*, a 15 year old dragged to service from the booms, where his remarkable swimming abilities drew attention. Ryan is a rider, a rare type of person with a symbiotic relationship with a sea lion. Ryan's sea lion is a 1 ton Steller's sea lion called Arashi

These three are members of the Wind Guard, a small and tight-knit squad of agents who do specialist work for the Gyre. They had previously worked together on the *Bobsled*, a famous tug boat reconditioned for battle and renowned for its resilience in storms. The adventure starts with them meeting Captain Dilver at the Strategy Gardens in the Hulks. Captain Dilver is the highest-ranked person they have ever met in the Gyre, a leader in the Wind Guard who is infamous for having quashed a rebellion in the Hulks 20 years earlier. Through spies, treachery and violence he beat the rebellion and captured its leaders; he is famous for having joined them together by leg and hand with plastic ties. He then threw their children in the ocean and laughed as they struggled to

save them. Once they had drowned, he made the controversial decision not to recover the bodies for recycling, because “we’ll not have their taint in our world.” He left them for the ocean. For the PCs, he is a figure of awe and command.



The Strategy Gardens

They met in the strategy gardens, a small space of peace and calm built onto the bows of the MV China 1, a huge bulk carrier forming one of the central parts of the Hulks. The strategy gardens have a small central shed, in which Captain Dilver is rumoured to meet and plan his strategies, inside a small garden of roses, strawberries, blackberry bushes and a few stunted lemon and plantain trees. A solar-powered antibiotic fermenter bubbles away in one corner, casting an acrid stench over the whole garden. The PCs met him at midday on a clear day in what was once early autumn. A gentle breeze blew over the gardens and clouds over the Gyre cast enough cover to enable them to meet without veils. Being midday, the call to prayer echoed across the Hulks, singing the song of the afternoon weather report to anyone who needed to know it. The characters approached Captain Dilver humbly, sitting on chairs around a small table and politely taking up cups of kombucha, nibbling daintily on candied grasshoppers, and waiting for him to speak.

Dilver offered them a simple job. After their work on the Bobsled they were deserving of a rest, and he had a simple job for them that, while it carried a small risk of violence, was basically a holiday. They were to travel to a raft on the edge of the Gyre and collect an old man. An oral history project

conducted across all the raft communities in the Gyre's areas of influence had recently finished, and as part of this oral history project they had discovered a raft city that had lasted for 50 years. On this city was an old man called Ken who knew the intricate details of the Gyre's currents, fish movements and weather. This man was old and surely soon to die, and they wanted to bring him to the Gyre to learn his secrets before he did. The PCs were to take a ship to this raft, and buy this man. On the way they were to stop off at the Eiffel Tower and deliver medicines, because 4 of the 6 guards resident in the tower had fallen sick with some disease that could not be cured with the current stock of drugs on the island. They were to take the Windslip, a famous and beautiful trimaran that could move fast on the wind over calm seas, and use its high density solar cells to power a computer unit that was running a task for the Arc. Some scientists on the Arc had identified a satellite with a possibly stable orbit, and to test its orbit they needed a moving ship running a continuous GPS signal to the satellite. The Windslip was perfect for this job, and a 5 day journey the right length of time. The PCs were to run the computer tracking system over the whole 5 days of their journey, via the Eiffel tower, to the raft. What could possibly go wrong?

Dilver gave them vague guidance on negotiations with the Raft for the old man. They were to carry an initial down payment consisting of a solar-powered antibiotic fermenter, 100 old screens, a new satellite dish, some weapons and a basic stock of drugs. They were to agree to any payment up to and including a small ship. Noticing the PC's expressions of surprise at such a high price, he hastened to explain to them that, having discovered that the raft community had lasted 50 years they were thinking of inducting it into the Gyre proper. The Gyre is not a colonial enterprise, and the rafters had to want to join the Gyre. To facilitate this they wanted to make them wealthier and connect them more closely to the life of the Gyre. Currently only the raft community's leaders held screens, but it was hoped that shipping in 100 screens would make raft culture available to a wider pool of people. That plus the wealth the raft could gain from extra drugs, independence in communications and drugs, and a small ship, would certainly make it look favourably on accession to the Gyre.

Unconvinced, the PCs set out for the Eiffel tower.

Poison and iron

They set off from the inner dock, the dock where the smaller ships hide from the full ravages of the world ocean. This dock is a sheltered spot under an oil rig, connected to the sea by a twisting canal some 100 metres long that winds through the poorest part of the Hulks. They met the Windslip's four crew in the breathless, still air under the rig, drawing first suspicion and distrust at the sight of

the monstrous Quark, and then relief and confidence when the men learnt they would have a rider aboard. The Windslip set off, drifting out of the docks under its own electric power and then speeding to the southwest on a light but constant wind. The computer in the hold slid silently through its infinite cycles of tracking and counting, and in the gentle wind the PCs had little to do. The Windslip steered itself, skipping lightly over the vast world sea towards their destination. By the afternoon of their second day they could see a distant cloud, like a smudge on the horizon, and soon the first seabirds were mobbing their ship. An hour or two later and they were at the Eiffel tower, sliding gracefully in to dock at the small second wharf. The second wharf was a capsized ship, made fast against the side of the huge bulk carrier Silicon Dream by a complex web of chains and tires. They slid into this dock in the shadow of the tower itself, which loomed above them and glowed orange in the afternoon light. The whole tower screamed with the constant calls of a million seabirds of every shape and colour, and even separated from that horde by the full height of the Silicon Dream and the first spars of the tower the noise was nearly deafening.

They lashed the Windslip tight and alighted to the dock. Here they were met by the man in charge of the tower, Captain Jack, and the tower's ornithologist Vlae. They greeted them warily, hailing them with the traditional greeting of "Fair Winds, brother" but standing well back out of fear of infection. Seeing their wariness, Jack led them straight to their cabins and offered to immediately introduce Quark to the four sick soldiers. Ryan went with him but Crimson had a deep fear of disease, having experienced cholera outbreaks before, and stayed as far away as possible. Captain Jack led Quark and Ryan through the vast cavernous holds of the Silicon Dream, some empty and some filled with supplies or precious materials – old wood, bales of soil, seed stock, ivory, steel, crates of guano ready for transport, endless shelves of eggs – until they reached a smaller cargo hold in the stern. This space had been converted into a medical facility, and through its door they could see into the chamber, in which 12 beds and a small nurses station were set out. The four guards lay in their beds, looking sorry for themselves and very weak. Quark entered and began investigating their symptoms, asking them about what they ate and how it was prepared, and looking especially for signs of the dreaded cholera. The eldest of the soldiers was an aging hero named Anna, who had led the attack that captured the itinerant warship the Gunfather some years ago, and who was famous for her calm and poise. A younger soldier, Adams, revealed that he had prepared the food – made a bowl of mashed pumpkin and taro, flavoured with honey, then gone personally to fish for snapper near the first dock. The group had eaten the pumpkin mash with fresh snapper sashimi an hour later. Quark realized that during that hour the food was largely unattended, and investigating their symptoms concluded they had all been poisoned, probably with rat poison.

There was a poisoner in the Eiffel Tower.

They returned to the living area of the ship, passing back through the silent halls of stored treasures and emerging on a narrow gantry. As they emerged, they ran into Vlae, walking along the gantry covered in blood. He was carrying a seabird in one hand, its neck ripped open and blood all over his face and coveralls. "Dinner," he said by way of explanation, stopping in the sulphurous light of a decklamp. He had obviously torn its throat with his teeth, judging by the down still stuck to his bloodied chin. They edged past him, looking suspicious. Quark told Captain Jack that, being unsure about the possibility of contagious disease in the food, he and his crew would eat on the deck of the Windslip with their own food; Jack and Vlae could join them but bring their own food. He did not mention rat poison. This agreed upon they retired to prepare dinner, and Quark warned the others of his suspicions.

Dinner passed awkwardly, with the PCs watching Jack and Vlae warily to try and work out which was the poisoner. Over dinner they discussed the guards' "illness," and discovered that both had an alibi, though unproven: Vlae "took his dinner on the tower" (i.e. he killed a seabird and ate it raw), while Jack ate in his office while filling in reports. After their awkward dinner Ryan slipped into the shadows and stalked them back to their rooms, where he was able to watch Vlae reading ornithology books and Jack communicating with his family by screen. No evidence at all of ill intent. With no proof of who was the poisoner, they went to sleep – Quark and Ryan on the Silicon Dream in their assigned quarters and Crimson on the deck of the Windslip.

In the early dawn Quark was shaken awake by Jack and led quietly through the ship to the tower. He and Jack climbed some stairs to a viewing gantry some 30m above the decks, and along the gantry to a harpoon gun. The night was clear and blissfully free of the scream of birds, most of which were sleeping; under a moonlit sky a gentle wind was blowing, raising the sea surface into mild choppy waves that gleamed white in the moonlight as they broke. The wind streamed cool and fresh across the ship and the tower, bringing with it the smell of salt and guano. From above them came a constant gentle sussuration of coos and gulling, as occasionally a few birds amongst the throng muttered or complained in its sleep. Hidden in the shadows of the harpoon gun, Jack pointed down to the deck of one of the giant carriers on which the tower rested. Down there in the shadows of the ship's decking, tubes and crates, a tableau of iron piracy was playing out. Three men stood over a steel tube on the deck. One was cutting it with some kind of welder, while one ran a saw or wire through the red hot metal, and another pulled the metal slowly away from the cut. Nearby, standing in a patch of moonlight, a sentry of some kind stood, wearing whalebone armour that glowed in the moonlight like a ghost. Jack pointed at Quark and then at the harpoon gun, a silent question that Quark answered with a grim nod. He prepared to fire ...

Meanwhile Vlae had woken Ryan and led him to meet Crimson on the decks of the Windslip, where he explained the problem. They needed to ambush these men and kill them, but first they needed to know by what ship they had come, and how many combatants might have come with them. Vlae wanted Ryan to take his sea lion Arashi and approach the area from which the men must have boarded the ship, and search it for their boat. Had they come in a tiny ship's boat, or had they managed to get a whole warship to silently approach the tower? Ryan nodded and slipped away into the darkness on Arashi, with clear instructions: find the pirate ship, tell the others the situation by his cellphone, and then give the order to attack when he thought it was clear. As Ryan slipped off through the moon-streaked waves to find his prey, Vlae led Crimson through a complex network of corridors and gantries to a point in the ship beneath the pirates. From there, he said, Crimson could rush up a flight of stairs and out through a hatchway onto the deck, emerging right on top of the pirates. As soon as he got the signal to attack, he could charge.

Ryan slipped around the outside of the Silicon Dream and down to the point where the pirates had boarded the next carrier, the Batons Rouge. In the near-darkness he could not swim under the keel, for fear of getting tangled in chains and plastic in the darkness, so instead he had to swim the long way round, but pulled along by Arashi he was able to get to his target zone rapidly. Emerging from a short dive near the point where the pirates had boarded the ship, he immediately found their vessel: a small submarine pulled up near the Batons Rouge, its deck just beneath the water but its conning tower protruding from the gentle waves. A thick black cable ran from the submarine's conning tower up to the deck of the Batons Rouge, indicating that the conning tower was open, and ropes hung down the side of the Batons Rouge. Ryan gave his sea lion the order to guard him and slipped through the seething waves onto the deck of the submarine. Somewhere out in the darkness his giant mount disappeared into the waves, to circle the submarine and wait for anyone to approach. Ryan crawled up the conning tower and took position behind the hatch, bone spear out. He then drew out his cell phone and sent a text: "Found a small submarine. Go!"

As soon as he received the text, Quark powered up the harpoon and fired at the gleaming ghost-soldier. At the same time Crimson hurled himself out of the depths of the ship, charging in to attack the group of soldiers. One died instantly in his charge, and the other slipped down to join the fight. Quark's shot missed, as did his second, and in the struggle that followed one of the men jumped over the edge of the ship. Crimson joined battle with the remaining two pirates. From his position on the conning tower Ryan heard the man hit the water, and start swimming to the ship; soon he heard a huge crash, desperate panting, a curse; there was some splashing, another huge crash, and a more agonized series of moans; another splash and then just the silence of the waves. Up above, Crimson was being pressed back by two foes, one wearing terrifying armour of carved bone, until Quark's third harpoon smashed into the bone knight's leg and tore it off. Quark then

fashioned himself a flying fox of shark leather and hurled himself down towards the deck on a nearby cable, but missed the deck and flew into the sea, where Arashi waited. Fortunately Arashi was feeling discerning, and as Quark scrambled up one of the pirates' ropes Arashi's head popped up from below, giving a knowing "whuff!" and pushing him up the rope.



Arashi is not renowned for showing discretion in the exercise of his guard duties, and he weighs 1 ton.

As the battle crawled to its bitter end up on deck a pirate emerged from the hatch of the submarine, looking for the reason the power had stopped flowing to the welder. Ryan struck him from the shadows, sticking his bone spear straight through the pirate's neck and killing him instantly. Up above, Crimson took down the shark-skin armoured pirate while the bone-armoured man floundered and gasped. The greasy business of the kill done, he cornered the bone-armoured man against the railings, warned him not to jump, and offered him clemency for information. The bone man, feeling his life rapidly ebbing out of his speared leg, agreed, and told them all they need to know. Iron piracy is an automatic death sentence that the Wind Guard have the power to commute to a life sentence repairing nets; there is a small host of cages hanging on the lower levels of the Eiffel tower, in which Iron pirates are trapped alive while the seabirds eat them, that attest to the

savagery of Gyre justice. The bone pirate was all too willing to give away his submarine and any hope of freedom in order to avoid that fate, even though it meant a life spent as a crippled slave. He revealed that there was only one more pirate inside the submarine (who Ryan had killed) and that there was a trap on the bottom rung of the ladder inside the conning tower, and a switch to turn it off further inside – anyone stepping on the yellow mark on the lowest rung would experience the full power of the submarine’s extensive array of batteries, in a millisecond. Ryan entered the submarine, avoiding the yellow mark, turned off the trap and explored. The submarine was almost entirely batteries and motor, with three tiny rooms reserved for the crew. One was a tiny common area, one a control room, and one a sleeping room. The sleeping room had four beds rolled out next to each other, and two more beds in the unused torpedo tubes. There was nothing to steal – these men had been living on the edge of nothing when they raided the Towers. There was, however, a half-empty container of rat poison ...

The party retired for the night. They called Captain Dilver and he told them, “We’ll send a ship to secure the submarine. Continue on your path. This submarine is a wavegift. Offer it to the rafters if they demand a ship in exchange for the old man.”

The PCs went to sleep stunned. The Gyre was willing to offer a submarine for a single person?

The raft

The next day they set out for the raft community, leaving the bone pirate tied in the cavernous hold of the Silicon Dream. Their journey passed uneventfully, though it was delayed for a couple of hours after they stumbled on a school of tuna and pursued it for meat; they arrived slightly late on the second day bearing a gift of maguro. As they approached the rafts they decided to do some reconnaissance, and Quark sent up his drone to scan the area. It revealed a small collection of rafts built around a container ship, the bow of which was unimpeded by construction, plowing the waves like a real ship. The rafts fanned out from the rear, built around a series of semi-capsized ships that offered both wavebreaks and structural stability. The rafts themselves were a kind of campsite, scattered with homes made in containers or tents, or the ruins of old yachts dragged atop the rafts themselves. At the outer extreme of the fan of rafts as an open space built from the smallest and weakest platforms, and it was here that the Windslip would dock, and the negotiations would proceed. However, as they approached Quark identified a small, deadly-looking ship on the far side of the container ship, that looked too new to be part of the raft. Someone else appeared to be here, and their first fear was that it was a Himalayan ship.

They sent Ryan to investigate. He slipped away with Arashi, diving under the container ship and aiming to surface just beyond the Himalayan ship. This time, driving fast on Arashi in a calm sea in daylight, he could go directly under the ship, staying in the sunlit zone where the autumn sunlight struck through the waves in beautiful golden lances, trusting to Arashi to guide him through the thick reeds and garbage growing under the ship and to drag him back to the surface before his prodigious lungs gave out. Five minutes underwater being carried forward by a ton of sleek death was as nothing to Ryan, who hung in that liminal space between sunlight, air and limpid darkness with a confidence borne of years of experience. Beneath him lay the long-abandoned stones and temples of the Tibetan plane, longed-for but lost; above him the glorious interplay of sunlight and ocean, all that Ryan had ever known; a sleek line of bubbles streaked by him as Arashi sped through the semi-darkness to their prey. Bound to that mighty beast like a silent sibling, Ryan guided it through the dancing golden rays, under the shadow of the container ship and the vicious-looking interloper, to emerge exactly where he intended, drawing deep breaths but controlled and quiet. The waves chopped, Arashi gently whuffed, and in the near distance the lethal-looking ship floated, tied to the old container ship. There was no sign of movement on board, and no one stirred at the sight of a sea lion on the edge of the rafts. The ship had a nasty-looking deck gun, and writing in a language Ryan could not understand – but Ryan could barely read his own language, let alone identify another. After a few minutes' watching, with no sign of movement, the teenager gave up. He and Arashi slipped below the waves and returned the way they had come, no knowledge gained.

They docked with the raft, and immediately a delegation of elders met them. At the centre was The Matriarch, leader of the rafts and a powerful presence in her own right. A pavilion was set up near the sea edge, and a conclave sat around the old woman as she prepared to negotiate. The down-payment was unloaded from the ship, and the old man, a stumbling, halting and ancient man came forth, accompanied by two children. In the course of negotiations it became obvious that the Matriarch wanted the two children to be sent to the Arc to do an apprenticeship. She also wanted an ocean-going fishing vessel – not a submarine, but something capable of real fishing work. How could she think a single old man was worth so much? Crimson had to make a call to check if such an offer was acceptable, but as he pulled out his mobile phone to make the call everyone's phones started ringing. The dial tone was the emergency tone reserved for Captain Dilver. Crimson answered.

“Dilver. Do you have the man?”

“No, we're negotiating now. What's wrong?”

“Change of plan. Grab the man and get out. Turn off the computer in the ship and get away as fast as you can. Something’s coming.”

“What?”

“Don’t waste time, just do it. Move now!”

The phone went dead. Dilver had spoken. No one argues with Dilver. Crimson moved. He pushed forward and grabbed the old man, announcing the change in plan to his colleagues. As he did so they heard the crack of rifles and three bullets shot past their heads. Up on the ridge of rafts near the container ship’s stern, three men were moving forward, carrying carbines and intent on combat. It was immediately obvious from their size and armour that they were Gurkhas. The Himalayan kingdom had sent its soldiers after the old man. Why was he worth so much?

They ran for the ship, rifle shots cracking around them. Ryan ran for the water, calling Arashi. The old man struggled, and somehow Crimson couldn’t move him. The Gurkhas came closer, shooting. Someone hit Ryan in the leg, but he managed to hit the water. Crimson dragged the old man into a channel of water between two rafts, and would have been trapped there moving slowly except that Ryan and Arashi slid down the channel, grabbed him and hauled him out as fast as they could. They all slid to the Windslip, Arashi pushing them on board. Quark was on the deck gun, firing nail bombs out at the Gurkhas to keep them down and away from the ship. Crimson ran below with the old man to tie him down where he wouldn’t be able to escape, as their crew started the ship away from the docks, moving as fast as they could.

Suddenly there was a huge explosion, a bright flash and a moment of confusion. Quark and Ryan were hurled from the decks of the ship, Crimson and the old man pushed deep down into the water and stunned. Boiling water streamed over them, and moments later they were all floundering in the water. Arashi lay stunned and gurgling, Crimson struggled in the water near death, the old man struggled in the hot sea, his legs melted. A huge wave of displaced water rolled over the rafts, knocking down children and elderly and Gurkhas alike. Somewhere near them the ship’s crew screamed and thrashed. The Windslip, broken and melted, sank beneath the waves with a horrible gurgling roar, and they were all left floundering in the water.

Crimson struggled in the water next to the old man, holding him up and looking in horror at his melted and wrecked lower legs, when his phone rang, the same emergency tone.

“Dilver, are you out? Do you have the old man?”

What??

“Something hit us. He’s dying.”

“Get the code. Whatever you do, get the code!”

Crimson stared in dumb shock at the phone. He had been about to abandon this stupid old man to the waves. What was this? Floating in the water, still half stunned, he turned to the old man and grabbed him by the neck. “What is the code?”

The old man hissed, “There is no code.” But Crimson noticed that as he did so the old man reached for a strange necklace he wore. This necklace was a piece of plastic in the shape of the character 源、strung onto a strange thick plastic cord. Was that the code? Crimson tore it off and stuffed it into his sharkskin tunic, then dragged the man to shore.

Another brilliant flash and the sea exploded behind them, a wave of super-heated salty steam roared past them, and they were tumbling over and over in the water. The remaining crew, floundering there in the centre of the blast, disappeared and never came up. More waves of warm water rushed past them.

When he righted himself, Crimson was closer to the raft and somehow still holding the old man. He thrashed forward in the water, hauling himself to the raft. As he did so Arashi, recovered from his temporary stun, surged behind them and hurled them onto the raft with a satisfied “whuff!” Almost immediately, rifle shots cracked into the deck around them. Looking down, Crimson realized he was badly hurt, possibly dying. Quark and Ryan also struggle onto the deck, and Arashi cruised the verges of the rafts, ducking in and out of sight.

The Gurkhas had run out of ammunition and were charging forward now. One charged towards Crimson and two towards Quark where he was attempting to tend to the old man’s wounds. Crimson charged his mark, leapt into the air and delivered a solid kick to the man’s chest, knocking him off the raft and into the water. Quar, saw two coming for him and hurled a grenade at them, managing to blow the legs off one but barely hurting the other. He fell back until Crimson could join the battle, sword join, and Crimson and the remaining Gurkha began a deadly duel, kukri against cutlass. Behind them the Gurkha in the water died horribly, battered away from the rafts by Arashi and savaged from below whenever he tried to swim. His desperate thrashings soon calmed.

Crimson was too badly injured to hold off the Gurkha, who began to press his advantage. Quark watched in horror from his position over the old man, unable to do anything. But Ryan still had his crossbow. He took aim and fired at the Gurkha's unarmoured head, scoring a spectacular blow under the jaw; the bone bolt blew out of the man's face, and he fell dead on the spot. They had beaten their attackers.

The phone rang. Dilver.

"Where's the old man. Did you get the code?"

"There is no code, just a necklace. We're fighting."

"Fighting who? What?"

"Gurkhas, there's a ship here."

"Do not let that ship get away on pain of death. No message can reach the Himalayans. Kill everyone."

The phone went dead. Though they were all nearly dead, they charged off to the ship.

There were two men on the ship, already moving it into open water. A gun battle followed, but Quark managed to shoot out their radio, and Crimson and Ryan boarded the ship and killed both the crew. They had stopped the ship escaping, and no Gurkha survived the battle. Crimson was nearly dead, Quark and Ryan both badly injured, and the rafters in uproar. Crimson called Dilver.

"Dilver. Do you have the code?"

"We got something. The ship is stopped. We lost the Windslip." Losing the Windslip is a death sentence.

"No matter. We're sending a sloop, the Gunfather. We're sending seaplanes. I'll be there in a few hours. Don't let anyone send any messages, keep the old man near you and find the Matriarch. We're going to have a serious conversation with her."

They waited. Within hours, as promised, three seaplanes arrived. Seaplanes fly on biodiesel, a rare and precious commodity. Sending three large ones for any mission is unheard of. They taxied

up to the rafts and disgorged scores of soldiers, men the PCs had never seen before: large, heavily armoured, carrying terrifying guns. Shots were fired. Rafters were rounded up, beaten, corralled. From amongst the mess Dilver emerged, wearing full combat armour, carrying his helmet, accompanied by two men in full armour none of the PCs had ever seen.

“Fair wind, brothers. Where is the matriarch?” They dragged out the matriarch.

Dilver then proceeded to show the same steel he showed those years earlier, when he made his name. He turned to the matriarch. “I am taking hostages, including your family.” As the PCs watched one of his soldiers dragged off the two children she had earlier tried to bargain with. “If anyone ever hears about what happened today from anyone on this raft I will hang your children from the Towers, to be eaten by birds. I will then come here and sink your rafts, the waves will take you and no one will know you were ever here. Fifty years of your history will be gone like raindrops on the waves.” Behind him a protesting rafter was shot, as if for emphasis. “Keep today’s events secret for one year and your raft will join the Gyre. Do you understand me?”

She nodded, silent tears running down her cheeks, as her children were bundled into a plane.

Dilver looked at the PCs. “You. Come with me.”

Dilver ushered them into a seaplane with the children and a few other moaning rafters, who he pushed and slapped out of the way. They were soon airborne, Dilver yelling over the roar of the engines.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t tell you all the details. Before the world submerged, near the end, the Chinese government built a kind of arc, filled it with rare materials that can’t be found on the open ocean, and left it for the flood to cover. It has a nuclear powerplant at its centre, which will activate and power it to the surface when called. The idea was that the government would call it up when they had stabilized after the flood. A good idea but the Chinese government expended itself fighting for the Himalayas, and everyone thought the codes to control the arc were lost. We knew where it was, but no one could activate it. But one of our spies in the Himalayan kingdom heard of a bundle of diaries that revealed some old Chinese scientists who survived the flood and the wars and were somewhere on rafts in the area, who might have the code. That’s why we instituted the oral history project, and the old man ken was one of them. So we sent you to get him but we didn’t want anyone to know why, which is why we told you a story about him knowing the currents. We didn’t realize the Himalayans had found him too.

“But the real mistake was the computer we had tracking that satellite. Our science guys didn’t realize that the satellite was a military satellite. They realized this morning that their hacking had triggered an emergency system. They warned me immediately and I called you, but it wasn’t fast enough. The satellite is an orbital laser. The scientists who made this mistake are already dead, I saw to it myself this morning.”

“We lost the Windslip but we gain a Gurkha warship, and more importantly we get this.” He took the necklace from Crimson. “The story is that this arc holds 100,000 tons of steel, a seed stock, another 100,000 tons of soil, it has huge quantities of wood, cement, medicines, vacuum-packed rice, medical facilities, glass. And at its centre is a nuclear powerplant. The Himalayans know where it is, but if they think their ship was lost to storms without any record, and they don’t realize we have the key, they may not be there when we raise it from the depths. So we can take possession of the whole arc.”

“You have done well, boys. Even the loss of the Windslip will not count against you. But next time, follow my instructions a little less tardily, yes?”

He pocketed the necklace, and that was all the thanks they ever received from Captain Dilver – that, and their lives.

Voltaire's Temple

This is the second adventure in the chronicles. It is half a year since the near-catastrophe with the old man on the raft community, and our heroes have been split up, working in different parts of the Hulks on security jobs. For this adventure, Crimson and Ryan are reunited after having spent six months doing penance for their errors with the Windslip. Ryan has been back working at the booms, and Crimson doing boring guard duty at the Russian (one of the Towers). But after six months' penance they were back at the Hulks, and welcomed back into Captain Dilver's personal service. Is this a good place to be ...?

The Ocean Whisperer

They were surprised then to receive a text message from Captain Dilver in the middle of the night:

[received 2:04 AM. Sender: Captain Dilver. Marked: Emergency] Go to the Flats immediately and bring in the woman called the Ocean Whisperer for questioning over distribution of fake medicines. Gather with your team at the Octopus Seller on the Flats' leeward side, a short distance from the Whisperer. Be discreet and bring her without trouble. If anyone sees you tell them the reason but keep everyone calm. Bring her to me at Pier 17 and DO NOT keep me waiting. D.

They responded immediately of course, and were soon gathered together under the dim sodium light at the corner of the Octopus Seller's shop. There were five, but they were not familiar with each other from previous adventures:

- Ryan the rider, whose sea lion mount saved the party repeatedly when they were on the rafts in their last adventure
- Crimson the old soldier, whose tenacious unwillingness to die stood between the party and complete extermination in their last adventure
- Quark, who had been working again in the pipes and narrow spaces beneath the Hulks, risking his life daily to atone for his past mistakes
- Dean, a middle-aged archer and scout with a penchant for heavy weapons
- Leviathan, the new captain of the submarine that the characters captured in the last adventure
- Thorne, an unhinged young martial artist with an invisible "friend" of very dubious morality

After brief introductions and confirmations, they headed to the Ocean Whisperer's address. Here they found a flat, open raft, perhaps once a river barge, with the skeletal structure of what might be

a simple pavilion over one end, and a small home made out of the cabin of an old boat at the other. Above the door of the cabin was a painted logo of an octopus, and three cats sat patiently outside the door. The sea this night was calm but active, with perhaps 2m waves out on the open sea; here within the border of the Hulks there was perhaps 10-20m of plastic, tires, old chains and wood beneath the water, and the sea was rendered sluggish by this debris, so that the barge only rocked a little with the swell; occasional splashes of water rolled over the edge of the barge, but it was the kind of still, grimly dark night that often rolls over the Hulks at the end of spring. This evening the sky was obscured in a thick veil of cloud, and the Hulks lay in complete darkness outside the occasional glow of solar-powered lamps, four of which illuminated the decks of the Ocean Whisperer's barge, and their approach. The cats meowed, but scattered when Leviathan shattered the stillness with a loud hammering on the door and a yell of "Open up bitch, it's the wind guardians!" Discreet, indeed ... After a moment and a few more bangs the door opened, revealing an old woman, perhaps in her 60s, wearing a semi-transparent night gown and looking bleakly out at them, long grey and brown hair tied back in an austere ponytail. "Yes?" she asked in trepidation when she saw their wind guard armour and uniforms. They soon had her out of the house, and dragged her off to Pier 17 without further trouble.

Pier 17 is located in one of the Hulks' two inner docks, docks set within a broader sweep of the structure of the Hulks and intended to be partially protected from storms. Pier 17 is one of the least secluded, facing open water in the middle of the dock area. On this night the open sea was hidden in darkness, but the pier itself was lit with brilliant white light from two large portable spotlights, that shone onto a focused point in the middle of the pier. Behind this stood Captain Dilver, wearing a strange and old-fashioned uniform that looked about 20 years old and had only the single wave insignia of a corporal on its shoulder and chest. To one side on the far side of one lamp stood two ranks of five storm guards, also in completely outdated and strange uniforms; between them lay a coil of plastic cable, with plastic cuffs attached every metre or so. As the PCs approached this scene, Thorne and Dean both realized what it meant, though they understood for very different reasons: Dilver was recreating the scene from 20 years ago when he threw rebel children overboard, and laughed as their shackled parents tried to save them, and drowned. This was the atrocity that made Dilver famous, and gained him his power in the wave guards. The Ocean Whisperer obviously knew this scene very well, for as soon as she saw it she shrieked and tried to run away. Leviathan and Thorne grabbed her though, and dragged her forward to stand in the lights. With barely a nod of recognition to them, Dilver stepped forward and addressed her.

Dilver: A pleasure to see you again Agnes, do you remember me?

Agnes: Yes ...

Dilver [gesturing behind him]: I think you remember what all this means. How could either of us forget? Just a little reminder of what I am willing to do for the safety of our little world.

Agnes: ...

Dilver: Now, Agnes, I have a simple question for you, a very easy one for you to answer. Try to be honest with me this time, yes? Tell me: can you really speak with the giant beasts of the deep? Do they really whisper to you in your dreams, or is it all a fraud?

Agnes [after a brief pause to think]: It's all a lie, Dilver. They don't speak to me, it's just a story I tell to make ends meet.

Dilver [stepping back to give a slow golf clap]: Well, Agnes, I'm happy to hear that. Now I'm going to make you a very simple offer, that I know you won't want to refuse. You go back to your cabin and sleep off this little interruption, then in the morning you convene a special meeting of your silly little church, and you tell them that it was all a fraud. You tell them that there is no way anyone can speak to the beasts of the deep, that they're just dumb animals and we are just tiny, frail people clinging to life on the surface of a great dark ocean. You tell them your church is over, because there is nothing anyone can do to control the beasts of the deep and anyone who tells them otherwise is a liar. Then you go into your cabin and wait. In the afternoon some wind guards will be around to arrest you for dealing fake medicines, and you'll never need to worry about seeing the disappointment on your congregations' faces. [Pauses] If you don't do this, I'll murder you and lock you in your cabin with your cats, and I'll make sure you aren't discovered until your cats have eaten a good part of your corpse. Then I'll drown them. Is that clear?

Agnes [eyes only widening a little bit]: Okay Dilver, okay. Please just don't hurt anyone.

Dilver [snapping fingers at two of the guards, who drag Agnes away]: I will hurt everyone I need to, Agnes. Don't ever forget that.

With that Agnes faded into the darkness, her pale face frozen in disgust as she was dragged away. Moments later Dilver gestured to the group peremptorily, leading them around a pile of crates to pier 18, where the slim and deadly shape of his favourite gunship the *Gunfather* loomed over them in the first shadows of dawn. They boarded and walked silently down gantries and corridors to the

captain's cabin, a bare room with a single bench a set of screens, and a narrow bed. Dilver himself poured them seaweed tea, and handing it around to them said

"I don't believe any of that stuff. But you hear stories about what's out there in the ocean, and it's my job to rule out every possible threat, no matter how unlikely. Because we have an unlikely problem, gentlemen, and it is a once-in-a-lifetime threat that calls for all our efforts." He stabbed his finger at a point on one of the screens and the darkened room lit up with the pale blue of an ocean map, a jagged red slash carved into it to show the path of some interloper approaching the Hulks.

"A miasma is coming, gentlemen. We have to stop it. But it is not drifting with the current. A fishing boat found it a few days ago and tracked it, sending us warning of its movements, but then the boat disappeared. We sent a drone, but that too disappeared. The problem is that the miasma is not moving with the currents. It has departed the stream of the current and is moving purposefully for us. It will be here in a week. We need to find out what is making it move, and destroy it. That is your job. You are to take the submarine, head to the miasma, and find out what is driving it. Then you are to destroy that thing, or bring it back if it is useful. The submarine has been configured to hold the rider's beast – what's its name, Ryan? – so you will be able to investigate with your own eyes under the miasma. This miasma is huge, so big that we cannot see into its centre, and I dare not risk something as valuable as a seaplane until I know more, so I am sending you instead. Questions?"

Leviathan said tentatively, "We should take the Ocean Whisperer with us sir. If she knows nothing it's no trouble, but if she does know something we can use her. Like you say, it's best to cover all bases."

Dilver agreed to this. He also told them more about the mission: two days to get to the miasma in the submarine, the first to be accompanied by a battery ship to keep the sub charged. They would be given a special GPS beacon which, when activated, would act as a homing beacon for missiles and artillery, so that they could call down a huge storm of artillery on themselves. Ryan was to be given a set of scuba gear and a special watertight diving suit that would protect him for a short time from jellyfish stings. Arashi, Ryan's sea lion, was already largely immune to stings due to his thick watertight fur, and could likely survive for a short time in even a thick cloud of the things. Because the submarine had no windows or external cameras and lacked manoeuvrability, Ryan and Arashi would be key to finding out what was driving the swarm.

They took their leave and headed to the submarine, which was waiting at pier 16, rocking gently in the swell. Arashi lay lazily on its bow, and let out a happy "whoof!" when he saw Ryan – the exact

same “whoof!” that Crimson remembered with a shudder from the dark waters where Arashi slew the pirates who owned this very submarine. Agnes was brought to them, cuffed, and they set off for the swarm.

The swarm

The journey to the swarm was uneventful, though after a day at sea they entered squalls of acidic rain that hurt their eyes and tasted foul. On the second day they reached a point close enough to the swarm to see it and understand its magnitude – it stretched across the whole sea before them like a fog bank, fading into hazy obscurity to left and right and giving off a vile stench. Dilver had been right, they could not penetrate the haze above the swarm, and deeper into the swarm this haze stretched high into the sky. A vile, warm breeze rolled off the thing whenever the wind changed, as if it were exhaling charnel breath, and from their vantage point they could see a pilot whale decaying in the hazy edges of the swarm.

They dove, heading down to the submarine’s safe depth of 40m and making fast progress to the swarm. As they passed under it their sonar screen lit up, and looking at it they felt as if they had begun sailing under a cloud of some kind. The submarine slowed down to more closely measure the swarm, and the tension mounted. In the front of the sub Ryan had begun donning his scuba gear, but everyone could not help but notice his nervousness and unusual reluctance to prepare for a dive. Everyone thought the same thing: they were floating under a cloud of death, with no clue about what to do when they got to its centre, and their whole fate resting on an 18 year old boy and his sea lion, who would be swimming up to scout at the edge of that noxious web of death.

After perhaps an hour of careful movement Leviathan noticed something new on his sonar screen: a huge object lying beneath the water, so big that its edges extended beyond the submarine’s

weak sonar range, and hanging perhaps 60m or more below the surface. The submarine could go



beneath it, but this was obviously what they were looking for. It was time for Ryan to dive...

Ryan entered the chamber at the bow of the submarine where Arashi waited, and when he was sure that he was ready the chamber flooded, Arashi taking his dive breath on command. The lights went out, the front doors of the submarine opened, and Arashi dragged Ryan out into a cathedral of neon. With the sun hidden behind clouds and sinking and the sea covered in a thick carpet of jellyfish, the ocean at 40m depth was almost black, and Ryan and Arashi found themselves hanging in a twilight limnal zone, looking down at rapidly fading grey light, and up at the carpet of jellyfish. Jellyfish, of course, are phosphorescent, and the ocean surface was crowded with countless blinking lights, a neon constellation stretching as far as Ryan could see in every direction. For a moment Ryan forgot his work and hung in the twilight depths, gazing up at this pelagic universe in fascination. Blues, reds, greens, all flickered above him, so rich and varied that he felt as if he was looking up at a new sky.

A deadly sky, of course. Ryan remembered his task and set off to explore the sonar shadow. As he approached the shape he turned on his torch, and found himself staring at a mysterious object from another world. A huge stepped structure hung in the water in front of him, stretching from the surface to perhaps 30 metres below where Arashi and Ryan floated, staring in awe. It was some kind of huge stepped structure, incomprehensible in design to innocent Ryan but obviously a relic of the pre-flood era. It stretched beyond his torchlight in both directions laterally, and from the way the waves slapped against it at the surface he guess it rose above the surface of the water. It

sloped away from him as it rose, and he and Arashi could glide along its barnacle-encrusted surface upward towards the neon-flickering swarm, noticing how it was carved in step shapes, each layer of the steps slightly recessed from the one before. It seemed to Ryan that a century ago when the world flooded, a nation of toiling slaves must have built some kind of pyramid and set it afloat on the high seas. How could that be?



After a few minutes drifting across the subsea structure, Ryan decided he needed to check what was happening above the water. How big was this thing? Where did it go? He had noticed that near the face of the structure the swarm was so deep that only the biggest jellyfish, and the dying jellyfish, gathered. The jellyfish here were the size of small boats, with thick rope-like tentacles that would probably be powerful enough to entangle him if they touched him, but these jellyfish were far enough apart that he thought he and Arashi could find a way through. Ignoring the tension in his belly he drove Arashi up towards the surface, picking a spot where two huge jellyfish lay dead and rotting to make space for himself. As he approached, Ryan noticed an amazing thing: all the jellyfish were pulsing with movement, but all their movements were in the same direction. The jellyfish themselves were not laid out in any regular order, but their movements were all in one direction: towards the Hulks.

He managed to pass between jellyfish relatively easy but as he pushed for the surface he began to feel strange: tingly and vague. He noticed that Arashi became listless and then began to twitch, losing forward momentum. Something was affecting them in the zone where the jellyfish swam, but he couldn't guess what. It was too late to go back now and he needed a view, so he drove his mount forward, and although Arashi was barely responsive he managed to break the surface after

a few more moments' struggle. They floated there for the moment Ryan needed, Arashi chan hanging limp in the water and Ryan fighting a strange feeling of nausea and confusion. Above the water the miasma stretched out into misty obscurity, but immediately in front of Ryan the strange pyramid rose up into the distant fog, silent and most importantly free of human interlopers. Ryan pushed Arashi down and they dived, Arashi now swimming on the dimmest of reflexes, his body twitching and jerking as if poisoned. They passed back through the zone of dead jellyfish and almost immediately Arashi recovered, looking back at Ryan and releasing a thin stream of panicked bubbles. With time running out and Arashi agitated and confused, Ryan directed them back to the submarine. They reached it in time, the doors to the chamber closed without incident, and after what seemed like an eternity Ryan and Arashi chan were back into air and light. Ryan staggered through the doors of the exit chamber and began stripping off his wetsuit, shaking and clamorous with reaction. Behind him Crimson tossed fish to a listless and uncaring sea lion, returned temporarily to its feral self. For good measure, he closed the doors to the exit chamber, because no one wants one ton of panicked beast rampaging through their one room submersible, and they sat down to hear Ryan's story.

Voltaire's Temple

Ryan of course knows nothing of the ancient world; he is barely a man, and he has never been educated in anything except diving and how to communicate with dumb beasts. He has never learned about the ancient world, so he doesn't know about the strange stepped temple he saw. But Dean has studied the ancient world, and identifies it immediately from the description as a Ziggurat. This Ziggurat had clearly not drifted into polar regions, but had instead found itself caught in a swarm, and in a current heading into the gyre. But how had it come out of that current? Leviathan provided the answer to this question. Ryan's strange feelings, and Arashi's strange behavior, when they were surfacing must have been caused by some kind of electrical field in the water. This field must be the reason for the strange, coordinated behavior of the jellyfish. By sending an electric field through the water someone must be controlling the direction of movement of all the jellyfish in the miasma, and the field of jellyfish was so large that the ziggurat moved with it. Someone inside the ziggurat was driving it, and to do so they must be in control of a very powerful source of energy. Everyone immediately settled on the same single possible explanation: nuclear power. Captain Dilver had told them to find out what was driving the swarm and destroy it or bring it back if it was useful: here they had a relic from the start of the flood, an almost indestructible floating monument that would make an invaluable addition to the Gyre; and inside it a functioning nuclear power plant. All they had to do was take it.

Galvanized by this decision, they set course for the ziggurat. The submarine would not be impeded by jellyfish in surfacing at the edge of the temple, since only the largest of the swarm floated here and the submarine's vents would not be clogged when they were venting water, only drawing it in. They could surface, but they might not be able to submerge again. As they rose Leviathan turned off all the submarine's electronic systems and its batteries, setting the vents to full open and surging to the surface in a barely-controlled rush. They swept up the sloping sides of the ziggurat and splashed to the surface just a short distance from the ziggurat, drifting to a rough stop against its plastic sides. After a moment's debate they gave the Ocean Whisperer a cell phone and told her to stay put, strapped on filter masks, and emerged from the conning tower hatch.

The ziggurat was as deserted on this side as Ryan had described. The air was still and calm, thick with the haze of the miasma, and the only sound was the gentle wash of waves against its sides. The plastic face of the ziggurat was devoid of life, and stretched above them into the mist, silent and dead. In the short distance they could see there was no evidence that anyone had ever used this monolith, but they knew someone must be here. They jumped from the submarine to the ziggurat's steps, carefully avoiding the foul water, and gathered themselves at the base of the steps. A decision was quickly taken, and Dean stole carefully up the steps towards the top of the ziggurat, to see if he could find any sign of life. Moving stealthily from step to step, he ascended perhaps 100 metres before he reached the ziggurat's crown. Here the air was clearer and he could see perhaps 500 metres in either direction, which gave him a full view of the whole top of the ziggurat. The ziggurat was roughly rectangular, perhaps 1km long and half a kilometre wide, with a bowl cut into its centre that was perhaps 400m long and 200m wide. From the rampart where Dean lay carefully watching the steps cut steeply down into this bowl, which lay perhaps 40m below the ramparts – about 60m above the water surface. The ramparts stretched around this bowl in a perfect rectangle 10m wide. At the furthest, narrower ends of the rectangle the ramparts were surmounted by a single watchtower, rising perhaps another 30m above the ramparts. On the far side of the bowl from Dean a huge crane rose into the sky, built into the superstructure of the ziggurat itself. This rusting monolith must have been used to load the original ziggurat with its current contents: on the floor of the bowl several sections of aircraft fuselage had been placed, and were obviously being used as accommodation. Opposite them, at one end of the bowl near one of the watchtowers, was a small cooling stack and the obvious structure of some kind of modular nuclear power plant, steam rising gently from its tower and into the soupy air. The rest of the bowl was covered in soil, on which grew scraggly grass and a few stunted, weak-looking lemon trees. A large section had been set aside for farming, and here amidst ragged cabbages, tomato vines and strawberry bushes Dean could see a single person working, weeding and tilling. The only other signs of life were distant figures in each of the watchtowers; otherwise the whole thing was silent

and empty. But judging from the aircraft fuselage and the scale of the farm, there could not be many people here – perhaps 20 or 30.

Dean slunk back down to the group, and together they moved up to his position on the rampart, stopping just below the rim. They could take this place, if they moved quietly and quickly. They made a rough plan, and prepared to take their greatest conquest ...

Cleansing the Temple



Having scouted the immediate vicinity of their landing point, our heroes needed to prepare to storm the ziggurat, which would mean taking on guards in two distant towers, and whatever soldiers were huddled in the main part of the compound. The safest approach appeared to be splitting the party, and this is what they decided to do. Dean sneaked into the powerplant, while Ryan slipped away to the opposite end of the ziggurat to approach its guard tower, and Thorne ran around the base of the ziggurat for no apparent purpose except the joy of the miasmic air.

Dean's stealthy incursion was successful; he was able to sneak into the base of the powerplant, climb some stairs to a high room that was clearly the control room, and confirm that it was a nuclear plant. From there he found a gantry that led joined the control room to one of the two

watchtowers. He slipped into the watchtower when the two occupants weren't looking and crept through a doorway that led inside the ramparts of the ziggurat. Here a narrow corridor led right through the ramparts to an observatory that overlooked the outer slope of the ziggurat, and the grim cloud of the miasma. On the left side of this narrow corridor was a door, through which Dean could hear a group of people arguing about a plan...

Voice 1: I say we use the negotiating tactic. There are too many to fight. We can send our last captive back with a message, then meet them and tell them to give us what we want. They'll do it, they always do.

Voice 2: This community is big though, Marionetta, too big ... they likely have warships, they might be able to hit us harder than we can handle if they know we're here.

Voice 1: Not if they can't see us, they can't do –

Voice 3 [interrupting]: What if they have radar or satellite? They might work it out. A couple of lucky shells from a big warship and we lose the plant. Plus we only have the one captive, we're running out and we need to drain that one or we're going to be naked.

Voice 2: I agree. We roll the swarm over them and hit them quietly while they're fighting it. They have a big ecosystem, they'll throw everyone and everything at defending it. While they're trying to protect themselves we slip in, grab everything we can and get out. They won't even guess where we came from, and we'll be safe.

Voice 1: But they're big, we can get them to give over more than we can take ... more food, more women, more than we need ... it's a big chance ...

Voice 4: Okay folks, I got some draining to do, I'm out. We can figure this out over dinner. Keep tight ...

[Various voices indicating assent and farewell]

Dean, realizing he might be caught at the door, slipped away into the observatory. No one emerged from the door, but he decided discretion was the better part of valour and ducked out of one of the observatory windows, creeping around the outside of the ziggurat to return to his colleagues.

Ryan had not been so successful, however. He drew close enough to the watchtower to see that it held two guards, but as he was assessing their position one saw him and opened fire with a sniper rifle; the other began ringing a bell. Ryan was forced to slip away fast into the mist, keeping low to avoid bullets that would carve him open through his weak sharkskin armour, and returned hastily to where Crimson waited. Realizing that the alarm had been raised, they peered over the ramparts and saw a gang of 6 men running out of the aircraft sections towards the watchtower where Ryan had been seen. It was time to act ...

As this scouting had been happening, Thorne had run halfway around the base of the ziggurat, youthful exuberance carrying him forward faster than commonsense could catch up. He passed a trio of boat ramps, with three boats hitched up high on the ramps and connected by winches to the top of the rampart. Passing through this he ran on until he came to another boat ramp, upon which a huge dead jellyfish was beached. Three men stood on the far side of the jellyfish, near a cart of some kind that was full of jellyfish parts and waiting to be winched up the ramp. Thorne seized the moment of surprise, sneaking up behind them and grabbing a long, thick jellyfish stinger from inside the cart. Appearing around the edge of the cart, he whipped this at the nearest man, whose back was turned. It slapped all across the man's back and over his shoulder, but he simply flicked it off irritably, and turned around to see where it had come from. Somehow these men were immune to jellyfish! Instead of falling paralyzed and screaming to the ground Thorne's target charged forward to attack. One grabbed a boathook while the other two charged in with knives, but they were no match for Thorne's savagery, and soon he had beaten all three to death. From there he crept up the boat ramp toward the ramparts. Here he found a small building that contained a biodiesel fermenter of some kind – clearly these people had found a way to convert dead and rotting jellyfish into biodiesel. Thorne was investigating when he heard the bell ringing, and wandered off to see what the fuss was about. However, he emerged from the mist at the wrong point, and the men in the watchtower opened fire on him. The 6 guards that Crimson and Ryan had seen charging up the ramparts now turned and chased after Thorne, who decided now might be a good time to return to his colleagues. He turned and fled back the way he had come.

The watchtower battle

Ryan, Leviathan and Crimson waited for Dean to return to them and then all four slipped down the ramparts and into the powerplant. They passed through the control room with the intention of reentering the watchtower unobserved, but as Crimson opened the door to the gantry someone above fired at him – they had been seen by the guards in the watchtower. They had to charge across to the watchtower under fire, but once inside they fixed the problem quickly with a well-

thrown grenade. Dean climbed up into the watchtower itself, taking possession of a sniper's rifle and using it to fire across at the sniper on the other watchtower. The mist and distance confounded him though, and he and the sniper in the far tower exchanged pointless shots.

Down below in the tower Leviathan, Crimson and Ryan were attacked by three of the leaders that Dean had heard in the inner room. These three were a huge, heavily-armoured man carrying an old-fashioned glaive; a small and fast-moving man with a knife; and a lean, vicious-looking woman with no weapons at all. The battle was short and brutal, with Crimson delaying the armoured man while Dean fired crossbow bolts at the other two, Leviathan tried to kill the smaller man and Ryan tried to avoid being killed. They were starting to win, the armoured man badly hurt and the little man dying, when the woman dropped a grenade at her feet, obviously intending to kill everyone in the room. Everyone managed to dive out of doorways and avoid the worst of the blast, but were still hurt. Fortunately the explosion ended the battle, and they were able to pick over the woman's splattered remains for a key. With this key they opened a door to an armoury just inside the doorway, and found a heavy machine gun with 30 rounds of ammunition. Dean and Leviathan took this up to the watchtower and returned to a futile engagement with the sniper in the far tower, while down below Crimson and Ryan explored the complex of rooms inside the ramparts.

Desperate science

The first room opened into a kind of conference chamber, where Dean had previously heard the leaders conferring. At one end of the room was a large screen, that showed a static view of a laboratory. As they watched, a man appeared on the screen and saw them! For a moment they stared at each other, and then the man uttered a stream of profanities and dashed out of the room he was in. The screen must have been linked to some remote part of the complex, and the remaining leader was now aware that the game was up. They rushed inside the ramparts to find a way to get to him, but couldn't find anything, and soon returned to the watchtower. At this point Thorne rejoined them, having given his six pursuers the slip through a tunnel in the ramparts. In fact, his pursuers had been forced to retreat by Dean's heavy machine gun – they had fallen into Dean's field of fire as they ran along the ramparts looking for Thorne, and after the first two were heavily injured they retreated towards the other watchtower.

The battle with this watchtower remained futile, although Leviathan and Dean were nearly killed when the distant guards unleashed a torrent of anti-drone rockets on their tower. These rockets fell short but Dean and Leviathan had to take cover from the onslaught. Dean managed to recover from this and finally reeled off a lucky shot, blowing the distant rocketeer's brains out, but during all

this time they had been ignoring their surroundings. Finally Leviathan noticed a bank of cctv screens on one side of the watchtower, one of which showed a man in the control room of the nuclear plant, madly fiddling with controls.

The implications were obvious. They charged out of the watchtower to the control room, but were trapped on the gantry because the man had locked the control room door. Inside the control room red lights were flashing and a klaxon was screaming. Leviathan hurriedly placed some explosive on the door handle and blew his way into the room, the explosion so perfectly set that it blew the inner doorknob out perfectly, preserving the door and driving the doorknob deep into the man's chest[1]. The door swung slowly open, to reveal a room bathed in emergency light and a calm electronic woman's voice saying, "Three minutes to initial containment failure. Please evacuate."

Three minutes!! Leviathan began working madly to understand the controls of the plant. He soon identified that the plant was a liquid salt-cooled thorium plant, so meltdown would release a huge quantity of molten salt into the plastic innards of the ziggurat, undoubtedly sinking it very rapidly. This would release the miasma, which probably would drift away from the Hulks, but it would definitely kill the entire group, and they would lose the ziggurat. Everyone watched in horror as Leviathan struggled to reverse the shutdown, scrabbling at controls and desperately running from panel to panel. Finally, with just seconds to spare, he managed to cancel the reactor core failure, and reverse the meltdown. They all fell back onto the panels in relief, and watched as the system returned to normal.

Aftermath

The remainder of the guards were easily dispatched, being mostly injured and trying to flee. The last two had to be shot down as they tried to escape in a boat, with one choosing to dive amongst the jellyfish and take his chances on the ocean rather than face the party. They found the scientist cowering in his lab underneath the second watchtower, and here they found a horrible scene of torture and cannibalism: two fishermen from the Hulks, held captive in cells near the lab, hideously deformed with thousands of jellyfish stings, and near to death. Exploring the ziggurat, they found a captive slave woman, one arm disfigured with jellyfish stings, who told them the tale of the stings. Captives would be tested for their reaction to jellyfish stings, and if they reacted a certain way they would be taken out to sea in small boats and submerged in the miasma, held in the water until they were insane with the pain. They would then be treated in some way, and their blood drained and drunk by the pirates on the ziggurat. This blood would grant the pirates temporary immunity to jellyfish stings, though the immunity required regular boosting with fresh blood. The slave woman

had failed the initial reaction to the sting, so she was not drained but kept alive and used. The pirates, it appeared, were also slavers and cannibals.

Common custom in the Flood holds that cannibals are to be destroyed, down to the last man and child: anyone old enough to walk who has tasted human flesh or blood is to be exterminated. It is grim work, but it is a strong custom that stems from the last years of the era before the flood, when desperate communities turned to cannibalism as their societies fell apart, and cannibalism is viewed as a throwback to the worst horrors of the collapse of landborne society. It is known that some floating communities maintained the tradition, and they are seen as horrid abominations to be destroyed at any cost. It was necessary for the characters to hunt down everyone on the ziggurat and destroy them, saving only the maid and the scientist. The scientist would, of course, die horribly, but first he would be taken back to the Hulks and forced to teach them all he knew about the jellyfish.

The characters returned triumphant to the Hulks, to announce to Captain Dilver their successful acquisition of a nuclear-powered ziggurat and the extermination of a cannibal jellyfish pirate cult. Soon they were ferrying soldiers and scientists back to the ziggurat, guiding them around it, and helping to secure it. Though they had nearly all died, their mission had been a resounding success, and position of trust with Captain Dilver assured. The Gyre had become incalculably richer through their efforts, and even Dilver had to concede that they had done well. He fated them personally, inviting them to a private party on the war sloop the Gunfather, so that they had alcohol and fine foods and a grand view as the scientist was flayed and hoisted high on the Eiffel tower, for the birds to pick to death.

A successful adventure indeed ...

Interlude: A Tale of Two Ziggurats



After Captain Dilver found and captured the Ziggurat he named Mount Arashi there was a frenzy of investigation in the labs and computers of the Ziggurat. The sole surviving member of the pirate crew, the scientist who had discovered the trick of drinking human blood to develop immunity to jellyfish, was questioned extensively before his eventual painful demise. These investigations revealed a startling fact: Mount Arashi was one of a pair of Ziggurats, the larger of which might still exist ...

The two ziggurats, which Dilver called Mount Arashi and Ziggurat 2, were conceived in the last years of the Flood, when the industry of whole nations had been committed to building floating structures that could survive the Flood. A whole host were launched by many nations, and these two ziggurats were just two of many. They were conceived as a pair, with Mount Arashi established as the living quarters and Ziggurat 2, the larger of the two, used for storage, farming and factories. Small boats ferried people between them, an ill-conceived idea with no respect for the vagaries of ocean life. But this was the first and last time anyone had to build such things, so who can blame them for their mistakes? The two ziggurats were what they were, and once they had been floated on the growing ocean no one could do anything about it.

At first they drifted together on a slow eastward current, heading towards the oceans south of what would one day become the Gyre, but they were soon to be separated by fate. After some years of slow drifting, moving at a crawl across the oceans, they ran into one of the first world storms. With no means of propulsion and no experience of the new world, these two ziggurats floated helplessly, unprepared for what was coming. Fortunately for both of them, however, they were large enough and well-enough built that they survived the storm. Most of the other structures thrown out on the ocean with them at that time – floating oil rigs, packed rafts of ocean liners, smaller islands of wood – were consumed whole, but Mount Arashi and Ziggurat 2 made it through with their population alive, though not unscathed.

Unfortunately, they were cast apart by the storm. Mount Arashi spun through the storm vortex and fell into the current that would eventually drag it into the Gyre, but Ziggurat 2, being larger and heavier, was not thrown out of the storm, instead drifting with it until it dissipated. When the storm raged itself out, the two ziggurats were separated by several hundred kilometres of ocean, and Ziggurat 2 was trapped in a northerly current.

This is where Mount Arashi's tale of cannibalism and piracy began. For many years the ziggurat drifted untroubled, though the loss of its supply-and-factory-oriented sister ship necessitated a change in way of life, and the community had to learn to adapt fully to the post-flood world. At first they managed, though they had their challenges; but then, after a few generations, they ran into the miasma. Stranded in a vast soup of jellyfish, they soon began to run low on food. A small gang of the most vicious members launched a mutiny, and with their thuggish followers they imprisoned the community and began slowly eating them, in a desperate bid to preserve their food. One of their number, the scientist, studied ways to control the jellyfish and eventually found a way to kill them or control them with electrical power. Some of the mutineers then suggested freeing the remaining prisoners, killing the jellyfish and returning to past life, and there was another mutiny in which the scientist's gang prevailed. They chose to keep the jellyfish close, and use them for piracy and locomotion. The remaining captives were handed over to the scientist for experimentation, and over the next 10 years they prowled the seas near the Gyre, threatening small communities and extorting food and women. Then they drifted into the Gyre, and their evil actions became a matter of history.

Things went very differently for Ziggurat 2. They drifted slowly north, too far away from their sister ziggurat to continue trading and swapping resources because the only ships that remained functioning after the world storm were those that were small enough to be dragged inside the ziggurats for protection. As they drifted they remained in contact with Mount Arashi by satellite and carrier pigeon, but this contact too slowly dwindled. Nonetheless, it was apparent that Ziggurat 2

was also doing well, partly because Ziggurat 2 had been the one initially stocked with all the communities' supplies and partly because they had drifted into rich fishing grounds and temperate weather. But they continued drifting north, and soon things became harsher. As they entered the far north, the few communiques reaching Mount Arashi spoke of hard times, food rationing, and strict and authoritarian rulership. Then communication ceased, but everyone assumed the same thing: that Ziggurat 2 had drifted helplessly into the arctic, become trapped fast in sea ice, and was lost to the world. Perhaps its residents had lived on their stores of food, but eventually – within a few years probably – these must have run out in such a harsh environment, and then they would have fallen to eating each other. By now the ziggurat would be an empty shell, drifting at the whim of the seasonal ice, undefended.

Captain Dilver, of course, settled on that word: undefended. He had uncovered the cargo manifest of Ziggurat 2 when it was launched:

- 100,000 tons of steel
- 10,000 tons of copper, nickel, tin and other valuable metals
- 30,000 tons of soil
- 10,000 tons of wood
- 1,000 tons of fissile uranium
- 10,000 tons of rubber
- One nuclear plant, whose waste could be used as fuel by the Ark's reactor
- Three water purification systems
- A small factory and workyard
- A seedbank with 1000 species of plant
- A small flock of goats, and preserved semen and ovaries for maintenance of the flock
- A large plastic extrusion plant

All he needed was a freighter capable of carrying a couple of hundred thousands tons of cargo, and a small crew of enterprising adventurers to accompany him. How fortunate, then, that our little group of PCs should return to his attention just as Captain Mithrades came into port on the nuclear-powered ice freighter the *Vladimir Putin*, telling a story of desperation and willing to offer almost anything in exchange for the right to settle in the Gyre ...

A lesser figure than Captain Dilver might have offered Mithrades, captain of a ship with a storied history of adventure, shelter out of mere magnanimity, but Dilver was no lesser man. He paid attention to sailors' stories filtering back from the bars where Mithrades crew were on shore leave, and he soon learnt the truth: a tragic accident in the nuclear engineering section of the *Vladimir*

Putin had exposed Mithrades' long-term engineer and both of his apprentices to lethal doses of radiation. The engineer was dead of cancer one year now, and for his apprentices it was just a matter of time. Very few communities of the Flood had nuclear engineers, and none were willing to release such valuable people to the high seas, so Mithrades was now looking for somewhere to settle. He had tried the Himalayan Archipelago but their conditions were harsh; instead he approached the Gyre, believing them more compassionate. Unfortunately he docked at the Hulks and met Dilver before he could stumble on a person of compassion. And so the deal was soon struck: a trip north, and then he could settle.

Ziggurat 2 was abandoned and held fast in ice, but the summer was approaching, when the ice would melt. Dilver's eyes turned north to that vast treasure floating in the arctic ocean, and then to the heroes who had captured Mount Arashi. They had captured one temple ... now they would loot another, or die trying.

Vladimir Putin's Last Voyage

After he realised the possibilities that might be lying stranded in the arctic, and the tools at his disposal, Captain Dilver turned to his trusted Wind Guards, and gathered them again in the Strategy Gardens. Here he told them of his plan, to send them north to the arctic to find this second ziggurat, and return with everything they could. In exchange they would be offered permanent homes on the Arc, the Gyre's most famous and prized location, and also given shares in a fish quota, which would be sufficient to make them independently wealthy and ensure that their retirement would be a long and wealthy one (if they survived service, of course).

Though it meant being perhaps a year or two away from the Gyre, on a ship they had never been in before, with strangers, in a frozen place, they agreed without hesitation. Fame and authority awaited them should they return successfully. Who could not but take such a task?

Strangers in a Strange Land

They are given a few basic conditions and information about their mission:

- They will be accompanied by 8 marines, led by a Captain Azel, to use as ruthlessly as they wish
- They have food for 18 months, or two summers, during which they can stay in the arctic searching for Ziggurat 2
- There is no time to equip the Vladimir Putin as they like, so Ryan cannot take his sea lion Arashi with him, but will be given a special drone to use in Arashi's place
- They are to take the contents of the Ziggurat no matter who or what they find there
- Although Mithrades is a man of his word, do not trust him: his future depends on admission to the Gyre along with his crew, and he may opt to use desperate measures to achieve this goal
- Once beyond the Gyre they will be able to contact the Gyre once per day for one hour by connecting with a certain satellite
- Once in the arctic they would only be able to access a single satellite to report back to the Gyre once a month, for one day

They set off, steaming fast out of the Gyre towards the northwest and the promise of ice and riches.

Their journey out of the Gyre was uneventful, with the Vladimir Putin heading northwest as fast as possible. They soon passed through the area of rough and unruly seas that marked the ocean-current boundary of the northern edge of the Gyre, and sailed into seas becalmed by the passing of the recent world storm. For a week they sailed across a vast, empty blue plain, unperturbed by waves larger than a finger's height and making excellent progress in a warm, still and sunlit world. After a week, however, Mithrades announced that they were making a small detour to stop at an oil rig community that he regularly traded with: his plan was to do a routine stop for two days, during which time he would trade energy from the Vladimir Putin's nuclear plant for food and sex. He and his community would organize a two day party during which the oil rig's residents would come on deck and have a long orgy, to make up for lost opportunities at the Gyre. The PCs were surprised by this unannounced detour but not by the nature of the trade – it was normal, and indeed essential, for isolated communities to do this kind of orgiastic trade in order to ensure biodiversity, since many of the residents of the community were too closely related to be able to interbreed.

At least some of the party were gladdened by the thought of a two day orgy, and although they initially queried this unexpected detour, they soon acquiesced and began preparing.



The oil rig was a poor and seedy affair, a small structure that must have been floating on the ocean for 100 years and that was obviously on its last legs. Shabby and rusting, the pillars holding it above the sea were heavily patched and repaired, and the decks looked tattered and world-weary. Here on the open sea beyond the Gyre they guessed it must be floating on perhaps 6kms of water, and the action of waves and salt water had not treated it kindly. There was no sign of any large boats, and although the pontoon and supporting pillars were laced about with flotsam, junk and

seaweeds sufficient to support a thriving ecosystem, there was no sign of any industry beyond fishing. As they approached in the light of the late afternoon they saw scrawny, tiny children scrambling around these artificial reefs, catching fish with their bare hands and eating them raw and living at the water's edge. Beyond the sussuration of the ocean's waves they could hear the raucous crying of thousands of sea birds, that roosted on the old refinery tower.

They weren't allowed to dock, but instead a kind of rope bridge was thrown over, a power cable drawn across, and preparations made for the party. As the sun sank the sea around the rig lit up with phosphorescent lights from tiny sea creatures, and by the time the party started the sea around the rig was thick with the lights, like a constellation of stars lapping against their boat. The rig's residents had also perfected some method for capturing these phosphorescent lights, and when the men and women of the party came on board their hair was sparkling with the same lights. The party started, and soon some of the PCs and most of Azel's men were enjoying the lissom, shy and sparkling delights the oil rig community had prepared for them.

Not all of the party, however. Ryan was in the water on his drone, cruising around the rig looking for trouble, which he soon found: he was drawn to one pillar by the sound of someone falling into the water, in time to see the body of a guard from the decks above floating face down in the water. Nearby, someone was climbing into an ancient wooden row boat and quietly pushing off from the pillar. Ryan followed them at a distance, as they headed to the stern of the Vladimir Putin. Diving underwater, he texted his colleagues the information.

Meanwhile, up above, Quark and Dean had noticed Mithrades was not on deck at the party despite his professed eagerness to enjoy a local girl. Their suspicions aroused, they headed to the stern, and found him in an observatory overlooking the ocean at the very rear of the ship. One window was open, and he had thrown a rope out of the window. When challenged, he told them that his lover from the oil rig was making her escape, and would be attempting to sneak onto his ship. He wasn't going to settle at the Gyre without her. They didn't have time to challenge his recklessness, however, because at this point guards on the rig saw the rowing boat silhouetted against the phosphorescence around the rig, and opened fire on it. Battle was joined!

Up on the stern Leviathan was looking at the rowboat below when the firing started. Captain Azel came running up from the party, buttoning up his hose and demanding, "those on deck! Kill or capture?" Leviathan, with little time to think and no one to consult with, replied "Kill!" and Azel and his men set off to slaughter the young men and women they had just been loving. Leviathan dashed off to get his gun, as too did Quark and Dean from below. Meanwhile Mithrades set the

ship into motion, hoping to get the engines running for a quick escape as soon as his lover was on board, safe in the knowledge that Ryan was helping her.

Ryan received a text from Quark: “rope at the stern, save the fugitive”. He realized that the person in the boat was dead if the shooting continued, so emerged from the water below the boat and pulled it over so that the woman in the boat fell into the water. He yelled, “take a breath” and then dragged her under, but unfortunately she didn’t take a breath in time. She hung below the surface in the inky black water, scrabbling at his face to resurface for air as bullets hit the water all around them, driving corkscrews of phosphorescent past his face and body. After a few seconds he was able to drag the drowning woman a little away from the boat and the shooting and allow her to surface for air; once she had calmed and taken a breath he dragged her under again and set off, aiming to run under the keel and emerge on the far side of the Vladimir Putin, safe from shooting.

As all this chaos erupted, the inevitable happened: the nearest set of battleship guns stirred to life, and began rotating to face the stern of the Vladimir Putin, its barrels lowering from their resting position aimed high. Leviathan tried in desperation to throw a grenade into one of the upward-pointing barrels as they rotated, but his grenade fell short and landed in the water, exploding in a small tower of phosphorescent water. The ship was still only barely moving, and would surely be an unmissable target for those formidable guns, unless someone could disable them. Quark attached a bomb to one of his drones and sent it off, hovering fast over the rig platform, and fortunately many of the riflemen who should have seen it were running away from the edge to repel boarders, having mistaken Ryan’s movements for a submarine raider[1]. The drone reached the gun turret unmolested and through its camera Quark saw a sight that truly warmed the cockles of his tiny heart. As might be expected on a poor and struggling oil rig in the middle of the ocean, the entire rear half of the turret had been long since cannibalized for use in patching the pontoons and pillars of the rig, so it was open to the elements and to his bomb. A stack of three shells sat at one side of the turret, a single man loading a shell into the third barrel of the battery, and a second man operating the mechanism to turn the turret. Quark let loose his bomb, and it landed perfectly, killing the operator and setting off the shells in a chain reaction of massive explosions. Unfortunately the shell that was partially set in the barrel also exploded, killing its handler and sending the warhead out of the barrel; it soared over the Vladimir Putin and landed harmlessly a hundred metres to starboard.

Now they were free to make their getaway, too far away in the dark to be shot at by mere rifles and unmolested by the gun turret. There was no one left to operate the second turret, because that man had been at the party, and now lay dead on the blood-slicked deck of the Vladimir Putin, party

lights flickering silently above him. They were safe. Ryan swam up to the stern of the ship and he and the lover climbed aboard, to be greeted by an ecstatic Mithrades. They had made it.

They sailed away into darkness, and the last thing they saw from the rig was the corner where the gun emplacement had been, sliding into the sea. They sent information on the rig's coordinates and armaments back to the Gyre, and a week later received a video report from Dilver; it showed three combat tugs raiding the rig, its residents lined up and hurled overboard after a brutal 10 minute battle, before the tugs began to drag the rig back to the Gyre. They had, once again, worked to enlarge the Gyre.

The arctic: life in the ice



Having destroyed that tiny community and run away with the wife of its leader, our heroes turned their satisfied gaze to the far north. For the next few weeks they steamed rapidly northwest, heading for the point where the second ziggurat was believed likely to have entered the zone of sea ice. This meant crossing much of what was once the Eurasian landmass, with 6km of water beneath them, and fortunately not over the deeper, wilder and more terrifying expanse of what was once the Atlantic ocean. They reached the first icebergs sooner than they had thought, and soon

found themselves moving slowly through a ghostly world of great white sculptures that stretched as far to the north as they could see. In a cooler world, unconstrained by land masses, the sea ice had extended from its traditional arctic home to encompass much of the arctic circle, and they soon could see the distant line of white that marked the only natural solid landmass they had seen in their lives. Unused to the sight of anything above the surface of the ocean that was not made by human hand, they were shocked and amazed by the beauty of the ice sculptures they passed.

They slowed the ship, and began looking for signs of life. The possibility that people might live here in these ice islands had not occurred to them, but one morning soon after they arrived, while he was practising his arctic swimming techniques, Ryan stumbled on a block of ice that held fragments of human rubbish. He took it back to the ship, and after some discussion the characters agreed to take their linguist and a single marine, and head in the direction of the current that had borne this rubbish to them, moving carefully in the submarine. They had to move carefully because the submarine was not ice-strengthened, but after an hour of careful, slow and painstaking movement they found an amazing sight: a small warship, perhaps 40m long but heavily armed, moored to an iceberg that had been turned into a homestead, its upper area carved out into a tiny apartment. People were living up here!

Initially they considered attacking, but Quark ran some careful investigations with one of his airborne drone, and soon saw that they were outgunned. Not only did the little patrol boat have a more powerful weapon than their submarine, there was a machine gun nest on top of the iceberg and the patrol boat appeared to have two torpedo tubes, though they might not work. Far better to negotiate. With this in mind they sent Ryan ahead underwater, to attach an explosive to the ship as a bargaining tool. They then gathered on the deck of the submarine and sailed it from its hiding place towards the iceberg.

As expected, the man in the machine gun nest woke up quickly, and both his machine gun and the deck gun of the ship turned to point at them. Holding their arms up in the universal gesture of non-aggression, they brought the submarine as close to the iceberg as they dared, and watched as a man emerged from the iceberg, walking down stairs carved in its sloped side and picking his way carefully across to the edge facing them. He was small, in his fifties, and gruff. The linguist told them he spoke English, and translated for them. They soon found themselves invited inside the iceberg.

And here is where the adventure ended, with our characters drinking instant coffee around a wooden table with this gruff middle-aged trader. He told them he and his fellows were just one of a large number of settlements on the ice, people who wintered deeper in the ice where it was stable,

and came out in summer to fish, hunt and trade. Ryan had noticed in his swimming expeditions that the water was thick with plankton and hard to see through, and the trader confirmed that fish and mammal life up here was rich, so in summer they could easily lay in enough food for the winter. But he hinted at more, larger communities in the ice. He himself traded diesel – diesel! – for food and furs, and was about to visit a group he called Settlement 11 to trade diesel for a battery. Would the characters like to come with him to meet the representatives of this community?

Stunned, the PCs could only say yes. They had found civilization where they had been told there could be no life. What had happened to the Ziggurat, and had they come here to loot an empty building, only to confront a community as powerful as the Gyre? What were they to do...?

A Message to Ryan

Soon after the Vladimir Putin left the comfort and safety of the Gyre, passing through the storm zone into the open seas, and was well past the point of no return, Ryan received a message from Captain Dilver. This message is given here.

Emergency message to Ryan from Captain Dilver.

Video message follows: one view only, video message will delete after viewing.

There is a brief flicker and the video starts. It has sound, and a time stamp on the bottom left. It shows a sea lion floating in water, looking calm. For a moment you think it might be Arashi but then you see it doesn't have the patch of darkened skin over one brow, it has a scar behind one ear, and it doesn't have his eyes and flares its nostrils slightly differently.

The camera pans back to reveal that the sea lion is floating in a kind of huge metal tub, perhaps 10 times its size, filled with water up to about 2/3 of the way, with a cage around the top. Strange black metallic rings loop around the metal casing.

The sea lion is floating happily in the water. From out of camera someone throws it a fish, which it catches and eats comfortably. It floats about, showing that casual and uncaring abandon that sea lions have when they're comfortable. Occasionally it looks at a particular point off camera, suggesting it recognises someone there.

Someone who sounds like Captain Dilver says "Okay" and after a moment the strange iron loops around the capsule begin to glow red. You hear a gasp off camera. The sea lion floats on, rolling onto its back, oblivious.

[1:10]: Apparently it's a time lapse video. It flicks forward to 1:10. The sea lion is looking a little worried, because in the background someone is making a keening sound and yelling and begging: "This was my fault, don't do this!" "He had nothing to do with it, let him go!" "You're a monster Dilver, punish me not him!" followed by Dilver calmly saying "Oh don't worry, I'll punish you."

[3:30]: Soft gasps in the background. The sea lion is floating still, looking worried at the sounds from the gallery.

[7:10]: The iron rings are still glowing bright red. The sea lion is starting to look a little agitated, moving around and sniffing the air and regularly diving to inspect the base of its bathtub. When it comes up it looks quizzically over at the gallery. At one point you hear scuffling, and a grunt of someone being hurt.

[10:10] The sea lion is starting to get really upset now. It is moving around in circles, gasping and splashing, trying to hold its fins above the water, barking occasionally. It has stopped paying attention to the gallery and is focused on its surroundings

[15:00] The sea lion is thrashing now. It tries to crawl out of the water but the sides of the bathtub are too steep. Every time it flops back in it whines and thrashes desperately, trying to look for a different way to escape. After about 10 seconds of video, it shits itself in the water.

[17:00] The sea lion is barking in distress. You can barely hear it though because someone in the gallery is yelling again, close to the camera. The water is starting to bubble, like water in a giant pot.

[18:00] The water is bubbling and heaving now, obviously near boiling. The sea lion is rolling around listlessly, barking and screaming in a way you've never heard such an animal scream. In the gallery someone is keening softly, and repeatedly begging Dilver to stop.

The video cuts away. It is replaced by a video of Captain Dilver, looking calmly at the camera. He speaks.

"Hello ..." [looks down at a piece of paper] "... Ryan."

After a moment the background flickers on to reveal a video of three men dragging the supine body of the boiled sea lion out of its tub. They proceed to cut it apart on the decking next to the tub, obviously not wanting to waste anything.

"Thanks for opening this message. Don't worry, the video's not Arashi, though I guess you knew that. It belongs - belonged - to another rider called ..." [looks down at a piece of paper] "... Virago. He betrayed us. Badly. Rest assured he deserved what he had coming to him."

"No doubt you think his sea lion was innocent."

Behind him the sea lion in the video starts twitching. Evidently they didn't boil it long enough. The guys call out, though you can't hear them because this video has no sound. They scuffle, then run off. One comes back with a boat hook. After a few brutal seconds they manage to finally kill the poor beast, and resume slaughtering. Dilver keeps talking.

"Now, I have no reason to distrust you or your friends, Ryan, but I thought the same about this ..." [looks at piece of paper] "... Virago ... but still. You can see what happened. I am a careful man, Ryan."

"I don't know what you're going to find up north, but there's a very small chance you'll find a functioning community. If that happens, it's possible that you or some of your fellows may decide that mutiny is a good idea. Maybe you'll see a chance at your own little kingdom, and decide to renounce the Gyre and stay up there."

"I just want to make clear to you what will happen to Arashi if you do that."

"And more importantly, I want to make it clear to you what will happen if you allow anyone else to betray the Gyre. Don't let that happen, Ryan, for your sakes and Arashi's. You're on your own up there Ryan, but you can still be loyal to the Gyre even if everyone around you is planning something bad. In fact, Arashi expects you to."

"But even though you're alone, we've still got a bit of help for you. In cargo hold 7B, behind the water reclamation unit under a bunch of old tires, there's a locked box containing a satellite relay unit. The key to that box has been hidden in your luggage. The relay unit contacts a satellite that passes over the arctic every two days, you can bounce a message to us from there. If you value your sea lion's life, I would recommend you use that relay box if you think anything unusual is happening. We can send the *Gunfather* to help you. But don't rely on the relay box. If people are starting to plan mutiny, I suggest you get to them first and ... change their minds."

"If this mission goes wrong, Ryan, because you let your colleagues let you down, then you won't just be disappointing me, you will be disappointing Arashi too. And I think you have seen just how disappointed a sea lion can get. So don't let me down, Ryan, and Arashi will be just fine."

"Thanks for your time, and bon voyage."

The video flickers out.

Life in the Ice

Having met Richard, the captain of a coast guard vessel that seems to be trading diesel – diesel! – to other communities in the arctic, the characters have established that there is a larger community called Research 003, built in an old semi-submersible arctic research base, that might be the best place for them. A squad from Research 003 will be meeting Richard at the edge of the pack ice, a few days' journey seaward from the base, in about a week, and he invites the PCs to travel there and meet them. He gives them coordinates and suggests they go by submarine – so trusting! The coast guard vessel needs to wind its way through the sea ice, but the PCs can go by submarine below the ice, faster and safer, so they decide to head there first and investigate the fishing base. This description is written in the language of “downtime” (it was conducted in Facebook chat) so is in a different tone to the remainder of this Chronicle.

The Fishing Base

You head off to the icepack. You travel underwater but things are a lot scarier than you expected – you are worried about some large iceberg hitting your submarine, which is not ice-strengthened at all, and although your sonar seems to be good enough you aren't convinced. Quark has managed to jury-rig a camera, connected to the battery of one of your underwater drones, but it's operating on a remote connection and you have battery fears, so its pictures are patchy and you can't have it on all the time, so when your sonar worries you you turn it on and the bow lights, and peer through the murk of plankton to try and see what looming shadow in the dark might tear you apart and send you down to the lightless, frozen depths. Those of you not responsible for driving the ship and running the camera – ie everyone except Quark and Leviathan – crouch near the conning tower or the forward sea lion bay, hoping you might be able to get to the surface and cling to whatever 'berg wrecked you before the cold takes you down. It's a vain hope you know, but fortunately you don't need to depend on it- you make it to the Vladimir Putin successfully.

Of course, surfacing is its own exercise in undersea delights. You have no camera to look up and your sonar is confused by Vladimir's overawing bulk, so you can't tell if you're going to bang into an iceberg as you rise into the sunlit zone. To solve this problem, Ryan is sent out with a hammer, and sits on the deck of the sub close to where he knows Leviathan will be, holding a light in one hand and tapping on the hull – very gently – with the hammer to signal all clear, left or right. He watches as his bubbles drift gently up into the distant sunlight, slowly getting colder and colder through his dry suit, wondering if perhaps planning has not been done sufficiently ...

You make it to the surface. Recharge at the Vladimir Putin, whose rusting expanse you have never been happier to see. Then you repeat the whole nail-biting experience for another few hours, as you sail the submarine close to the icepack.

This time you don't surface, but go up to 20 m below the surface and send out Ryan on his undersea Arashi-substitute. He rises easily to the surface and breaks through a thin film of ice close to the coordinates. It is snowing on the surface and it must be near midnight (you have long since lost track of time) since the sun is near the horizon and the light is grim and grey. A thin film of ice – maybe 1cm thick – has formed on the surface and near the ice pack it has been pushed by wind and waves into slushy lumps, amongst which it is easy for Ryan to hide. He realizes maybe it's a good thing that he didn't bring Arashi, since he surfaced near three seals and they would probably attack Arashi if they saw him – but they ignore Ryan's black wet-suited head. He can hear voices and smell a strange smell which, thanks to his efforts on Mount Arashi, he is now able to recognize as ... diesel.

Drifting around the edge of the ice, he sees a remarkable sight: a small fishing village. There are maybe 10 or 20 people with a couple of igloos set up some distance from the edge of the ice. They also have a small boat, from which they are unloading large fish. Near the shore, two of them are skinning and flensing a couple of seals. A way back from the shore between the igloos are a couple of snowmobiles (Ryan guesses this; you guys obviously know what such a thing is). The diesel smell comes from a small fire that is being used to render down seal fat. The men are talking cheerfully. In amongst them are two men with large rifles who stand looking out over the ice, but they seem to be taking turns at this task and not looking towards the sea. The ship is small – maybe 20m long – and has a harpoon on the front and a large gun, but it looks like a single shot grenade launcher or something similar, probably wouldn't seriously harm the sub except on the surface at close range. None of them look warlike or dangerous. You have been sent to meet a fishing and trading delegation, which has enough rifles to cause you trouble but not enough to justify mounting an attack on you.

Ryan watches this as long as he can in the frozen water, then sinks back down to the sub. He manages to get back inside without incident and sits on the floor shaking with cold.

Since you don't see any reason to hide, and you have an armed submarine, you surface it after a few hours. The men and women working at the beach are interested in your arrival but were obviously expecting you. One of them comes out to meet you in a small inflatable motor boat, that strange smell of diesel hanging around the engine as it guns up to you. He introduces himself as Connor, head of trade. You notice that like the other people you've seen so far, he's physically larger than you, and sleek – you guess it helps to be fat around here. He's wearing a kind of life jacket / heavy weather coat combination, carrying a vicious-looking knife at his waist and he has a rifle in the boat. He steps easily onto your submarine deck, shakes hands, and speaks with your linguist briefly. She's getting the hang of their weird mix of "English" and "French" and "Russian," and is able to understand most of what he says. He points out that leaving the submarine here for

a week would be quite dangerous, as the ice near the pack moves around a lot and can freeze in a ship or crush it if left unattended. It might be better, he suggests, to return the sub to your mother ship and come back in something you can drag up onto the ice. When you reveal that you don't have something of that kind, he suggests you come with him to the ice now and send the sub back to the Vladimir Putin – you don't want it frozen in. That's how many of their remote habitations are formed, he tells you – old ships that got frozen in.

You don't have any other ideas so you follow his advice. At the shore he and a few people look askance at your trade samples, but he doesn't ask any questions. You are shown inside a cozy igloo and left to your own devices for a while. The igloo looks pretty temporary but you are struck that it has real glass windows. Looking out of them you can see those snowmobiles, which have real tracks and skids and powerful-looking diesel engines. There are some larger ones with trailers that were out of sight before. No sign of heavy weapons.

Research 003

Richard and his team arrive after another 18 hours, and spend the next 6 hours pumping what you guess is diesel from the hold of their ship into some waiting tanks that are connected to the larger snowmobiles. Men and women – all large, heavysset people – pile your samples onto some sleds, then everyone takes a rest for a few hours while the sun dips below the horizon. When it rises again – perhaps at 5am? – you are roused and offered seats in the cabs of the larger snowmobiles. Again, everyone is polite and friendly but it's a worry to be separated from each other in the company of armed strangers, but again there is no choice – each snowmobile only has room for 2 or 3 people in the cab. Connor joins you, and you set off slowly over the ice, the snow falling gently around you as you slide off to the north.

You travel for about 8 hours non-stop, then the snowmobiles pull into a circle and everyone decamps, sets up tents and crashes. You sleep until you are woken by the sound of rifle shots. Surging out of your tent in a panic, you almost die of shock when you find a grizzled, blood-covered animal head facing you in the snow, its eyes staring blankly at you. It's a white bear the size of a large shark, dead on the snow. Someone you don't know apologises for waking you, says they weren't expecting such a beast so far inland. The others are already setting about the grim task of butchering it. In the drifting snow and dim half light, lit by a couple of lamps, it's a horrific scene, but they don't seem to want to waste any of it. You go back to bed, unsettled, and when you wake in the morning even the blood from the butchery has been covered by fresh snow. The remains of the bear are packed in ice on one of the snowmobiles. You have never seen any

mammal on land that is larger than a cat, and it's shocking to think you are sharing this icy world with such a monstrosity. Are they going to eat it?

You travel for another 8 hours. The sun is again setting for its brief rest below the horizon when you arrive at a strange place. It is a field of shacks, just their roofs protruding from the ice, many of the roofs made of glass, laid out in a ring like fields in the ice. Between each of the shacks are fields of solar panels on little stilts, with pathways between them that you drive through. There aren't a lot of shacks but there are a lot of solar panels. They're arranged in a ring around a central fortress-like structure of grey steel and glass that rises out of the ice, perhaps 20m above the surrounding empty plain. A couple of red and green lights flicker on its roof, and welcoming orange glow is cast from its windows. A cold, constant wind is blowing loose snow across this strangely welcoming scene, and beyond the fortress and its furthest fields of solar panels there is a cluster of wind towers, surrounded by growths of ice like hills, turning majestically in that constant wind. They are barely visible in the gloom, but as the sun sinks behind the ice their huge, silent blades glow with its weak red light.

You are led inside the fortress-like place, which just as they said looks like it might once have been a research building. You sleep in a narrow room carved out of the ice and connected to an ice-fast outer door of the research building – it's cold and damp but safe, and in the morning you have a small breakfast of fish, potato slices and more of that "coffee." Then Connor comes to meet you, takes you on a quick tour, and finally introduces you to one of their "treasures." You take tunnels carved in the ice through several turns, that lead you perhaps 30m away from the entrance to the fortress, and end in a heavy door. He opens the heavy door and you enter a warm, dimly lit room that is perhaps 40m long, 4m deep and 10m wide. The roof must protrude above the ice because it is made of steel and shaped ice like an igloo, but the base must be beneath the ice surface. The room contains five racks, each 2m high and 1m wide, and into each rack are slotted four identical square shapes. The four shapes neatly fit the width and height of the rack, and they are each about 10cm wide. There are thousands of these objects slotted carefully into the racks, stretching all the way to the back of the room and all connected to a single cable running along the floor in the middle. On the nearest of them you can see "TESLA" written in a fading, ageing script.

"Batteries," Connor says, "four of them store enough to power a pre-flood home for a week. There are hundreds of thousands in the arctic. Maybe millions, we don't know. They feed us in winter."

And then he takes you back for more "coffee" and tells you a sad story of ingenuity, desperation and conflict that ended with a couple of thousand people eking out a precarious existence in scattered settlements across the polar ice.

Before the flood started consuming the world, global warming was the greatest threat facing the planet, and civilisation was forced to rapidly shift away from carbon-based fuels. They switched to solar, and to store it they developed batteries that could be installed in homes to store the daytime sun for evening. Most developed nations and a lot of poor nations had huge programs of rooftop solar power and batteries in place when the world started to flood. When the lowlands of Europe and America began to flood, the governments of France, Denmark and the USA made a secret plan. They tore up homes that were threatened by the flood and moved the most valuable resources up and away from the waters, storing them on higher ground at first just to try not to lose so much material to the flood. But when they realised the flood wasn't stopping they conceived of a grand plan to save the world's resources. The growing oceans were absorbing much more carbon dioxide, and the collapse of arctic ice had been reversed, but now it was growing rapidly as the lands that used to impede its spread were submerged. The governments of these countries realised that in the future this might be the only solid land on earth, and was certainly the only stable land they could conceive of in the immediate future. So they moved all those batteries, solar panels, glass and copper wires to the arctic and stored them in caverns in the newly-thickening ice. As the situation in Europe and America became more desperate, people fleeing the floods were told the only way to get into refugee settlements on higher ground was to strip their homes and bring the key materials with them: batteries, solar panels, wiring, steel pans, garden soil, glass. This was all gathered together and shipped to the arctic, to be stored there until the water level stabilized.

When the governments realised that the waters were not going to stop until all the earth was consumed, they changed their plans: they began constructing settlements in the ice, which they would use as a base of operations and storage for post-flood communities. They kept the plans secret to prevent raiding and conflict, but unfortunately they kept their plans too secret – governments collapsed long before the end, and took knowledge of the plans with them. But the coast guard, and some arctic researchers, remembered, and as the world turned to cannibalism and piracy these people took their ships and families and friends and headed north. After a period of desperation and conflict they settled into roughly the pattern that they are in now. The batteries were linked together and the solar panels set up to be rolled out in summer and rolled away in winter. The batteries would charge up, and were laid out around settlements in their thousands and thousands. In summer they charged, and in winter they ran lights, heating and most of all hydroponic gardens – hundreds of square metres of gardens dug into the ice, growing potatoes, strawberries, cabbages and sometimes even oats and beans. In winter the communities settled in for the long night, living off fish and seal meat harvested in summer, and potatoes and strawberries grown in the hydroponic gardens. Then as soon as the sun rose, they ventured out, rolled out their

solar panels, and began recharging. They also opened up gardens in the ice, heating them inside with a combination of greenhouse glass and solar power, and growing more food to prepare for the following winter. Every winter was a close call, because they always ran out of food near the end, and every summer was a season of furious work, but over 70 years no community had failed. In summer they traded with each other and worked together; in winter they settled into their dens and waited out the frozen dark.

“We have riches up here,” Connor told them. “There is glass, soil, copper, and so many batteries. But we are living hand to mouth for a simple reason. We don’t have enough people to expand our farms and panels in the summer, and so we can’t allow our population to grow because we can’t feed the new mouths. We’re working flat out to prepare for the next winter and maintain things as they are, we don’t have time to build new things. If we could just get a group of people up here for a summer, working for us and helping to build new farms, new battery stores, new solar setups; but if they then left before the winter came. A few seasons of that and maybe we could get the space we need to grow. But as it is we’re fighting entropy up here, with nowhere to go.”

He looks at you all. “We don’t need a lot of the stuff that’s been dumped up here, maybe you do. But maybe we can trade? You are here for trade ... right?”

Amongst the Barbarians

At first the PCs were unwilling to share too much detail with Connor about the purpose of their mission, but after a few days in the comfort of Research 003 they could find little reason to hold out on him. Their limited exploration of the research base suggested that if they really needed to they could probably take it - most of the residents were clearly incapable of serious combat, and for much of the day mostly outside, and they could relatively easily take on the people who did show any semblance of military skill. However, their hosts seemed remarkably unconcerned by security, which worried our heroes inordinately, and they also realised that, knowing nothing of the harsh environment here, there would be little chance of survival here if they had to flee - or even cross the ice back to the *Vladimir Putin* - without help from locals. Furthermore, they soon realised that the ice was huge, with many communities scattered across it, and they would never find the Ziggurat if they had to search it all themselves - and why should they when they had such amenable hosts to help them?

So they asked. On the third day they told Connor the situation, and asked if he or his allies knew anything about the Ziggurat. They described it in detail, carefully eliding some of the more salient information about the riches it held, and asked Connor if he knew anything of such a community?

He did not, and nor did anyone else in his community. For a few hours he contacted other communities by radio to ask, but none of them knew of such a place. However, the westernmost of the known communities, a frozen-in ship called the Oiler, had experienced occasional raids over the past 30 years by barbarians who came from the west, primarily hunting for people to abduct. They only came in summer, and they must be coming from far away on some kind of reliable conveyance, because it was beyond the Oiler's resources to track them back to their origins. Most raids were not successful, but on occasion the barbarians had carried off a small number of prisoners, to no one knew what fate. The Oiler lacked the combat experience to take them on effectively, or the resources to adequately pursue them. Perhaps these were the residents of the lost Ziggurat? It seemed likely: the Oiler had itself been trapped in ice some 50 years ago after drifting up from the old Atlantic, and since then the ice pack had expanded, and could have captured the ziggurat further to the west.

The Oiler was west of Research 003, perhaps a week's travel, and perhaps another couple of hundred kilometres from the western edge of the ice. No group was planning to travel there from Research 003 for at least another week, and from the Oiler it would be impossible to head west over the ice, as the Oiler would not be able to spare equipment and guides for such a task. However, there was another way to find the Ziggurat. If raiders were coming from the west they must be near to the sea at that edge, and so it seemed the simplest way to find them was to travel around the pack ice to its edge directly west of the Oiler, and search for the Ziggurat there. Either the Ziggurat, or some fishing base attached to it, must be there, for there was no possibility a large community could sustain itself in the ice without access to the sea.

The characters decided to head back to the *Vladimir Putin* and take this course west. Before they left they made a trade agreement with Connor: they would return next summer with a squad of workers from the Gyre, along with supplies for them, and they would work here during the summer, returning to the Gyre when the freeze began. In exchange Research 003 would share some of its bounty with them: soil, glass and batteries from its stores for starters, and seal oil and skins. They took some samples with them when they left, including a polar bear skin to present to Dilver as a rug, and with the rise of the sun the next morning began the return journey to the *Vladimir Putin*, accompanied by two guides from the research base.

The Outpost

After they returned to the *Vladimir Putin* they set off west, skirting the worst of the ice pack and heading as fast as they could to the place they thought they might expect to find the Ziggurat or

one of its outposts. It took them over a week to reach the area, and another week of careful scouting with airborne drones, but eventually Quark was able to identify what they were looking for: columns of smoke rising above the ice near its edge. They took the Vladimir Putin to a location near but out of sight of the shore, and let slip their submarine. Taking all their marines with them, crammed into the hold, they set off for the ice pack's edge. When they were close to it they rose to within a safe distance of the surface and Ryan slipped out, rising up to the edge of the ice to investigate the outpost.

It was a typical fishing and seal-hunting base, similar to the outpost Research 003 was maintaining. Two small fishing boats, perhaps converted from the lifeboats of a larger vessel, were resting against the pack ice. Nearby a couple of large drums were being used to render seal fat, and it was the smoke from their fires that Quark had seen from his drone, rising high into the still air of this cold, clear day. A couple of rough igloos had been built further back on the ice, and amongst them sat some rundown snow-mobiles, including a very large one that looked like it was used for transporting goods.

The camp itself seemed to be occupied by three distinct groups of people. There were some people getting into one fishing boat who looked cowed, beaten and exhausted; they were sitting at placements for oars, and as Ryan watched someone standing behind them on the boat started hitting them with a stick. Two more men got in the front of the boat and a few more of the poor, tired-looking folks pushed it away from the shore, obviously heading off on another fishing expedition. On the shore, some men tending to the fires appeared to be in this middle class of weary but unbeaten workers; one broke off from the fires to approach the men who had pushed the boat out and begin beating them with a stick. The whole thing was overlooked by a group of armed men, carrying whalebone crossbows and savage-looking clubs, who might be some sort of guards or soldiers. Everyone looked tired and angry, and everyone was working very hard. Their clothing was rough and savage compared to that of the folk from Research 003, and it appeared to be made of different materials, with more fur and less sealskin. These men were all smaller than the people of Research 003, who had been large muscly - these people, bar one or two soldiers, were short and looked like they must be lean. They also did not look as comfortable either in the cold or with each other, and it certainly appeared as if some of them were slaves of the rest.

Ryan had seen enough. He slipped below the waves and descended to the submarine. This time he had timed it poorly, and by the time he was back inside he was shaking and in shock from the cold. As he recovered, they planned their attack. First they would take the boat, surfacing the submarine beneath it to overturn it and capturing the crew. Once they had the crew and knew what they were facing, they would make a plan as to how to attack the camp.

They found the boat and tipped it. The submarine rose perfectly out of the frozen waters, emerging beneath the converted lifeboat's keel and tipping it into the water. Ryan was riding the deck of the submarine and was able to slip into the water as the boat tipped, watching as people fell out. One man - the one who had been beating the slaves - sank like a stone, probably wearing iron armour, a trail of bubbles drifting up behind him as he screamed his last, panicked curses to the darkness. The other two were able to swim for the surface, though slowly, but the slaves, Ryan realized, were chained to the seats of the boat and would drown unless freed. He saw that the boat had trapped a pocket of air that the slaves were not aware of, so he rushed up beneath the boat and pushed them, one by one, up into the air pocket. As he did this one of the free-swimming men emerged from the water near the submarine, and Crimson offered him the end of his spear, telling him he could live. The man grabbed the spear and dragged Crimson for the water, so now Crimson was forced to let it go. Leviathan, at the conning tower, fired at this man and killed him. The other man emerged, a marine shot but missed him, and realising he was in trouble he dived and tried to swim under the submarine. Crimson, the marine and Leviathan were shooting the other man in the water like a floundering whale, so Ryan finished saving the slaves and then set off after the remaining man under the submarine. Using his drone he soon caught the man, stabbing him in the leg with a spear and then using the embedded spear to drag the man, struggling, back to the ship. By the time they got him on the deck of the submarine he was nearly dead but they soon revived him and asked him about his fellows.

They turned the boat back over to rescue the slaves, and everyone returned to the *Vladimir Putin* to make plans. The non-slave they had captured declared that he was "a Freeman" and would not be bullied, but the slaves soon explained everything. Yes, they came from the Ziggurat, yes they were slaves. Their society consists of slaves, freemen, warriors, experts and the leaders, and they were here as slaves to help the freemen with fishing. There were 12 warriors at the fishing base, about 20 freemen and 15 slaves, and the warriors were led by a man called Everard. There were no communication devices, all messages would be taken back to the Ziggurat with the next fish transport, due in a day or two. Attacking the base would be easy - they simply needed to wade in.

They left the slaves with the freeman at the *Vladimir Putin*, and prepared a two-pronged attack. Quark and Leviathan took a squad of marines in the submarine to land a little distance from the base on the icepack and crossed overland to attack from the rear, while Ryan and Crimson took the fishing boat and four marines directly to the front, assuming that their use of the fishing boat would confuse anyone who saw them.

Their assumption was correct, and the raid passed off without any serious problems. Everard and six warriors were sleeping when they attacked, and although they managed to join battle they were too late and ineffectual, and the fight was soon over with the loss of just one marine to concerted crossbow fire. During the fight Ryan distinguished himself by killing a freeman who was beating the slaves, and by handing Everard over to them for execution - by flensing - when the battle was done. This gift of their greatest oppressor ennobled Ryan in their eyes, and they each presented him with a handful of Everard's still-warm fat, prostrating themselves before the rider, and declaring him to be the Stormwarden. From this the PCs saw their way into the Ziggurat opened, and they began to make plans ...

Taking the Ziggurat

Speaking with the slaves, they soon learnt the layout and structure of the Ziggurat. In summer most of its workers and warriors would be outside, the freemen and slaves labouring over farms dug into the snow and the warriors beating them. A few of the leaders and their guards would remain inside the Ziggurat, but not so many. The slaves would go inside and begin unloading their transport of fish, but if they arrived at night they would be essentially unsupervised. The PCs could leave the transport at the base of the ziggurat and explore the outside, then slip inside at night and come to the slave quarters. From there they would be able to learn the layout of the ziggurat, and take it. By the slaves' estimate there were about 36 slaves, 120 freemen, 45 warriors, 25 experts (who ran the reactor and other specialist functions) and then the leadership: Old Prime the leader, his warrior chief Gunnard, three warrior captains called Fist, Stone and Salt, and the slave master Rack. These men would all be gathered in the leaders' area, except Rack who slept near the slave quarters. During daylight 30 or so of the warriors would be outside, but it would be harder to approach.

They also discovered that the entire ziggurat society was held together by a strange religion of the storm, led by a priest called Pyro, which held that the ziggurat was the only bulwark against a worldwide storm, and anything except complete obeisance to the gods of the storm would lead to the destruction of the ziggurat and all of humanity, of which they were the last sane remnant. Anyone who didn't believe in the storm gods and the ultimate power of pyro over them was doomed to die, and become a slave. It was through these religious teachings that the strict hierarchy was enforced. Unfortunately for the leaders of the ziggurat, Ryan had been pronounced storm warden ...

The PCs decided to go in at night and explore before the raid. They left in the snowmobile, the slaves dragging it across the ice as they always did. The journey took two days, and when it was done the slaves were exhausted but jubilant. They rested out of sight of the ziggurat and headed in after the sun sank below the horizon. The slaves dragged the snowmobile through fields of snow and ice that had been cut into big farms. Pits had been dug into the ground in great arc around the ziggurat, and covered in glass. Cables snaked between the pits, carrying warm water from the reactor, and between each set of farms a small igloo had been built to house the freemen who would till the farms in the morning. The slaves who would do most of the hard work had been returned to their quarters, but the freemen would sleep in the igloos until dawn, when they would rouse early and return their digging and tending. The slopes of the ziggurat itself were not covered in snow, like the landscape around it, but steamed with warmth, and seemed to be encrusted with lichen. Scraggly goats hopped over the steps, grazing on the lichen, and bright lamps stood on poles above the slopes, lighting them up with a surprising brilliance. The Ziggurat glowed in the dark plains of ice like a wedge of hospital-lamp sodium brilliance.



The snowmobile slide between the farms and up to the ziggurat itself, stopping at the base of a huge ice ramp that had been built on the north face. This ice ramp led up to the ramparts far

above, where two guards stood lazily watching over their sleeping landscape. Here the PCs jumped down from the transport crate and slipped into the shadows beneath the ziggurat, to scout the outside. The slaves resumed hauling, dragging their load of fish and seal fat up the ice slope to the waiting guards.

The PCs explored around the base of the ziggurat. They saw old, rusting cranes standing on the north side, and on the south side another ice ramp. In the shadows of the ice ramp were three large boats that had been converted into snowmobiles. They were resting on the snow on huge wooden skis, and had masts that obviously were used to propel them across the ice. Ryan crawled up into one, followed by Leviathan, and found inside three small snowmobiles, a machine gun on the bow and a locked room at the rear. Quark broke the lock and they slipped inside, finding a cabinet filled with ammunition. They couldn't pick the lock of the cabinet but Crimson was able to force the door, and they pulled out grenades, a grenade launcher, carbines and ammunition for the machine gun. They took the machine gun, slipped back out, and headed off to the slave quarters.

It was easy to slip inside. Guards had only been placed on the ice ramps, because their main purpose was controlling the slaves, not seeking strangers. Anyone approaching the Ziggurat would be seen from kilometres away during the day by guards and pickets, and no one expected anyone to approach with the help of the slaves, so no guards were set on the east or west slopes, away from the ice ramps. The characters climbed the slopes of the ziggurat and slipped into the nearest door once they passed the parapet, taking the direction they knew would take them to the slave quarters. Even the slave quarters were unlocked - where could the slaves go, and what could they hope to achieve? - so the PCs simply slipped inside. Here they made their plans.

The slaves told them that there was a soldiers' barracks on each corner of the ziggurat, and the experts slept above them, near the top of the ziggurat, unarmed and protected only by a few guards. The leaders were far away, on the opposite side of the ziggurat, but likely one of either Fist, Stone or Salt were awake and on duty. Rack was just down the hall, in his quarters, which were always locked. There were cameras on some hallways but "the spirits of the cameras have left, and the experts cannot bring them back." This place, clearly, had lost any ability to renew itself. They decided to pay a visit on the slave master, Rack. They took the slaves with them and gave them simple instructions: once they had dealt with Rack the slaves were to take any weapon they could find, run up the stairs to the experts' quarters and kill them all. Without his experts, Old Prime would be lost and unable to control the place, and even if they lost in battle the PCs might be able to negotiate on that basis. They dispatched Captain Azel with one team of marines to the furthest corner of the ziggurat to deal with the soldiers there, and another team of four to the other corner. Azel took the machine gun with him, while Quark carried the grenade launcher.

They knocked on Rack's door, expecting him to answer, but nothing happened. After a moment of waiting, from far away, they heard the sound of a siren, a powerful electronic buzzer, springing to life: obviously Rack had realised what was going on and did not want to open his door. The PCs told the slaves to go to the experts, fast, and cleared away from the door. Quark fired a grenade right at it, blowing the door in, and they charged into the room. Rack was there, but he was unarmoured and couldn't put up much struggle - he went down almost immediately. In the corner of his room they saw a screen with a cctv camera pointed at his own door. Obviously he still could speak with the spirits of the camera ...

The PCs now knew that trouble would be coming to them. They charged down the hall towards the nearest barracks, and before they arrived they could see that the soldiers had gathered outside, and were listening to someone talking. As they ran, Quark fired a grenade from his launcher straight into the assembled ranks, and Leviathan threw another. Crimson and Ryan charged in, and they found Stone there, injured but rallying his troops. Combat was short but brutal, with a few crossbows fired and one bolt hitting Crimson but no serious damage done. During the battle Ryan and Quark both invoked "Storm" when they killed someone, although Ryan isn't very good at languages and got it wrong, yelling "Slut" instead. They took down Stone, but as they finished him off they heard more soldiers coming. Leviathan and Quark hurled and threw grenades down the hall, killing the first two ranks of men - Quark's grenade hit one man full in the chest and redecorated a portion of the corridor - and then battle was joined as the remainder hit the room. They prevailed in this battle, but as they were fighting Quark heard the sounds of people coming down stairs from above. Guessing it might be Fist and Salt, he alerted the others and took a position near the stairs. While they fought behind him, he fired a grenade into the stairwell, doing serious damage to both of the warriors as they came down. Ryan slid stealthily up to the stairwell and Crimson charged in, and Leviathan finished off the soldiers behind them. Somewhere far away they could hear the roar of the machine gun in the ziggurat's corridors. Fist and Salt surged out of the stairway to take on the group, but as they came Ryan stuck a spear in one, and Crimson smashed down the other. They died, and in truth no one amongst the group knew which was which. Nor did they care.

It seemed the battle had been done. After a short while Azel and his marines came running up, to report that all soldiers were dead and no marines lost. The second marine squad had gone up above and pinned down the remains of the leadership - Gunnard was dead and Old Prime was holed up with his priest, Pyro, on the ramparts.

At the ramparts they found Pyro and Old Prime hidden behind some steel cabinets in a room facing off with the four marines. The 36 slaves were gathered behind the marines, holding various precious items belonging to the experts and jeering the leader and his priest. The area around the ziggurat was in uproar, with freemen running around on the ground unable to understand what was going on, and no one coming down to tell them. Old Prime was broadcasting something over the public address system but they didn't have time to check with their linguist, who had managed to stay out of the way during all the fighting and had conducted herself with all the aplomb they had been warned to expect of her when they had been given her by Dilver. They marched forward, Quark pointing his (empty) grenade launcher at the cabinets, and Pyro the high priest emerged slowly, looking terrified. As he came forward Ryan stepped out amongst the slaves and told him "Bow down before the stormwarden," translated in a booming voice by their linguist. Pyro looked back briefly at Old Prime, who was shaking his head furiously, but then he looked at that (empty) grenade launcher, and bowed down before Ryan.

As the marines stormed Old Prime's position, Ryan dragged Pyro to the ramparts of the ziggurat, the slaves following and crowding around him just below the ramparts, in full view of the freemen below. Ryan held Pyro up by his priestly robes and in his biggest voice, he yelled

"I am the stormwarden! See what happens when false prophets go against the will of the storm!"

and threw Pyro to the slaves, while the linguist translated. The slaves tore Pyro apart with their bare hands, throwing pieces of him down the steps of the ziggurat. The marines dragged Old Prime away to a secure spot, and the freemen cowered.

The ziggurat was theirs.

Aftermath

They enlisted the freemen to help them loot the ziggurat, and carried all that they could across the pack ice to the Vladimir Putin. It took time, and they were there for most of the summer, but during this time Ryan cemented his role as the stormwarden, dispensing judgment and wrath amongst the freemen. By the end of summer, when they left, the society of the ziggurat had changed irrevocably: they had formed trade relations with the communities of the ice pack, had given up on their slaving ways, and were terrified of the future. When the PCs left Ryan told them: I will come back in the spring, and if you have survived this winter of wrath I will rule you.

They returned to the Gyre by winter, and Dilver met them at Pier 18, Arashi by his side. He was pleased with all their reports, though disappointed in them for not freeing the ziggurat from the 10m thick ice in which it was held fast. He agreed to the trade mission with the other communities of the ice pack, and also agreed to Ryan's unusual request to be allowed to return to the ziggurat the following spring as stormwarden. "Has the Gyre not been good to you?" he asked, as he watched Ryan hugging Arashi desperately. "Why would you want this time away?" But he granted the request. "Of course you can take Arashi with you," he said, "we will arrange a way to carry him there in the *Vladimir Putin* - why, I even have a big metal tub I don't need, that you can use!"

For a couple of seasons Ryan spent spring and summer in the arctic, returning with the *Vladimir Putin* in autumn, but the appeal soon wore off. Not only were the responsibilities of storm warden exhausting, but he could only ride with Arashi in the arctic sea occasionally, and when he did the rides were short due to the cold. He also had to keep a constant eye out for Orcas, which love sea lion fat, and after one particularly vicious encounter he decided the tropics might be better. He abandoned his converts, and returned to the sun. Here he was given his promised home in the Arc, and put in charge of a squad of riders who would play a key role in the raising of the arc that he and his fellows had made possible in their first adventure. Unfortunately Quark, Leviathan and Crimson's mistakes during a mission to the Himalayan Kingdoms made the raising of the arc a much more complex job than it should have been, and they all had to show exceptional bravery during that breathtakingly chaotic mission. But that is a tale for another day ...