

Radioplay: Habbakuk of Ice

*For I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe,
though it be told you*

Old Testament Book of Habakkuk

NOTE ON SPELLING:

The Old Testament spells the name of the prophet Habakkuk with a double K. When he named the project, Pyke - or can we blame Miss Pleens, his secretary? - wrote Habbakuk with a double B and single K. The error was continued on all official documents relating to the project. So the play goes with that. Kabbalistically speaking, if they had spelled the word correctly, the project might have succeeded.

1. PLAY IN WITH JAUNTY INSTRUMENTAL VERSION OF LILI MARLENE. BRING UP THROUGH IT THE GENTLE SOUND OF LAPPING LAKEWATER. FADE MUSIC. OARS DIPPING IN WATER. CONTINUE THROUGH SPEECH.

THE CANADIAN VOICE

(voice over, to us) There is a cold clear lonely lake in northern Alberta called Patricia. Take one of the two rowboats that lie beside the lake. Row into the middle of the lake. Lean over the side. Open your eyes in the clear water and before your eyeballs freeze you will see the twisted metal skeletal remains that supported the body of Habbakuk, a battleship made of ice. Habbakuk has been undisturbed for 60 years. A forgotten secret. Until now. This is the history of the good ship Habbakuk and of those who willed her into existence, and of one special man, whose baby it was: Mr Geoffrey Pyke.

They say that even when he was a small boy his mind was overflowing with original ideas, great and small.....

2. LATE VICTORIAN DRAWING ROOM, 1899. IN A ROOM NEARBY PYKE'S 7 YEAR OLD SISTER IS PLAYING *BLOW THE WIND SOUTHERLY* BADLY ON THE PIANO, HER SHRILL VOICE WARBLING THE WORDS. CLOSER: TINKLE OF CHANDELIER, LIKE ICE. INFANT PYKE ENTERS WALKING ON PARQUET FLOOR. MARY PYKE HAS A YAPPING PEKE ON HER LAP.

MARY PYKE (grand, precisely dotty) Geoffrey, I must speak with you very very seriously for a moment.

INFANT PYKE Yes, mother.

MARY PYKE The Rabbi has taken your father away.

INFANT PYKE (clipped) I witnessed the event from the top of the stairs. I will miss him.

MARY PYKE This means that you, Geoffrey, are now officially Head of the Family. Remind me, please, how old are you now?

INFANT PYKE I am five and a quarter. If I survive till next Tuesday I shall have lived exactly two thousand days.

MARY PYKE That many? Excellent. You must look after all of us, your brothers and sisters - and ME of course. We are YOUR responsibility now.

INFANT PYKE I will endeavour to carry the burden as lightly as possible.

MARY PYKE Good boy. You will find the household accounts in the roll top desk and the share certificates in the bathroom cupboard.

INFANT PYKE (on his way) I will attend to business immediately mother. You need not worry your head about anything.

MARY PYKE (calling after) Geoffrey, what is it you keep writing in those horrid little notebooks?

INFANT PYKE

(brightly, but with staggering import) Ideas, mother.

THE PEKE GROWLS

3. AIR RAID SIRENS. HALF-SNATCH OF WE'LL MEET AGAIN. CHURCHILL'S VOICE: 'THIS WAS OUR FINEST HOUR'. BOMBS DROPPING AND EXPLODING.

4. MOUNTBATTEN'S OFFICE. BUSTLE OF WARTIME LONDON OUTSIDE. PHONES RINGING IN OUTER OFFICE. TYPING. PEOPLE HURRYING IN CORRIDORS.

THE CANADIAN VOICE

(swift voice over, to us) Lord Louis Mountbatten's office, Combined Operations H.Q. October 15th, 1942.

MOUNTBATTEN

Who the Devil are you? How long have you been standing there?

MISS PLEENS

(a shrewd cockney, ruffled for the moment, fast) They sent me in about twelve minutes ago. To see Lord Mountbatten himself. Thought it was a joke. Saw you, sir. Guessed it wasn't. Daredn't speak. Sorry, sir. Miss Pleens.

MOUNTBATTEN

(excited) Ah, the famous Miss Pleens! (shuffling his papers) I have a splendid file on you here somewhere. Yes. Graphology Department, Scotland Yard. Very impressive. Now look here, I have been seeking a victim for a wonderfully horrible but vitally important assignment, and you're it!

MISS PLEENS

(very nervous) No parachutes involved, sir?

MOUNTBATTEN

(laughs) Parachutes? (playing with her) We shall see. (down to business) Look here: you know who we are in Combined Operations. We dream up anything we can to confound the enemy. And the best dreamer-upper we've got is a boffin called Geoffrey Pyke. He is the most brilliant man in the world. Really. He is. 'The Ozzard of Whizz' we call him. He has amazing ideas all the time. Never stops. Writes them down in scruffy little notebooks. Forgets most of them and cant read his own handwriting anyway. Your mission in life will be to help him prepare his official memos. But more than that: to collect his throwaway scrawls, type them up, pass them on to my office here, and we'll see what to do with them next.

MISS PLEENS

I see.

MOUNTBATTEN

And he only ever wears pyjamas - Oh, and a pair of boots he wore when he escaped from a German prison camp in 1917. Never wears underwear and abominates socks. He mostly works in bed all day and paces up and down all night. He's too busy to visit the lavatory, so he pees in bottles.

MISS PLEENS

Pees in bottles, yes sir. - Unusual sort of man, would you say, sir?

MOUNTBATTEN

(after the fun, back to getting his point about Pyke forcefully across to her) Look, Miss Pleens - may I call you Pamela?

MISS PLEENS

Nobody ever has, sir.

MOUNTBATTEN

(checking file) It is your name, isn't it?

MISS PLEENS

(unsure) Yes.

MOUNTBATTEN

You see...Pamela...Pyke gets everybody's back up: other boffins, but especially the top ranks. He's more hated than Hitler around here. But that's why he's here! He's a man WHO THINKS. He stirs everyone up, me included, gets us all THINKING. And any one of those ideas of his could win us this war, or save thousands of lives. - I suppose you think I'm a pretty important chap. But I'll finish keel up in the water one day and will be forgotten ten minutes later. This country will never forget Geoffrey Pyke. And you have the honour of helping him in his work.

MISS PLEENS

Well, sir, I...er...

MOUNTBATTEN

(closing file on desk) Dismissed. Carry on.

5. PICCADILLY, LONDON. PYKE'S FLAT. PYKE PACES TO AND FRO IN HIS OLD BOOTS. SOUND OF HURRIED WRITING. DROPPING OF PENCIL. PYKE HAS A DEEP, GENTLE, CONVINCING VOICE, AS FAST AS HIS MIND.

PYKE

Idea: how to sink the Turpitz. Pipes can be lowered into the harbour. These can discharge continuous jets of compressed air. (chuckles) Altering the specific gravity of the water. Turpitz sinks in a sea of bubbles. Ha! Next idea:.....

PHONE RINGS. PYKE ANSWERS IT IRRITABLY. MUMBLE-SQUEAK OF ADMIRALÕS VOICE DOWN LINE.

I'm thinking here, what is it? - Trouble with ice forming on sides of ships in the Arctic. Slows them up. Of course it does! - You need something hydrophobic. Paraffin wax repels water. Paint the sides of the ships with paraffin wax. Problem solved. Why couldn't you have thought of that yourself? (slams phone down, chuckles) Now then...next idea. (suddenly slows down) Ice. Ice. Oi, yes. A ship MADE of...ice.

KNOCK ON DOOR.

(yells) Thinking. Go away.

DOOR OPENS.

MISS PLEENS

Miss Pleens, sir. Lord Mountbatten's office sent me.

PYKE

(rude) What for?

MISS PLEENS

(suddenly worried) Why is all the furniture on the ceiling?

PYKE

Floors should be a place for walking, Miss Pleens. Rooms would be much more sensible places if furniture was suspended from the ceiling by ropes and only lowered when needed. - Do pyjamas offend you?

MISS PLEENS

No.

PYKE

Good. Fetch me a herring and we shall commence work. You ARE a secretary, I take it? We have a memo to write which will win the war. Ha!

MISS PLEENS

(miffed, towards us and away, muttering loud) You want a herring, do you? A herring. Where do you keep them? In a fishtank under the carpet?

PYKE

(barks) Herring-Kitchen-Through-There!!! (to himself, close to us, as if confidentially whispering his ideas) Problem: Murmansk shipping convoys continually under attack. Not nearly enough aircraft-carriers to defend them. No bases. Range too far for aircraft. What if we made floating ice platforms, armoured aircraft carriers... iceberg ships... (a knowing little chuckle)

MISS PLEENS

(calls from kitchenette, irritated) The larder's on the ceiling!

PYKE

(barks) Lower it by its rope, woman!

HE CONTINUES WITH THOUGHTS WHILE MISS PLEENS LOWERS LARDER. SQUEAK OF ROPE. CRASH OF LARDER, BREAKING PLATE, JARS AND BOTTLES. CRY OF MISS PLEENS.

Ice is unknown quantity as substance. Unstudied. But if bombed by the enemy it could be easily repaired. And if mixed with...what?...sawdust, wood pulp...would it not be considerably stronger? A molecule of ice is remarkably similar to a molecule of concrete and tiny specks of wood in the ice might make a tougher bond, yes. Whole armies could travel inside vast ice battleships, invulnerable to attack. (laughs, then suddenly calls, very rude and impatient indeed) Where's my herring?

MISS PLEENS

(breathless, miffed, presents it) Your herring, Mr Pyke. Do you eat it head first or tail?

PYKE

A plate, Miss Pleens. I am not a seagull.

MISS PLEENS

I broke the plate. There was only the one.

PYKE

(eating and pacing) No matter - no matter. Type. Type. Idea for Invasion of France. Floating ice platforms, each one half a mile long, can be towed towards the German coastal positions, firing jets of supercooled water at the enemy....Ha!

MISS PLEENS STRUGGLES WITH TYPEWRITER...

- This herring, Miss Pleens, once swam in the very waters that our new iceship... Habbakuk... will sail in! What do you think of that for a name? From the book in the Bible of my Hebrew forebears: 'For I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you.' - Put HABBAKUK at the top of the page... (lightningly fast) H.A.B.B.A.K.U.K.

MISS PLEENS TWISTS TYPEWRITER'S ROLLER TO GET PAGE TO TOP. SHE TYPES.

- Now, where can I get 40 tons of experimental ice in London at four of clock on a Tuesday afternoon? - Ha! Tuesday! Today I have been alive exactly 17,000 days, and this was the day on which I invented the Habbakuk. (Churchillianly) This was my finest hour! (continues dictating) No need for cranes on iceships, (corrects himself with better word) bergships - holes in sides, cargo can slide on and off onto barges shaped like Venetian gondolas. Then the holes can be frozen shut immediately upon putting to sea... (he laughs, overexcited, almost ecstatic, FADE)

6. CHURCHILL'S BUNKER, DOWNING STREET. AGILE CLIP OF MOUNTBATTEN'S SHOES AS HE HURRIES ALONG CORRIDOR. HE SEEMS PAINED, GOES 'OO! OW!' AS HE HURRIES.

THE CANADIAN VOICE

(voice over, brisk) The underground war rooms, 10 Downing Street, November 7th, 1942.

MOUNTBATTEN

Where's the P.M. I've something he has to see this minute. (pained) I can't hold it much longer.

OFFICIAL

He's taking his bath, your Lordship.

MOUNTBATTEN

Perfect! That's exactly where I want him to be!

OFFICIAL

(calling after, worried) Your Lordship!

WE GO WITH MOUNTBATTEN BARGING THROUGH DOOR AFTER DOOR, TILL THE ACOUSTIC IS THAT OF A BATHROOM. TAP DRIPPING THROUGHOUT SCENE.

CHURCHILL

Louis, I am in my bathtub! Am I to have no moment's peace in this quarrelsome world?

MOUNTBATTEN

Hitch up your knees, Winston. I can't hold this bloody thing a moment longer.

SOUND OF CHURCHILL MOVING IN HIS BATH, THEN AN ALMIGHTY SPLASH AS MOUNTBATTEN DROPS A 'PYKRETE' BRICK INTO THE WATER.

CHURCHILL You have dropped a brick of ice in my nice hot water. Thankyou very much.

MOUNTBATTEN Not ice, Winston. 'Pykrete', named after its inventor, my man Geoffrey Pyke! It's part ice, part wood shavings. It's indestructible to bombing. Tougher than concrete. And it takes yonks to melt. Look - it's not melting!

CHURCHILL So I see. But what is its purpose?

THE BRICK GENTLY COLLIDES WITH SIDE OF BATH.

MOUNTBATTEN The memo. Habbakuk. Haven't you read it yet?

CHURCHILL (a sound of Churchillian irritation) Read what?

MOUNTBATTEN PULLS OUT HIS OWN COPY AND SHOVES IT INTO CHURCHILL'S HANDS.

MOUNTBATTEN This! Look! The Habbakuk memo. 55,000 words of it! 232 pages of solid gold.

CHURCHILL I only ever read one page of anything. I never turn over. (flicks through memo) Hab-ba-kuk. Like the prophet. - Habbakuk. Sounds like ice cracking. - Are there two Bs or two Ks in Habbakuk? It says two Bs here, but I think it is two Ks.

MOUNTBATTEN Two Bs.

CHURCHILL Hrr, two Ks.

MOUNTBATTEN Two Bs.

CHURCHILL Ks.

MOUNTBATTEN

Bs.

CHURCHILL

Ks.

MOUNTBATTEN

(irked) What difference does it make how you spell it if it wins us the war?

CHURCHILL

It is a Hebrew word, and therefore suffused with magical numerological power. Everything makes a difference. Details win wars. (reads) 'For I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you.' (inspired) - A battleship of ice! A belligerent floating igloo! Splendidly stirring idea. - But will it work?

MOUNTBATTEN

Think of it: ice. Construction costs would be minimal. The pykrete blocks form the outer shell of the craft, seven feet thick. Inside is pure ice, cut from the ice floes, with accommodation for thousands of troops and hangars for hundreds of aircraft.

CHURCHILL

(a very brief Churchillian noise) But won't everyone aboard freeze to death? Or do we recruit a brave body of snowmen?

MOUNTBATTEN

Apparently, the quarters can be quite warm. Like in, as you say, an igloo.

CHURCHILL

(doubtful) I confess my experience of igloos is not extensive.

MOUNTBATTEN

(over-eager to convince, turning pages for him) D'yersee here: diagrams of the cooling system. - The original idea was for ice platforms to protect the Murmansk convoys.

CHURCHILL

(a Churchillian noise of approval) Mm, vital, yes.

MOUNTBATTEN

But with the proper refrigeration system bergships could service equally well in Pacific operations. Not to mention its obvious application for getting a major invasion force across the Channel. It looks a tidge mad, I admit, but it could just be the thing that saves us! Winston, you **MUST** read more than one page!

CHURCHILL

Very well. Leave me alone with my block of ice and I shall read Mr. Pyke's report to her.

SPLISH-SPLOSH OF WATER AS HE SETTLES DOWN.
PYKRETE HITTING SIDE OF BATH.

7. ONBOARD A BOMBER. FLYING NORTH OF ICELAND.
VERY WINDY AND CLATTERINGLY NOISY.

PYKE

(yelling over aircraft noise) So nice of you to let us come along for the ride, Captain. It is giving me so many useful ideas. - Stop hugging that parachute, Miss Pleens, and thank the pilot.

MISS PLEENS

(like a child in an unpleasant visit to a hated aunt) Thankyou so much for letting us come.

PILOT

There's two icebergs dead ahead, Professor. Which one do you want?

PYKE

Couldn't care less.

PILOT

(into mask) Jocka, we'll bomb the one on the left.

JOCKA

(from mask) Target sighted, chief. Iceberg left.

PILOT

Jocka never misses, Professor. We'll hit brother iceberg with one bomb, then swing around for the photos.

PYKE

Watch, Miss Pleens! You must see this! We are about to learn about how your common run-of-the-mill iceberg reacts to its own personal blitz!

MISS PLEENS

I don't feel well, Mr. Pyke. (sudden change of tone, charmed) - Oh, they're blue, like cornflowers. I thought they'd be white.

JOCKA

(from mask) Target below! There she goes! Bang on! - Jocka never misses!

SOUND OF DESCENDING BOMB. EXPLOSION ON ICEBERG. SHATTER OF ICE. SPLASH AND GROAN OF ICEBERG. CRY AND APPLAUSE OF PYKE. BRING UP BOMBER'S ENGINES, THEN IT FLIES AWAY FROM US...

8. TEA TIME IN THE ADMIRALTY. BRIEFEST SNATCH OF MAD DOGS AND ENGLISHMEN, ITS MUSIC ONLY: NO WORDS. CLOCK TICKING HEAVILY IN BACKGROUND. GENTEEL CLATTER OF PLATES DURING SERVING. TOP BRASS STUFF THEMSELVES THROUGHOUT.

WAITER

Your tea and scones, General, Admiral. (he goes)

ADMIRAL

(ungratefully) Thank you, yes. (irate) Have you heard, Fergus, what that arrogant swine Pyke is up to?

GENERAL

Something too clever by half, I'll bet.

ADMIRAL

It's ten times more idiotic than that tosh he sent me about sinking the Turpitz with bubbles. He's put in a report to the P.M. about making battleships out of icecubes! He's been off up to Iceland bombing icebergs to see how they stand up to it!

GENERAL

What a preposterous ass he is!

ADMIRAL

And they'll pass it, just you wait and see!

GENERAL

Serve him right if they do. Right bloody fool he'll look when it comes a cropper.

ADMIRAL

I can't deny he may be the sort of man who would have invented the wheel. But he's not even a proper scientist, you know. No qualifications or anything. - Is this the same jam we always have? - Ideas man! TOSH! He is a constant avalanche of TOSH! I have better ideas myself!

GENERAL

Yes, that idea you had about...erm...

ADMIRAL

What?

GENERAL

You know, that thing, the...erm... - And he's mad, mad, you know. That ceaseless obsessive writing of his. It's a recognised mental insanity. A condition called *hypergraphia*. A chap I know told me all about it. - Pyke should be put away. For his own good.

ADMIRAL

Do you know what he said to me? In a moment of weakness I confessed to him I was so tired I was thinking of going off to my place in Shropshire and never coming back. And he tickled my medals like they were a budgerigar and said: 'Why don't you?'

GENERAL

The blasted cheek! If we can't win the war without men like him we don't deserve to win it. - No, this jam's not as sweet, is it? Should you complain or I?

9. PYKE'S MAKESHIFT LABORATORY IN AN UNDERGROUND COLD STORAGE VAULT WAY UNDER SMITHFIELD MARKET. CRUNCH OF ICE UNDER EVERYONE'S FEET. SOUND OF ICE BEING HIT WITH PICKS, TURNED ON LATHES, PUMMELED AND WORRIED. APPROACH OF J.D. BERNAL. A PLAINER GENIUS THAN PYKE. TOUCH OF WEST OF IRELAND ABOUT HIS VOICE. STRAIGHTFORWARD. SERIOUS. 2.333 POINTS FROM BEING DOUR.

J.D.

Geoff, I need a word...

PYKE

(not his everyday rudeness, he's hurt and snubbing) Sorry, too busy! Even for the country's most eminent physicist and expert on ice.

J.D.

(in a mood of humble contrition) Look, Geoff, when I gave my initial opinion about Habbakuk...

PYKE

An icy expertise gathered without need of insight or experimentation. - Anyway, J.D., how did you get down here without a pass? My underground Ice Palace is the most top secret location in London. Isn't it splendid? You'd never think we were the length of Nelson's Column under Smithfield Market.

J.D.

Mountbatten has put me on the project.

PYKE

(both worried and dismissive) No he hasn't! He would have told me.

J.D.

Just this morning.

LAB ASSISTANT

(hurrying over) More trouble in icepan 16, Mr. Pyke. It's warping again. The compression is too much for it!

THEY HURRY AWAY TOGETHER.

PYKE

Warping, pah! Is pan 16 the four percent woodpulp solution or the fourteen percent? It has, I hope, been kept strictly below minus fifteen degrees? The creep of the ice should be obviated.

THEY ARE GONE. J.D. PUFFS AFTER THEM,
CRUNCHING ON LOOSE ICE.

J.D.

Geoff! Geoff! (angry) Geoffrey Nathaniel Pyke!

PYKE

(calls back) Too busy for you, J.D.

J.D.

(yells huge) I HAVE CHANGED MY MIND ABOUT HABBAKUK!!!

HIS VOICE ECHOES IN THE HUGE UNDERGROUND
CHAMBER AND COMES BACK TO HIM.

PYKE

(hurrying back, delighted irony) What was that? Didn't quite catch it?

ONE MORE ECHO COMES.

J.D. (angry) That's why I'm on the project, you great goblin! I withdrew my initial critical report. (contrite) I have sent a recommendation for approval to the War Cabinet, for go-ahead of your Habbakuk Project.

PYKE Well, that'll hit the spot! You are very eminent, you know. (chortles, then sings under J.D.'s contrition below, dancing on ice) '...oh, if ever a whizz there was, the Ozzard of Whizz is one because - because, because, because, because, because - because of the wonderful things he does -ya-ta-ta-ta-ta-TA-TA!'

J.D. (talking through Pyke's song) I had a dose of conventional thinking. Sorry. I've been listening to your prattling genius for twenty years - should have known better. Habbakuk is an abnormal idea and that's why it is so magnificent. - It WILL succeed, I'm sure. (as Pyke finishes singing, a wise professional warning) - But, mind you, only if we allow Nature to do nearly all the work for us. - Churchill's dead keen. He's trying to sell the scheme to the Americans and Canadians right now.

STRANGE BOOMING SOUND. CRASH AND ECHO.

What's that?

PYKE (blithe) Air raid. We don't hear the sirens down here. Just the bombs if they get too close.

BOMBS ARE CLOSER. ODD BITS OF BRICKWORK FALLING, AND SHOWERS OF DUST. SHAKING OF GLASSES ON LAB TABLES. ICE SHIFTING AND FALLING. NOT A CONTINUOUS SOUND, BUT STILLNESS BETWEEN THE SOUNDS.

If the ceiling goes all the pork in London will fall onto our heads. (laughs) Don't worry, J.D., we'll live to see a fleet of Habbakuks sailing across the moonlit ocean.

NEXT BOMB IS VERY CLOSE. FADE WITH ITS RATTLE AND PYKE'S CHORTLING, HUMMING HIS SONG.

10. 10 DOWNING STREET. CABINET OFFICE. SIRENS IN DISTANCE. FIRE ENGINE BELLS. MUTTER OF TOP BRASS. THEIR MEDALS CLINK ON THEIR BARS.

THE CANADIAN VOICE

(voice over, brisk) Cabinet Office, 10 Downing Street, December 6th, 1942.

SUDDEN OPENING OF DOUBLE DOORS. CHURCHILL, MOUNTBATTEN AND AIDES HURRY IN, CHURCHILL SPEAKING AS HE COMES. ROOM HUSHES.

CHURCHILL

(puffing cigar, swiftly down to business) Gentlemen, I thank you for coming here today. There has been some scepticism among our American cousins and our colleagues in the Dominion about our ingenious scheme of building ice battleships.

MURMUR OF DISAPPROVAL.

So we have devised a little demonstration for you to bedazzle your unbelieving eyes... (calls) Lord Mountbatten! (to room) Take care, make room there...

SQUEAK OF TROLLEYS BEING PUSHED INTO ROOM. EXPECTANT MURMUR FROM GENERALS.

MOUNTBATTEN

Gentlemen, on the trolley to my left is a block of ice, three feet by two. On my right is a block the same size of 'pykrete', the material which will be the basis for our bergships. - Now, if everyone will please stand behind me, I shall take my revolver...

WE HEAR HIM UNHOLSTERING AND COCKING IT. GENERALS QUICKLY SHUFFLE BEHIND HIM.

...and I shall shoot first the iceblock, then the pykrete.

FIRST SHOT - A BIG SOUND IN THE CONFINED SPACE. ICE SHATTERS, TINKLES TO FLOOR.

Our experiments show that a .303 bullet fired into pure ice will penetrate fourteen inches. Into soft wood twenty-one inches. Into brickwork six inches. Into pykrete five inches.

COCKS, FIRES SECOND SHOT. CHUZZZZZ OF BULLET RICOCHETING OFF PYKRETE. - APPLAUSE. EVEN A FEW GOOD NATURED CHEERS.

See, hardly any damage at all. (examining pykrete) In fact, there's no entry hole. Where'd the bullet go?

ADMIRAL ERNEST KING U.S.N.

It is in my leg, Lord Mountbatten. Bounced clean off the sonuvabitch pykrete into my leg.

MOUNTBATTEN

Oops, Admiral King. I am sorry.

CHURCHILL

(closer) It fights back. I like that.

THE ADMIRAL SWOONS AND IS CARRIED OUT, MOANING. DOORS OPEN. AMAZED VOICES OUTSIDE.

AMAZED VOICE

(in background) Are you shooting each other in there?

JUPITER FROM HOLST'S PLANETS SUITE PLAYED LOW IN BACKGROUND OF THE FOLLOWING CHURCHILL SPEECH, TO ROUSE US.

CHURCHILL

(in thumping mood, sucking on cigar) The largest aircraft carrier in the world today is 1 thousand by 113 feet. I propose to use this pykrete material to build carriers 2 thousand feet long and 300 feet wide. I understand it will take six thousand men less than a year to build one of these marvels. The cost will be a fraction of building a conventional steel battleship. - Gentlemen, do I have the support of the United States and the Dominion of Canada?

APPLAUSE. WORDS OF APPROVAL. CHATTER AS THEY GATHER AROUND AND EXAMINE THE PYKRETE. CHURCHILL, WITHIN ALL THIS, CLOSE, AS IF ADDRESSING US PERSONALLY:

Mr. Ambassador, it seems obvious to me that Canada would be the place to design and build our Habbakuks. (moving away to catch someone else) Will you please tell your Prime Minister that this is a matter of the utmost importance and urgency?

11. PYKE'S FLAT, PICCADILLY. DOOR SHUTS. PYKE RETURNING. HE HUMS *LILI MARLENE*. MISS PLEENS HURRIES TO GREET HIM.

MISS PLEENS

(brighter than we will ever hear her) They brought the official notification around this afternoon, Mr Pyke. The go-ahead. Well done, sir!

PYKE

(upset, his words unusually precise) Miss Pleens, what did I say to do if ever you heard me humming 'Lili Marlene'?

MISS PLEENS

To put a big bag of broken biscuits on your pillow and to leave you alone in the dark, sir. I know. But you can't be having one of your depressions today! This is what you have always worked for! But instead you're pulling your beard out! Now snap out of it!

PYKE

(almost breaking down, humming notes of *Lili Marlene* between the words as he hurries to bedroom) The instructions are, Miss Pleens.... Broken biscuits.... Pillow.... No talking.... No calls.... No interruptions.... No pen or paper. Darkness.

HE SWIFTLY CLOSES BEDROOM DOOR. HUMS *LILI MARLENE* LOUDLY TO BLOT OUT MISS PLEENS.

MISS PLEENS

(loud through door) But we're going to Canada! They've started setting up the tests already. They are going to build an experimental Habbakuk on a lake in Alberta. What more do you want? (shouts) You are the most impossible man!

12. PYKE'S BEDROOM. HE HUMS *LILI MARLENE* WHILE EATING BROKEN BISCUITS FAST AND EMOTIONALLY FROM A PAPER BAG. STOPS, BREATHLESS. CHATTERS TO HIMSELF, WITH TINY HUMMED NOTES OF *LILI MARLENE* CREEPING IN...

PYKE

When an idea has been suggested but has not happened, when it is - you hope, with all your passionate intensity - going to happen but has not yet happened, THEN is the time of greatest joy and safety. But when the moment strikes that the Idea is to be made in Reality, when it is happening and you are in it happening with it, that is when the failure begins. The reality is always so puny, so narrow after the full blown idea. (sudden energy from nowhere, fast) - IDEA! Problem of getting troops from ship to shore safely under enemy fire. Usual landing craft inadequate. Too many casualties. - Suggest...ha! Pneumatic tubes, laid by divers underwater, to PUMP soldiers from ship to shore, in jets of air. Two at a time - not so claustrophobic that way. (hums snatch of *Lili Marlene*, but jauntily this time, chuckles) NEW IDEA! (fade) The point about..

13. HOCKEY STADIUM, OTTAWA. PLAY *O CANADA!* ANTHEM. GAME IN PROGRESS. CHEER OF CROWD. SWISH OF PLAYERS ON ICE. STRIKE OF STICK ON PUCK, AGAIN AND AGAIN....

THE CANADIAN VOICE

(voice over, brisk) January 14th, 1943. Ottawa Hockey Stadium. Jack Mackenzie, Head of the Canadian National Research Council tracks down C.D. Howe, Canadian Minister of Munitions and Supply.

MACK Found you at last! (sits, all worked up) Something weird landed on my desk this morning. It's called a Habbakuk.

HOWE Humdinger, isn't it?

MACK But it's the wildest most impracticable scheme I ever heard of! A battleship made of ice half a mile long! Who's more crazy - them for thinking it up or us for listening to them?

HOWE It's an iffy pudding, I know.

MACK Pie in the sky, you mean! Let someone speak sense and bring us all down to earth.

HOWE (soft and sure) It's decided, Mack. We're going ahead with the research and you're the man in charge, so get used to the idea.

MACK Do you mean to say that Mountbatten and that court jester of his in England dream up something that wouldn't have a ghost of a chance of even getting before a minor official over here, and all of Canada has to jump through hoops into Neverneverland.

HOWE You could put it like that if you wanted to.

MACK But my department's overstretched as it is. (whispers) All this work we're doing on the A-bomb, my staff, me too, never sleep.

HOWE Look, the British are crazy about this ice idea. Let's just do the research, we'll evaluate the findings, then take it from there. Maybe we'll build the thing, maybe not. - But we'll learn plenty about ice while we're at it. That's not a bad deal for a country with so much ice in it.

A SCORE IN THE GAME. HOOTERS. CHEERS. HOWE ON HIS FEET CLAPPING.

MACK (cowed, disappointed) I'll give it all I've got, of course.

14. TWO GOOD-NATURED CANADIAN HABBAKUK WORKERS REMINISCE - THIS MUST BE IN THE EARLY 1960S. THEIR HEARTS ARE SOFT. IN EACH OTHER'S COMPANY ALL THEIR LIVES, THEY ARE IRRITATED BY EACH OTHER, BUT DEEP FRIENDSHIP SHINES THROUGH. THEY TALK QUICK.

- BEATTY** (answering question we have not heard) Yes, sir, I was a conscientious objector in World War 2.
- BUCK** Me too. Conshies both.
- BEATTY** Didn't want to kill anyone, that's all, did we? But we had to do something useful.
- BUCK** (echoes) Something useful.
- BEATTY** So they sent about thirty of us...
- BUCK** Twenty-seven.
- BEATTY** Twenty-seven...up to the Rockies, Lake Patricia, Alberta - the sweetest air, smell of pine - to be the dogsbody workers on the Habbakuk Project, which was making a....
- BEATTY and BUCK** (together)battleship out of ice.
- BEATTY** We were there for most of the rest of the war. We had a great time.
- BUCK** Great time, yeah.
- BEATTY** Ours was a prototype, not the full sized Habbakuk. They were going to build the full monster Habbakuks out on Hudson Bay...
- BUCK** (corrects) Corner Brook, Newfoundland.

BEATTY Yeah. - We're still not supposed to talk about any of this, you know. - Pretty thing, the Habbakuk. Like a diamond full of splinters.

BUCK Fine piece of Canadian craftsmanship.

BEATTY It was sixty feet by thirty feet, ten feet high. Sat at lakeside with a little plank roof over it. Lost the tips of two fingers on the cooling pipes. - There were mornings, conshie or not, I would have killed anyone they said - him too....

BUCK Thanks a bunch.

BEATTY ...if only I didn't have to put those cold wet gloves on again. - Remember the moose and her calf who used to come down to watch us work?

BUCK That's the bit I remember best.

BEATTY What I remember best is Mr Pyke, the English inventor. He came out to see us, you know. Long spider of a guy with a beard like a goat. Wagged at you all the time he spoke.

BUCK I hated that.

BEATTY Wore his jim-jams under his raincoat. No socks. - You should have heard the things the big chiefs said about him when he was gone. He rubbed them the wrong way just by looking in the lake.

BUCK (breaks our from the double-act to speak with frankness) Apart from his beard, I liked him a lot. He found out I used to make radios as a kid. Asked me a zillion questions. He made a great impression on me. I was a troubled kid. He looked like his head was full of flies, but he was a kind man.

BEATTY He said to me: "All Problems In Life Can Be Solved By Clear Thinking And FEROCITY OF PURPOSE". I have carved those words on a piece of wood and nailed it up in my den.

BUCK Will you make me one?

BEATTY (matter-of-factly) No.

15. LAKE LOUISE, ALBERTA. MUSIC: BLOW THE MAN
DOWN SEA SHANTY. WINTER WIND BLOWING.
MOUNTAIN GOATS BLEAT IN DISTANCE. SQUIRRELS
EEK, PEEP. BEAMS OF ICE CREAK AND CRACK.

**THE CANADIAN
VOICE** (voice over, brisk) Experimental Ice Unit, Lake Louise, Alberta.
March 8th, 1943.

**CHIEF ENGINEER
SNELSON** (very dull) Our major activity here, gentlemen, is the
construction and testing of reinforced beams of ice. We are
engaged in calculating the stress at failure of ice in that
format.....The plastic flow of creep tests in compression were
initially

HIS VOICE DRONES ON IN BACKGROUND AS WE
SWITCH TO PYKE'S PERSPECTIVE.

devised in wooden forms 5 inches wide, 25 inches long and 5
inches deep. These specimen constructions may be divided into
two general groups.....

PYKE IS CLUCKING HIS TONGUE AT SQUIRRELS, WHO
PEEP BACK AT HIM. SNELSON DRONES ON TEN FEET
AWAY.

PYKE (mutters to squirrel) That's it, come to Geoffrey. What can you
teach me, little one? What ideas can you inspire?

MACK (stomping up to PYKE, exasperated) Mr Pyke, will you please
stop feeding squirrels! Chief Engineer Snelson is explaining his
experiments to us.

**CHIEF ENGINEER
SNELSON**

(in background)one of which you see before you, upended in the lake..... (handing out papers) The figures on this paper summarise findings from our 139 experiments to date. (during PYKE's next speech) - What you may find especially interesting is the relation between the deformation curves and the stress under load.....

PYKE

(stomping up through snow, sniffing in the cold) Frankly I've had enough of experiments. What's this? (accepts paper from SNELSON, reads, muttering at it) Yes, I could have told you all this and saved you the time.

J.D.

(warning not so gently) Geoffrey, remember what we talked about.

PYKE

(sniffing) Well, yes I know, J.D. But they're getting bogged down with details, and someone has to tell them. Habbakuk is not a scientific evaluation of the properties of ice, Mr... erm, Snelson.... It is a mission, a practical project for winning a war.

MACK

(very irked) Mr Snelson is taking things one step at a time. Experiment. Evaluate. Re-evaluate. Experiment. That's the way we do things here.

PYKE

Think WHY, man, not HOW. - Victory!

PYKE BLOWS HIS NOSE ON A PIECE OF PAPER.

**CHIEF ENGINEER
SNELSON**

He blew his nose on my figures!

MACK

(through gritted teeth) We have serious problems with the creep of the ice, Mr Pyke. These experiments will help us understand

PYKE

(interrupts) Creep is a minor problem, really it is.

MACK

You'll not say that if the hull of the Habbakuk collapses under its own weight after three days at sea, killing everyone on board.

PYKE Bah! (high-horsing) In the 'twenties, Mr. Mackenzie, I started a school, to teach children how to THINK LIKE ME! It is a pity for us all that you and your pettifogging Habbakukers were not enrolled there! (he would go on, but is interrupted by MISS PLEENS)

MISS PLEENS (running up in the snow) Mr Pyke! Mr Pyke! They've unpacked your weasel and it's ready to go!

J.D. Oh Geoffrey, not the weasel! We agreed not to bring the weasel.

PYKE (stomping off cheerfully in the snow) Perfect terrain for it, J.D.

MACK What's a weasel? Never mind, I don't want to know!

J.D. Please forgive Pyke, Mr Mackenzie - Mack. He just says what's in his head. It's a virtue in a way.

MACK That man - wearing pyjamas, a raincoat and no socks, even though it is 20 degrees below freezing - is in charge of a project which is tying up most of our best people. (sees something, worried) What in all that's holy is that, J.D?

WE HEAR AN APPROACHING CHUGGING.

J.D. (sighs) It's his weasel. Snow vehicle. He's been developing it for use in Norway. I told him not to bring it.

THE WEASEL CHUGS UP. IT IS A SPLENDID EARLY SNOWMOBILE, ON TANK TREADS, MAKING A SOUND LIKE A CEMENT MIXER CHEWING CHICKEN.

PYKE (from the driving seat) Now I've never actually driven the weasel before, or a car for that matter, but I know the principles. Jump on board, gents! I thought we'd climb the forest paths around Mount Victoria.....

CHIEF ENGINEER SNELSON But I've shown you hardly anything yet!

PYKE

Then we can rejoin the road by the Columbia Icefields. We should be at Lake Patricia in about 9 hours. Miss Pleens...

MISS PLEENS

(long-suffering) Mr Pyke.

PYKE

Keep that notebook handy. I shall be having many new ideas on the way.....

CHUG OF WEASEL IS LOST IN SUDDEN HOWLING WIND. WOLVES HOWLING IN THE WIND. BLEAT OF MOUNTAIN GOATS. LOST IN THE WIND IS A SNATCH OF MUSIC: WE'RE OFF TO SEE THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ. BEAMS OF ICE CREAK, CRACK, LOUDER THAN BEFORE, THREATENINGLY.

16. CABIN AT LAKE PATRICIA, ALBERTA. MARCH 9, 1943. MISS PLEENS TYPING. J.D. ENTERS FAST...

J.D.

(in a flap) Where's Mr Pyke?

MISS PLEENS

(continues typing) He's filling more notebooks down on the Habbakuk. - He hasn't slept since we came to Canada, Mr Bernal, and he's so excitable, as if he's about to have a fit or something - and these new ideas he's got me typing up - well! I....

J.D.

(groans) I'd better go down and tell him right away. Will you come?

17. BANKS OF LAKE PATRICIA. J.D. AND MISS PLEENS WALKING DOWN TO THE LAKE. ONLY A CRUST OF SNOW. PINE NEEDLES SNAP UNDER THEIR FEET. - MOOSE MOOING AT LAKESIDE.

J.D.

Do you know where he got the money from to start his school?

MISS PLEENS

School? - Ooooh, look! - A moose!

J.D.

He was in the City one day and saw stockbrokers walking in and out of their buildings and he thought: "IÕm cleverer than they are. If they can make money with stocks and shares I can make money too". So he applied that incredible mind and six months later he was rich (laughs affectionately) - he controlled one third of the world's supply of tin. He opened his school. That's when I met him. 1926. Of course, the big boys ganged up on him. He went bankrupt. Lost his school. It was the worst day in his life. - Second worst. There's today. (stops in his tracks) - Oh God, look at him standing there on his brainchild! I can't tell him, Miss Pleens!

MISS PLEENS

Tell him what? What's wrong?

J.D.

They've taken him off the project.

18. ON BOARD THE HABBAKUK IN LAKE PATRICIA.
HISS OF AIR FROM COOLING SYSTEM. CRUNCH OF ICE
AS J.D. AND MISS PLEENS COME ABOARD. SLIGHTLY
HOLLOW ACOUSTIC UNDER THE PLANK ROOF.

J.D.

Geoff... Geoff.

PYKE

Not now, J.D. I'm thinking. They've done a very good job with the cooling system. Outside temperature's dropped six degrees in a week and no melt. Except for that problem spot.

J.D. IS ALREADY TALKING THROUGH THIS.

PYKE

But multiply that by 50 for the full size vessel and...

J.D.

(nervous, upset, gives it straight) Geoff, they've taken you off the project. You are no longer Head of the Habbakuk Committee.

PYKE Hm? What? Hm? (hums two bars of LILI MARLENE) I shall speak to Lord Louis, to Churchill!

J.D. There have been messages flying both ways across the Atlantic for days. The Canadians and Americans have demanded. It's been agreed. You're to start back for London tomorrow. I warned and warned you. You rubbed them up the wrong way, Geoff.

PYKE But I haven't met any Americans to rub!

J.D. There was that American general in Winnipeg.

PYKE Oh!

INSERT. GENERAL CARNABY SPEAKS DIRECTLY TO US.

GENERAL CARNABY (fierce) That limey dingbat said to me he did not ADMIRE the military mentality. I told him I do not HAVE a mentality I've got GUTS and NUTS and KNOW-HOW, plenty of all three - FOUR! - cos I've got two nuts! I want him OFF THE PROJECT or the British can stick this crazy icicle scheme up their combined ass.

CONTINUING ABOARD THE HABBAKUK.

PYKE But I can find solutions to every ittybitty hitch in a flash that would take these numbskulls months of sharpening pencils.

J.D. (sadly) I know.

PYKE (calmer, quieter) Who's to be in charge over here, then?

J.D. (very awkwardly) Well, they've asked me.

PYKE Oh, I SEE! You! You, is it? (bitter fury) - Here we have Professor Bernal pictured at the helm of the Habbakuk, his remarkable invention with which he won the Second World War.

J.D. I know you're upset but that's not fair.

PYKE Habbakuk is mine. If it succeeds they will have to listen to my other ideas. (extra fast) - What about in 1940, when I suggested that to escape the air raids we dig living space underground? Most of southern England is made of chalk, I said. Easy to dig chalk. 25,000 men can in six months dig accommodation for one million people at 81 cubic feet per person, as compared to 30 offered by an Anderson shelter. If they had listened then, no one would have died in the blitz. No one!

PYKE STARTS SINGING *LILI MARLENE* AND CONTINUES DOING SO UNTIL THE END OF THE SCENE.

J.D. (deep calm) I'll keep you informed about all progress, figures, everything. You can still be a rudder for the project.

MISS PLEENS And what about all your other ideas, Mr Pyke. You've had some stonkers lately. You can be doing so much other valuable work while Mr Bernal is wasting his time in committee meetings all day.

J.D. (cheerful) That's right! No need to worry, Geoff. The figures are all very promising. - Sailing across the moonlit sea - eh, lad. We'll see them, you and I together. In all their icy majesty.

PYKE (uncomforted, rants) - You will have to convince those committees first. And committees are made up of people who would rather be somewhere else and who only think what people who aren't even there tell them to think, people who can't think, won't think, who have never thought about the matter in hand at all. - Idea. Better people is what we need.

J.D. (ironically) Come the Revolution.

PYKE That is what I shall turn my attentions to after the war is won. Better people. (broken-heartedly) To make Better people. People who think.

19. THE HABBAKUK COMMITTEE SEQUENCE: WE ARE ABOUT TO ZAP FROM ONE MEETING TO ANOTHER DURING 1943.

19A. A GAVEL IS STRUCK TWICE. LILI MARLENE PLAYED THUMPINGLY. CHIEF ENGINEER SNELSON IS ALREADY SPEAKING IN BACKGROUND WHEN THE CANADIAN VOICE ANNOUNCES TO US:

THE CANADIAN VOICE

(voice over) Committee Meeting of the Anglo-American-Canadian Habbakuk Board Of Control, April 21st, 1943, Montreal.

CHIEF ENGINEER SNELSON

(we enter at the end of a long tedious statement)the eutectic solution of potassium chloride and ice forms at -11°C and represents a concentration of 24.6 of potassium chloride in 100g of water. Therefore....

J.D.

(breaking in) Obviously, we need further reports from the Feasibility Study Group before embarking upon the evaluation of the final design.

FLURRY OF VOICES

I am surprised no work is being done on the propulsion system? (insistent) I am still worried about the rate of creep! Costs, that's all that worries me.

IN BACKGROUND, A SINISTER CHOIR CHANTS THE MANTRA: 'HABBAKUK-HABBAKUK-HABBAKUK'

19B. A GAVEL IS STRUCK TWICE. CHATTER OF VOICES. HENS CLUCKING. LILI MARLENE PLAYED FAST.

THE CANADIAN VOICE

(voice over) Committee Meeting of the Anglo-American-Canadian Habbakuk Board Of Control, May 19th, 1943, London, England.

PROFESSOR SOUTHWELL

(begins speaking during THE CANADIAN VOICE) No, no, no, no - it's all very well testing the properties of the material, but that is NOT going to help with the construction of the thing, is it?

PROFESSOR PIPPARD He's right you know!

FLURRY OF ARGUMENTATIVE VOICES. BRING UP
SOUND OF SINISTER CHOIR CHANTING 'HABBAKUK-
HABBAKUK-HABBAKUK' MANTRA.

MACK (storming out) This is the most futile meeting I have ever attended!

19C. BIG BEN CHIMING NOON. LILI MARLENE PLAYED
SLOW AND DISTANT.

THE CANADIAN VOICE (voice over, urgently announces) War Cabinet, 10 Downing Street, London. May 20th, 1943.

CHURCHILL I am anxious to know how our Habbakuk enterprise is progressing.

MOUNTBATTEN I am afraid we have a negative report from the Ministry of Supply 'Habbakuk' Committee.

CHURCHILL Is that the same Habbakuk Committee as the Habbakuk Steerage Committee?

MOUNTBATTEN Erm, no, it's not. They see structural problems which will require a lot more testing. There's been concern that a seven feet thick hull of pykrete will be too heavy. Mr Pyke, who is not on any of the committees, as you know...

CHURCHILL (grunts)

MOUNTBATTEN ...has suggested to them they use a new resin material he's developed. Lighter. They're looking into it.

CHURCHILL They had better get their skates on! History waits not for Habbakuks.

19D. LILI MARLENE PLAYED VERY SLOW AND SICK.
'HABBAKUK-HABBAKUK-HABBAKUK' MANTRA
FASTER, CHIDING.

**THE CANADIAN
VOICE**

(voice over, briskly accounces) Meeting of the Habbakuk Structural Engineering Sub-committee, June 1st, 1943, London, England.

**PROFESSOR
SOUTHWELL**

The estimates for the amount of steel needed in support of the pykrete are different in every report I've seen!

J.D.

(at the end of his tether) If you look at my plans - no, the new plans - there, man! - you'll see that the steel support has been considerably simplified.

PROFESSOR PIPPARD As I see it manoeuvrability's the major problem.

J.D.

No it's bloody not.

PROFESSOR PIPPARD But to attach a rudder the required size, the additional stress...

J.D.

No, no, no, you don't understand....!!!!

ERUPTION OF COMPETING VOICES. CONTINUAL
STRIKE OF GAVEL. SUDDEN FALL OF HUSH...

PYKE

(entering) Gentlemen, I have some notes, ideas I would like to read to the committee.

**PROFESSOR
SOUTHWELL**

How did he get in here? The sergeant was warned about him, after the last time!

PROFESSOR PIPPARD (during PROFESSOR SOUTHWELL above, beginning one sentence later) He's not a member of the committee. (to PYKE) I say, you're not a member of the committee!

PYKE

(shuffling many papers) A few brief ideas which may clarify your perceptions....

**PROFESSOR
SOUTHWELL**

(at the end of his tether) I've seen your brief ideas before. And scant regard do they have for anyone else's contribution to this project. You seem to think problems will go away just by ignoring them, that you can cheat nature with brilliance, well you can't, you just can't!

'HABBAKUK-HABBAKUK-HABBAKUK' MANTRA RISES FOR A MOMENT, LOW IN BACKGROUND. DURING PROFESSOR SOUTHWELL'S SPEECH, J.D. TRIES TO GET RID OF PYKE GENTLY.

J.D.

(up close, as if whispering to us as well as to PYKE) Geoffrey, you shouldn't be here. I've told you. They won't listen to anything you say. Leave this to me. I'm doing my best.

PROFESSOR PIPPARD Shall I buzz for the sergeant?

PYKE

(to J.D., close) But your best is not good enough, J.D., is it? The only ideas these knuckleheads have are more and more useless complicating details to bog the thing down with. They have no ferocity of purpose, J.D. Their contribution is to pervert, not to realise.

DURING PYKE'S SPEECH A BUZZER IS BEING PRESSED IN BACKGROUND. ALREADY WE HEAR THE SOUND OF HEAVY BOOTS APPROACHING.

J.D.

(to PYKE, close) I know. I know. Just leave it with me, boyo.

PYKE

(shuffling papers, announces) One point! Let me read one point! It's crucial....you see. Here...Gentlemen, just a moment of the committee's time, please.

J.D.

Out! Geoff! Get out before they...(hurry to door)

DOOR BURSTS OPEN. THREE SOLDIERS ENTER, RIFLE BOLTS MADE READY.

SERGEANT

Awl right, professors, nobody move! - Got a fifth columnist in, have we? Which one is it?

J.D.

It's all right, sergeant, there's no problem. Science has been one long argument and we are continuing the tradition, 'tis all.

BRING UP 'HABBAKUK-HABBAKUK-HABBAKUK'
MANTRA, MARCHING FEET WIHTIN IT. BAA OF SHEEP.
CRACKLE OF ICE..

19E. BUZZ OF VOICES. *LILI MARLENE SLOW.*
'HABBAKUK-HABBAKUK-HABBAKUK' MANTRA
SLOWER, SLOWER... FADE MANTRA.

**THE CANADIAN
VOICE**

(voice over) Meeting at Combined Operations H.Q., London, May 24th, 1943. Jack Mackenzie, Head of Canadian Research Council, attending.

MACK

(happy and confident) They seem to find more problems every day. But they're all quite minor, really. We're going ahead, as a provisional measure, setting up the plant for pykrete production on site at Corner Brook, Newfoundland.

J.D.

Is there an estimate on production time?

MACK

A year.

J.D.

Not in 1943 at all. Oh, dear!

MACK

But in any case our people, and the Americans agree, are not prepared to commence production at this time. More time for experiment and development is needed before actual construction of the first full sized Habbakuk can be approved.

J.D. But it won't be ready for (lowers voice) the invasion of Europe, which can't be more than a year away, can it? (louder, his passion showing) - That is Habbakuk's proving ground. Providing fighter cover for the invasion and wotnot, hm? If we could just build ONE. Don't you see: it need only last at most a week or two. Then let it melt away.

MACK Habbakuk One, by current estimations, will be completed by September 1944. Habbakuk Two by the Spring of 1945. (FADE) - Of course, it could take longer....

'HABBAKUK-HABBAKUK-HABBAKUK' MANTRA, FAST AND AMUSED THIS TIME.

20. MOUNTBATTEN'S OFFICE. MOUNTBATTEN IS CLEANING OUT HIS DESK. PYKE ENTERS.

THE CANADIAN VOICE (voice over) Lord Louis Mountbatten's Office, Combined Operations H.Q., London. October 2nd, 1943.

MOUNTBATTEN (very cheerful) Ah, Pyke! Hope I haven't dragged you away from anything too brilliant.

PYKE (words tripping out extra fast, defensive) If this is about my memo 'Latrines For Colonels Only' which the numbskulls here are laughing at, I shall defend it to the death! - If we want to hide our weasels in enemy territory - in the mountains of Norway, for instance - while our troops are off on a mission...all we need do is put the weasel in a hut marked 'Latrines For Colonels Only' and the enemy troops will never enter and discover the weasel... because it is against their mentality to disobey an order. Those fools down the corridor are saying it's an idiotic idea but it's brilliant psychology! (stops in his tracks, shocked) - You're cleaning out your desk!

MOUNTBATTEN I'm leaving to-day. I've been made Supreme Allied Commander Far Eastern Theatre.

PYKE Oy, such a promotion! (tougher) - What about Habbakuk?

MOUNTBATTEN (firmly) Nothing to do with me anymore, I'm afraid. - Going a bit slow, isn't it?

PYKE I keep sending memos to the committee. But they take no notice. The seas should have been full of Habbakuks by now. But they never really believed.

MOUNTBATTEN (cheerful) Still, the Americans love your weasel. They've got some in the Far East. If I meet up with one out there I shall kick it and think of you.

PYKE The weasel is a toy. Habbakuk is....

MOUNTBATTEN (firmly but benevolently) I didn't ask you here to talk about Habbakuk, Pyke. (into kingly mode) Rather, I wanted to thank you, officially and personally. You can look with pride on all the work you have done here over the past two years. Your original thoughts have been of utmost value to the war effort.

PYKE (surprised, moved almost to tears) Thank you, sir. (a small thoughtful pause) - But don't think that you chose me for this job. I chose you.

MOUNTBATTEN (caught off-guard) You... chose me?

PYKE I heard how you devised new tactics for playing polo. "That's my man," I said.

MOUNTBATTEN (amused) How very flattering.

PYKE (back to business) - About Habbakuk.....

MOUNTBATTEN (sighs, gentler) Look here, Geoffrey, I've had a word with the chaps at the Admiralty. I think it would be best if you were to move over there from now on. The research department are eager to have your services.

PYKE

The Admiralty. But it's full of knuckleheads!

MOUNTBATTEN

(two notches tougher) You've ruffled too many feathers here. Without me to protect you Combined Ops will take no notice of any idea you put forward. Which could be, of course, disastrous for all of us. - Chin up, man! If and when they do build the bloody Habbakuk it will be the biggest splash of the war, everyone will listen to you then. Your incredible brainbox can help rebuild the world, make a new world when the war is behind us.

PYKE

And if they don't build Habbakuk? What then? Who will listen to me then?

MOUNTBATTEN

(a dimissal) Goodbye, Pyke. Good luck.

PYKE

(emotionally) Thankyou, sir. Bon voyage.

21. PYKE, IN THE DARK, EATING BROKEN BISCUITS, SPEAKS DIRECTLY TO US. THE BATTLE HE DESCRIBES SLOWLY COMES ALIVE AROUND HIM.

PYKE

(a calmer, more reflective PYKE) In my original memo on Habbakuk I suggest an attack by three bergships on the Italian port of Naples, with Vesuvius as a backdrop.

BRING SLOWLY UP IN DISTANCE, DURING SPEECH, GETTING CLOSER: A NEAPOLITAN SINGER SINGS O SOLE MIO. CRACKLING FREEZE OF SUPERCOOLED WATER. BOMBING OF NAPLES. RAT-TAT-TATTING OF AIRCRAFT GUNS. SPLASH OF THE WAKE OF A HABBAKUK. SOUNDS OF THE IMAGINARY BATTLE. BAGPIPER GOING ASHORE. TRUNDLE OF WEASELS. DIRECT HIT ON NEAPOLITAN SINGER.

First we soften up the city's defences with our aircraft, launched from our ice-hangars on board. Then the bergships move slowly in, ramming enemy vessels in the harbour, hosing them down with supercooled water which freezes everything it touches, but whose real intent is to make a bridge of solid ice from bergship to quay. We then send out the weasels over the bridge, dragging blocks of pykrete which are placed in a ring around the city, an ice fort of about six miles in length. Ice fortresses are installed as further fortifications, and all rooftops are hosed with supercooled water making them too slippery for snipers to run across.

- With the help of bergships we could have bridgeheads in every major Italian port within a few weeks. It is beautiful because it contains so many ideas, suggested by each other, all working together.

Of course, it will never happen. They won't do it. That's the military mentality, you see. They only ever want to do what has been done before. I tried the other day to teach a General how to think.

22. COMBINED OPERATIONS CANTEEN. SUMMER 1943.
BUZZ OF VOICES IN CANTEEN. CLINK OF CUTLERY
AND PLATES. PYKE IS CALMLY TALKING TO A
GENERAL - THE SAME OLD BUFFER WE MET HAVING
TEA AT THE ADMIRALTY IN SCENE 8. THE GENERAL
EATS DURING THE LECTURE.....

PYKE

Be purposeful. Be intense. Have 'Ferocity of Purpose'.

GENERAL

Ferocity of Purpose, gottit, yes. Does your beard HAVE to waggle at me like that?

PYKE

Know your problem. Have no preconceived ideas about its solution. Approach your problem from the widest possible base. Taking nothing for granted. Forget every idea and opinion you ever had. Begin the world anew with every thought. Then don't think at all, hm. Wait.....Wait.

GENERAL

(waiting) I'm waiting, yes.

PYKE Wait for perhaps for no time at all. But if you are doing it properly, it will come.

GENERAL What will?

PYKE Have darkness in your mind and the right solution will come like a bird flying across that darkness and it will be clear unprejudiced thought that comes. A new idea.

GENERAL (chortles) Will I be able to think up rollicking good stuff like yours, Mr Pyke? - 'Latrines for Colonels Only' - that was your best, I think, eh? (laughs) But that good ship lollipop, Habbakuk nonsense - by jingo you've had them going on that one! (laughs himself silly).

23. OFFICE OF C.D. HOWE, OTTAWA.

THE CANADIAN VOICE (voice over) Office of C.D. Howe, Canadian Minister of Munitions. January 12th, 1944.

HOWE Well, Mack, how do we stand with Habbakuk? I sat up all last night puzzling through your reports. Can it really be built?

MACK I think we are at a stage now where we can definitely say there is no technical impediment to building the Habbakuk. But, the costs, as I have indicated are three times the original British estimates. Mainly because of the greater steel support the structure needs.

HOWE So the costs aren't that much less than a conventional carrier?

MACK No. (laughs) Its displacement is 2,200,000 tons - 26 times that of the 'Queen Elizabeth'. No-one has ever understood the magnitude of this project.

HOWE

In which case it is not something that Canada can suffer alone. I shall speak to the Americans. If they will come in on this quickly, we can start production. Hell, if we can really do it, won't it be a thing to see. Most incredible achievement of the war. And Canadian.

24. CHURCHILL'S BUNKER. LATE NIGHT. STILLNESS. CLOCK TICKS. DISTANT CLANG OF FIRE ENGINE. THE 'HABBAKUK-HABBAKUK-HABBAKUK' MANTRA IS HEARD - FLOATING BRIEFLY ON THE WIND. CHURCHILL PUFFS HIS CIGAR. A SNIDE OFFICIAL HANDS OVER PAPERS.

THE CANADIAN VOICE

(voice over, not so brisk, ominously depressed) Downing Street, London. February 3rd, 1944.

SNIDE OFFICIAL

Communications from Washington and Ottawa re. the Habbakuk project, Prime Minister. Looks like the Americans won't play.

CHURCHILL

Oh, yes. (takes papers, flicks through them, grunting angrily, then sadly, puffing cigar) I thought we were just going to slice a bit off the North Pole and paddle it up the Channel. All these cold-hearted figures! And what's creep? (with resolve) Well, we can win the war without Habbakuk.

SNIDE OFFICIAL

It was always rather a far-fetched idea, wasn't it, sir?

CHURCHILL

Was it?

SNIDE OFFICIAL

(a snide smile in his voice) Everybody thought so. Too imaginative.

CHURCHILL

(grunts)

SNIDE OFFICIAL

Any determination on the matter, sir?

CHURCHILL

(low and grim) Yesssss. (with pugnacious resolution)
Habbakuk's a dead duck. (puffs on his cigar) - Kill the project.

HE THROWS DOWN THE PAPERS.

SNIDE OFFICIAL

(seems very pleased indeed) Oh, yes, sir!

GUNSHOT. A DUCK QUACKS MORTALLY WOUNDED.

25. BEATTY AND BUCK, TALKING TO US. LAP OF
LAKEWATER. DUCKS TAKING OFF.

BEATTY

Yeah, we knew the project was in trouble.

BUCK

We guessed.

BEATTY

But the war was so far away from Lake Patricia. We felt that our life there would go on forever. In abeyance.

BUCK

Abeyance. Good word.

BEATTY

What a beautiful summer that was. So, so hot and muggy.
Hottest on record.

BUCK

But the little model Habbakuk didn't melt one bit, did she.

BEATTY

She did not! No! No melt! No! - Apart from that little problem spot. - She just sat calm and cool by the lake and we breathed the mountain air, helped take the readings, talked a whole lot, and grew up a little. Then, when the plug was pulled, in spring of '44, we launched her.

BRING IN WHALE SONG, DISCREETLY, KEEP LOW.

BUCK

Pushed her out with poles. Right out into middle of the lake.
Beautiful. Floating there. Like a bird with nothing to do.

BEATTY I'll bet she took all summer to turn to water. While those other boys were dying on the Normandy beaches, huh. - But we were gone.

BUCK Gone.

BEATTY So nobody saw. That moose, maybe.

BUCK Moose, yeah.

26. SAVOY GRILL, LONDON. 1948. SNATCH OF MAD DOGS AND ENGLISHMEN. LOTS OF COUGHING FROM CUSTOMERS. DISTANT LAUGHTER.

GENERAL (delighted) Admiral! Admiral! - Jervis, you blind fool, it's me!

ADMIRAL (equally delighted) Fergus, old bean, positively my favourite general! Ha! Ha! (wishing to sit at his table) May I? - They'll bring my mixed grill over here, will they? (calls) I'm over here now.

HE SITS DOWN AT THE GENERAL'S TABLE.

GENERAL Haven't seen you since the war! How's Wiltshire?

ADMIRAL Shropshire. Deadly dull. - Do you know who I heard on the wireless last night? The Ozzard of Whizz.

GENERAL Pyke! Damn him! Tried to teach me how to think once. Never recovered.

ADMIRAL They had him giving a talk. Absolute tosh! "Ordinary common sense thinking is NEVER superior!" he says. And what was it: "The more receptive a community is to originality, the more it benefits." TOSH!

GENERAL What's he up to these days, apart from talking tosh on the wireless?

ADMIRAL Apparently, he's some sort of advisor to this new National Health service lark they're starting up.

GENERAL (snide) Oh, good - He'll find the civil servants even less friendly to his way of thinking than we were.

ADMIRAL (laughs in delight) I'll bet they bin every memo he sends them. - Next week he's giving a talk called 'The Desire For Health'. Some balderdash plan he's got for saving the world from itself.

GENERAL Drop the bomb and be done with it, I say. Start all over again.

ADMIRAL (playfully) Written your memoirs?

GENERAL (doomladenly) Yes.

ADMIRAL Me too. Deadly dull. Couldn't think of a thing to say. - Ah, my mixed grill!

27. PYKE'S POST-WAR FLAT, STEELE'S ROAD, LONDON. PYKE HUMMING *LILI MARLENE* JAUNTILY, HUNTS THROUGH MEDICINE CUPBOARD, SHAKING BOTTLES. HE TAKES A BOTTLE IN HIS FIST. WE HEAR PILLS RATTLE.

PYKE Ah, found you! Nasty little devils!

THE CANADIAN VOICE (voice over) Steele's Road, Hampstead. February 21st, 1948. Geoffrey Pyke's last day on earth.

LOW IN BACKGROUND A CANTOR SINGS.

PYKE

(while swallowing pills, his voice emotionally cracked and erratic, he is writing fast) Ha! Idea for talk on the wireless! Waste! Ours has been a civilisation which only worked if there was waste. Today bad manners to new ideas, to new suggestions, are (fierce) SABOTAGE! - as they were in war....a PUBLIC OFFENCE against the possibility of better food....

LOW IN BACKGROUND WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ BRIEFLY FLOATS BY. CANTOR CONTINUES SINGING. A LARGE WINGBEAT OF A HUGE BIRD COMES CLOSER.

....better housing, more fun, more expansion of the personality, an offence against the possibility of better people....(suddenly weak) - Bad manners to new ideas is the only immortal sin.

MARY PYKE

(inside his head) Geoffrey, what is it you keep writing in those horrid little notebooks?

PYKE

(drowsily) Ideas, Mother. (to himself) If they had built the Habbakuk, then they would have listened. They would, I know.

FOR A MOMENT FAR AWAY WE HEAR A JEWISH FIDDLER.

**THE PROPHET
HABAKKUK
HIMSELF**

(inside PYKE'S head) Tis I, my boy, the Prophet Habakkuk. What doest thou with thyself? Why so despairing when thou hast worked a work in thy days, which none will believe, though it be told them.

PYKE

(very drowsy) Go away! I'm thinking! - IDEA! Ha! Yes, that's it! It's the idea I've been looking for! - Just got time to get it down.... (giggles bitterly)

**THE PROPHET
HABAKKUK
HIMSELF**

(fading away) There is no failure. Only folly.

A TAP DRIPS ANNOYINGLY. SCRATCHY WRITING FROM PYKE, A WHINE, A GIGGLE. SILENCE. A FINAL DRIP FROM THE TAP.

PYKE

(with a final breath) Hhhhabaaakukkk....

28. MISS PLEENS READS A LETTER, WITHOUT ANY GREAT EMOTION, AS IF SHE'S CHECKING IT OVER FOR THE UMPTEENTH TIME. SHE CLEARS HER THROAT AND RATTLES THROUGH IT.....

MISS PLEENS

To Lord Mountbatten, Viceroy of India, New Delhi.....

Dear Sir,

I am sorry to tell you, if you have not already been informed, that Geoffrey Pyke committed suicide on February 21st last. He shaved off his beard and took a bottle of pills. It was the only unoriginal thing he ever did.

One of his final letters was to you. I enclose it here. You will not be able to read anything other than your name, the word HABBAKUK, and the figure 19,910 - which I think refers to the number of days he had been alive. Because Mr Pyke continued writing for several hours while the barbiturates poisoned his system everything he wrote is illegible. He also wrote to his family. I never knew he had one, did you? He had a wife and son. In a letter to Mr Bernal he wrote the essence of his new idea, a very important one, apparently, which had occupied his mind during this last year. It could, I suppose, have had a major impact on us all. But apart from a few words this letter also cannot be read. (a smile in her voice) When the police found Mr Pyke lying in his flat, they could not work out why all the furniture was on the ceiling.

Yours faithfully,

Pamela... (she hesitates before adding) ...Pleens.

29. PYKE AND J.D. HURRYING THROUGH PICCADILLY CROWDS. AUGUST 11, 1943. 6.25 P.M. PEEP OF TRAFFIC. NOISE OF CROWD.

PYKE

(jauntily) My dream, J.D., all day I've been meaning to tell you about it.

J.D. (his usual almost dour self) I thought you only dreamed about algebra. I know I do.

PYKE

I was wearing a pair of polka-dot pyjamas, squatting on a fogbound iceberg like a lost penguin...when ah-ha, I realised it wasn't an iceberg! I was on the deck of a Habbakuk. Then the sun burned the fog away and I saw that the sea was covered with an array of Habbakuks, a thousand Habbakuks, shiny and minty green on the black ocean...and there was a me on the deck of every one, scribbling away in a notebook. The sun filled half the sky. It was getting hotter and hotter! The Habbakuks were all melting fast - me too, all the mees were melting like snowmen! I knew we would never reach our destination. The war was lost. (all-knowingly crafty) - But then I had an idea.

J.D.

So what did you do? What was it? The idea?

THEY WALK AWAY FROM US INTO THE CHATTERING CROWDS. THE 'HABBAKUK-HABBAKUK-HABBAKUK' MANTRA IS IN THERE SOMEWHERE. PEEPING OF TRAFFIC, VOICES. WHALE SONG. SUDDEN CRACKLE OF ICE. PLAY OUT WITH ROD STEWART SINGING SAILING, BUT DIETRICH SINGING LILI MARLENE EVENTUALLY ELBOWS HIM OUT.

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