

The Thing in the Ice

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Players: 1-5



Setting: Call of Cthulhu

Time: 7th January 1808

Suggested background music:

OST from S1 of “The Terror” TV series

Synopsis:

A British exploration vessel, engaged in exploring the Antarctic in 1808, makes a remarkable discovery next to a small ice-filled island - a strange French ship. Upon initial observation, it becomes evident that its entire crew has met an unfortunate demise, seemingly while engaged in excavating the ice and partaking in ritualistic activity. The focus of their excavation appears to be something concealed within the ice - a frozen creature of unknown origin.

If you are thinking of playing this short story, DO NOT read any further! Give it to your Keeper/DM/GM (along with some snacks).

Goal:

The players need to figure out the weakness of the dangerous creature that killed the French ship's crew before it finds them and kills them too.

Background:

This French ship, named "Le Neptune," belongs to the division "L'unite d'investigation scientifique de Napoléon," Napoleon's scientific investigation unit, it has a mission to explore the supernatural, holy, and magical phenomena's existing in this world.

Earlier, the French had obtained an item from some Dutch traders which was unbeknown to them a fragment of a larger alien vessel. When activated it acted as a homing beacon, directing their path towards the larger vessel which was buried in the ice on an island close to Antarctica.

The French ship found the island but didn't see the alien ship itself.
(Although they cannot see the vessel itself, it is hinted at being in there as a shadow deep in the ice)



They did however see two creatures frozen inside the ice wall right next to the alien ship. It contained two highly dangerous alien creatures/monsters that managed to break free when it crashed there but were frozen in the ice in their attempt to escape.

At this point they decide to excavate one of the creatures, resulting in the slaughter of the entire crew, as the creatures are still alive and extremely hard to kill unless you know their weakness.

These investigating French explorers have acquired a lot of strange equipment and items/artefacts over the years, and they have experienced a lot of unique situations. So, they did not go into this situation blindly and unprepared. However, the Thing in the ice was not something they had any

idea how to control. They used both conventional weapons as well as “blessed” weapons and rituals to bind it. The French dug out a block of ice with the creature still contained within. Then prepared weapons and a demon binding ritual consisting of a salt circle and symbols around the ice block. None of them worked as the creature proved too strong and the fact that it is not a demon, it is an alien. The creature was awake during all of this and only faked being “out of it” until it saw its chance to strike at its would-be captors. A rather one-sided slaughter ensued.



Some of the French ran downstairs and turned a cannon towards the stairs leading up, resulting in a cannon hole going outwards to the view of the players. A couple others tried their luck escaping in the small boats only to either get caught before entering the water or realizing the creature got one hell of a jump (possible placement of the creature during gameplay). Only one man has survived until the players arrive and that is the ship cook, but we will get to that later.

Solution:

The truth is much simpler than silver bullets, iron/steel swords and holy rituals. The thing/aliens in the ice does not like salt. Their carapace melts/dissolves at the touch of salt and hurts it.

The goal of the players is to figure out this through the clues on the ship. At the climax of the story, they will encounter and fight the released alien. They will have little to no chance of defeating it without salt in some form. The clues might be hard to pick up on, as it is hidden in between a lot of other red herrings. But if they investigate and realize that all the red herrings are things the French already tried and failed to implement, they will realize it is logical.

There are two clues indicating that salt is the solution.

- 1)** The first is the ritual salt circle on the deck of the French ship, showing that the broken circle has a weird looking fluid in a trail out of it. The creature stepped in it during the start of the fight and damaged its foot. (This is shown in Handout 2)
- 2)** The second clue is the fact that the ships cook is still alive (although in a coma and dying without a chance of salvation) behind a couple of barrels of salt in the “ships kitchen”. He was trying to hide behind the barrels, resulting in their destruction, spilling salt over the floor. The creature did of course not want to step in it again and decided to use its acidic ranged attack (which it rarely uses due to limitations) on the chef. The players will find him dying of severe acid burns on his body. (If you want to decrease the difficulty, you can also add more of the alien’s blood here, although I don’t use that clue myself)

All the other stuff the players find on the ship is meant to give false hope in magical bullets, spells and alchemical concoctions. It had already been tried by the French, and it shows. Nothing else works.

Start of the story from the player's side:

The players find themselves aboard the British scouting vessel "HMS Explorer," a well-equipped ship exploring the fringes of Antarctica. Under the command of Captain Gibson, the crew remains cautious upon sighting the strange French ship nearby. Captain Gibson decides to keep "HMS Explorer" at a safe distance while dispatching two smaller boats to investigate the situation and ascertain whether it's a potential trap. One of these boats is filled up by the players. The other boat is crewed by NPCs, an important detail that will trigger specific events, as they include the only member who can speak and read French. The island in question is "U" shaped, creating a bay-like opening (Give the players Handout 1). Nestled within the bottom of this "U" shape lies the French vessel "Le Neptune." Enclosed by treacherous ice formations,



considerable height, and unstable terrain makes direct access to the island nearly impossible. Captain Gibson employs both boats to "flank" the French ship.

Story begins when the players row toward the ship inside the bay. The players have with them flags used to signal ships from a distance, so have in mind that they can only relay basic information back to the ship when at a distance.

On the way over there you can give one of the more observant players a small note saying that they see a large shape swimming beneath the boat towards their own ship. (This is just a leopard seal but will make for great atmosphere and start a bit of the paranoia) If they make a big deal about it, Captain Gibson will get pissed and order them to continue. It will also undermine how serious he will take further "ideas" and "theories" from the players, as he will view them as just cowards/scared. (In his mind the threat here is the French, not local wildlife). As the players draw closer to the French ship, they observe a cannon hole, seemingly originating from within the vessel, blasted through its side towards the rear.

The water surrounding the ship holds the grim sight of several shredded and lifeless bodies. Moreover, one of the smaller boats lies broken and tangled in ropes along the ship's edge. If asked about other small boats, you can tell them that there seems to be one missing. (Possible hiding spot for the thing in the ice).

Tell the players it looks like a battlefield with people dead everywhere, mostly centered around the circle of salt in the middle. The salt circle seems to have symbols written around it. Ice is also spread around on deck, extra on the far side because the ship is grinding with the waves against the icy wall of the island.
The most striking features here is the creature frozen in the ice and a strange metal device slowly melting the ice just beneath it.
(This is the smaller fragment of the alien ship acting as a beacon)

While NPC crew members climb aboard from the ship's backside, the players must ascend using ropes on the ship's side, granting them the view depicted in "Handout 2." (Give the players this now).

The creature is sentient and awaits its turn to get out (like the first one did). If someone studies the creature closely through the ice, give them a small note telling them that they could swear the creature's eyes opened slightly to regard them quickly before closing them again. (This happens so fast that it will seem like a "did that really happen?" thing) If anyone should start digging it out, the other NPC's will object wildly and tell them to focus on their job of investigating the ship instead. If they do dig it out, it will attack them immediately after being freed enough to start moving. (See stats at the end of the PDF).

As for the homing beacon, it is hot to the touch, but not hot enough to burn yourself on it. (Actually, pleasantly hot in the freezing Artic) It clings to the ice slightly below the creature and is slowly melting the ice digging a hole. The hole is not very deep so it must have started melting the ice very recently. If grabbed and manipulated ask for a (hard) mechanical check to be able to disable it. It can likewise be activated again. If ignored, the heat will grow over time and its magnetic pull increase. The already released creature will be relevant long before the beacon reaches its destination inside of the ice. If the players investigate closer on where it is going, they can see that it is melting ice beneath the monster, trying to reach something deep beneath it in the ice. You can have the beacon become so hot later, that it first melts through ropes if the players tie it down, and even being able to melt through chains after that. It can also put the ship on fire if they pull it down below deck without de-activating it. This will create a sense of urgency, masking the true important clue that is the salt. (It can also make for a very cool and dramatic climax during the fight against the thing in the ice)



The dead people on the boat all have the same kinds of wounds as the dead in the water except for the cook. They are all ripped and slashed to pieces as if mangled by a big animal/monster not unlike what you can see on the creature still in the ice. Most of the people here died with weapons in hand, both swords and black powder guns. If studied closely, some of the

weapons contain silver edges/bullets as well as strange engravings. Feel free to add extra items/weapons as you feel fit. As long as said items/weapons are not effective against the creature. Let the players loot as much as they want to. There is plenty to go around.

One of the dead people next to the salt circle is a man of higher rank, and on his body, they find an ornate important looking book. On this man and down in the captains quarter they find the name of their division: "L'unite d'investigation scientifique de Napoléon," (Napoleon's scientific investigation unit). The book conveys, in a mix of Latin, French, and English, different kinds of rituals and spells. The ritual with the salt circle and its symbols is designed to bind demons and other foul beasts of the earth. (Let one of the silent players have the ability to read/speak Latin) This is actually a clue on how to NOT defeat the thing in the ice. This ritual had no effect on an alien lifeform and will continue to not have an affect whether done anew or repaired. (Remember the ritual says demons and foul beasts of the earth, and this is an alien).

The big clue here will be the alien's blood leading away from the broken part of the salt circle. It seems to be boiling around the salt area as if still reacting to it. If touched by a player, it will be very sticky and start to burn the affected skin after about half a minute, as if reacting to a weakened acid. Its odor is very strong. If they use a lot of time investigating the upper deck the other NPC's that joined them will go down below to see what the inside of the ship holds. By now, the players might be very scared of the creature in the ice, or on to the fact that another one might be nearby. The island itself is open for all to view and shows no hint of having anything living on it. Down below we have 3 important clues/situations that will help the players understand what they need to do or cannot, as well as give some false hope.

1. **Down the first stairs:** First, we have the cannon pointing towards the stairs when they first enter down below deck. This cannon is surrounded by a couple of dead French sailors and shows that even a cannon cannot hurt whatever did this. They were willing to blow a cannon inside of the ship to try and save themselves.

At this point I usually suggest from the NPC's side that they can check one side of the ship, while the players check the other side. They feel confident that this is not a trap, and that they can investigate faster for their Captain if they split up. If the players agree, the NPC's check the kitchen, finding the cook still alive at a convenient point in the story. If the players refuse to split, I still try to send them towards the kitchen first, making them find the most important clue in the salt first.

2. **Kitchen:** In the kitchen they find the cook in a coma, still breathing but clearly dying. He is lying in a mound of salt and flour. His wounds are not like the rest of the crew, rather he seems to have been wounded by some kind of acid. The flesh on his face, neck and chest is burned to the bone. Also, the front of his arms is burned as well, as if trying to block whatever struck him. (If you want to play this one-shot on "easy mode", you can add in a clue saying that there are some of the same strange acidic liquid at edge of the salt and flour mound here. Same as on the edge of the salt circle above deck).

3. **Captains Quarters:**

This room has a lot of curiosities and items as well as a journal of their current affairs. The captain of this ship is dead in this room, slashed down from behind as if he was trying to reach for his desk. He has a very ornate golden musket in his hand that is unloaded. A chest on the main desk here has a container with 18 different musket bullets. Five different bullet types of various materials engraved with runes. They appear to be of silver, gold, some kind of starry metal and two types of wood (One



dark and one lighter in color). They are all engraved with unknown symbols. There are 4 of each of the special bullets, but they can see two bullets are missing. One from silver and one from gold. None of these will work, so it does not matter what has been used or not. This is to give the players a false solution/option. Feel free to let the players find other strange items/potions here if you want to, but keep in mind that none of it should work unless they first strike the creature with salt.

The Captains journal in this room is what confirms that there are indeed two creatures and that one of them is missing at this moment. This is where the NPC who reads French is important. He will read to the players the log of their travels. Read to them “Handout 3”. Try and have the players locate and investigate all the clues before the NPC is done reading/translating. The revelation of there being two creatures sparks the story's thrilling finale.

The creature is either:

- Inside the missing small boat (Now floating outside of the island closing into view of the big English ship)
- Clinging to the outside of the hidden side of the French ship
- Or hiding some clever place on the island. Whatever fits the situation for it to arrive in the most dramatic manner for the players.

At this point, it becomes unmistakably evident that two creatures are involved, and the current creature trapped in the ice is not responsible for all the events that have transpired. As the players' actions thus far have shaped the course of events, several potential options are possible. And in my opinion and experience playing it with several parties the first option offers the most action, excitement.

- The captain of the main British ship decides to inspect a small missing boat now visible and vulnerable in the open sea, considering it no threat to the heavily armed vessel. The creature sought refuge inside the boat after slaughtering its crew, using it as a shield against the salt-drenched waves. The players will observe as Thing in the ice

jumps onto their own ship, weapons firing relentlessly in a futile attempt to kill the creature, just as the French had failed before. The players watch helplessly as their ship loses control and turns toward them, granting them a brief window of 10-15 minutes before the creature can re-enter the French ship. (This gives the players time to prepare whatever they feel is needed to fight it).

- Alternatively, if the players have exhibited extreme caution, signaling their main ship to stay away from all potential threats, including the small missing boat, the creature might finally emerge on the ship where the players are stationed. Realizing that the other boat won't be approaching (since the creature wants it to come closer), it is forced to reveal itself on the players' ship.
- In case the players have conducted a thorough search of the ship and warned their own crew about the small boat's potential danger, you have the flexibility to introduce another suitable outcome. For instance, the creature might have been hiding in a crevice on the island, only now making itself known. Alternatively, the captain of the British ship could dismiss the players' warning and deem it safe to check the small boat, thereby leading to the result described in the first option.

Regardless of the approach chosen, the resolution will ultimately rest in the hands of the players, and the decisive factor will be their decision on whether to employ salt to combat the creature.

Here are the alternatives available to defeat the creature:

- They can hit the creature with salt from the barrels stored below deck. This will remove its protective carapace, making it vulnerable to conventional weapons. Depending on their approach, it could be easy or hard – they could create an explosion by blowing up a barrel of salt next to gunpowder, damaging the creature in the process. Alternatively, if they simply throw the salt at the creature, it will be harder, as the creature is swift and lethal.
- Another option is to push the creature into the ocean, where it will lose its armor and suffer ongoing damage. Struggling in the water, it will also lose its ability to dodge attacks.
- They can also choose to release the second creature. Although this may seem unwise, these creatures are enemies and will attack each other, recognizing nothing else as threats. After the battle, the surviving creature will be severely injured, making it possible to defeat it, even without salt. However, using salt at the end of the battle should make it very easy.

Creature stats:

- 40 HP/wounds
- 15 dmg soak and immune to critical strikes unless hit with salt.
- 40% chance to dodge melee attacks. (Shooting can't be dodged)
Lower this to 20% if hit with salt.
- 75% hit chance with claws/tail/bite
Lower this to 40% if hit with salt.
- 2d10+5 dmg, lower to 1d10+3 if hit with salt

High movement, great climber and able to leap very far.

Player stats:

- 15 hp
- 20% melee dodge chance
- 40% chance to hit with ranged, 50% with melee.

Give players a set amount of re-rolls for the one-shot based on the amount of players;

- 1-2 = 3 re-rolls
- 3 = 2 re-rolls
- 4-5 = 1 re-roll

You can adjust all of these numbers based on how difficult you want it to be. The main objective is to figure out that the salt is the solution, and to make it exciting. So if they figure it out in good time, give them the necessary bonuses.

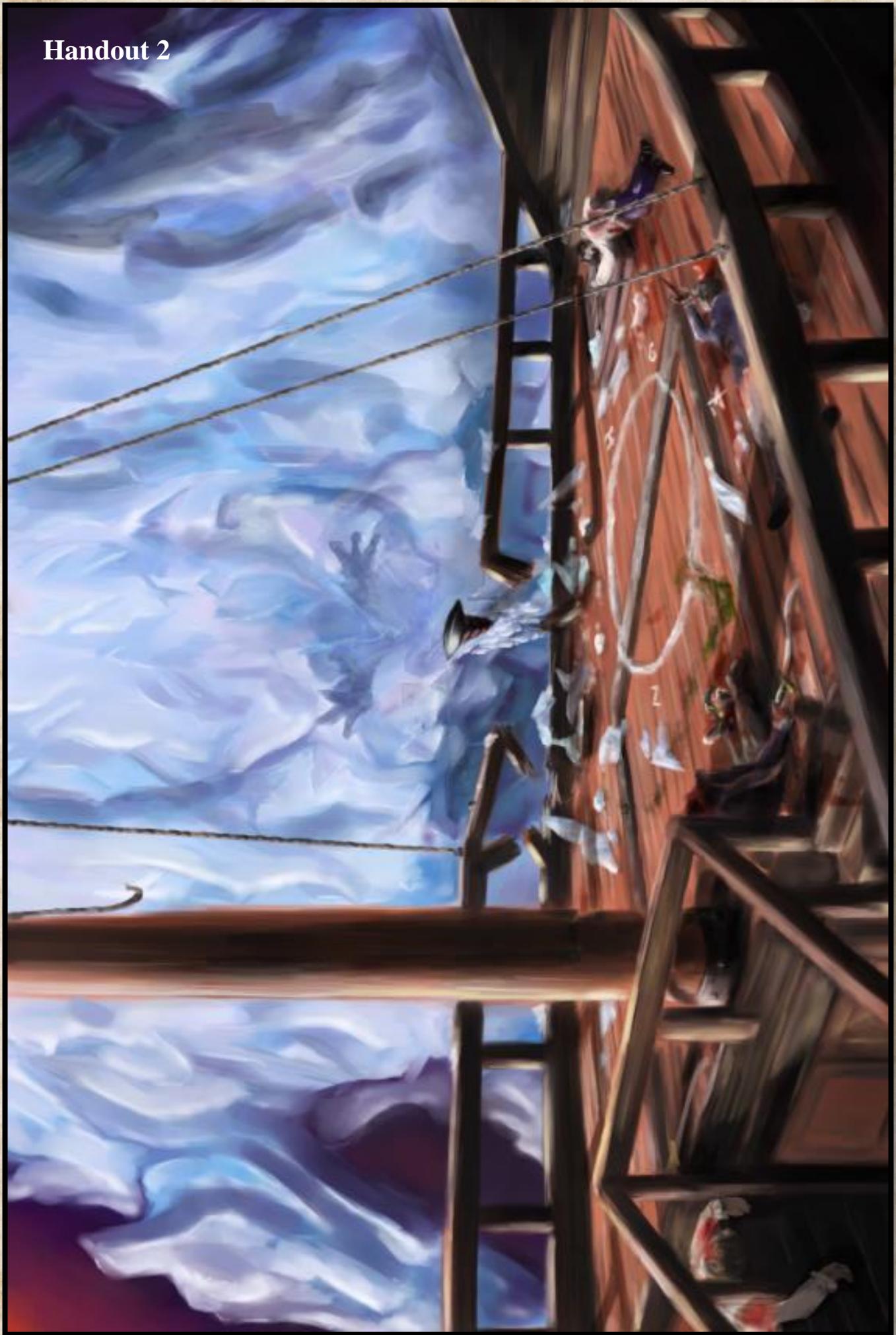
Weapons dmg:

- Melee weapon (Sword/spear etc) = 1d10+3 dmg
- Handgun: 1d10+5 dmg (1 round reload)
- Musket: 2d10+1 dmg (2 round reload and longer range than handgun)
- Cannon: 3d10+10 dmg (3 round reload and impossible to aim after a moving target, so only usable for a general/specific spot).

Handout 1



Handout 2



Handout 3

It was undeniably one of the most peculiar items I had ever encountered. The Dutch trader from whom we acquired it shared an astonishing tale with us. During their journey around the southern edge of Africa, they bore witness to a breathtaking spectacle - fiery bursts in the sky, followed by a shower of shooting stars that did not fade away in the heavens but descended to Earth, leaving trails of fire. Their log and initial accounts recounted their close proximity to one of these "fiery shooting stars" landing sites, but regrettably, they did not pursue further investigations aside of from this piece.

This artefact possesses multiple manipulation possibilities, though many of its workings remain unknown to us. Its initial response was to function as a sort of "compass," guiding us southward. We chose not to make further adjustments, hoping it would lead us to more related pieces. Obtaining permission to follow its lead was not a challenge.

Upon arrival, we were astounded to discover this small island and its frozen contents. A true marvel! The artefact appears drawn to something deeply buried within the ice, seemingly yearning to move towards it on its own.

To ensure the utmost safety, we must spare no expense in securing this extraordinary find. For we are uncertain if these new discoveries pose any potential dangers. All the weapons known to hurt the supernatural are given out, as well as holy and magical rituals to contain it. My scientific mind sings in anticipation as we now start on the excavation of the first of the two creatures!