

WAGOLL - Journey...

Our journey across the frozen wasteland had begun several hours earlier, just as the sun was rising. Now, we were traipsing, seemingly endlessly, over the Great Ice Shelf. On all sides, the gently undulating ground stretched into the distance; on the horizon, a range of mountains could be faintly seen reaching into the air like the fingers of a giant holding the ice shelf aloft.

We walked in a chain, separated by several feet but connected by a length of thick climbing rope: the ground underfoot could crumple at any moment. As we walked, slowly narrowing the distance between us and our destination, the clouds began to roll slowly in. Within a matter of minutes, the blue palette of sky was sketched over, replaced by one ominous shade of grey.

“Do you reckon we’ll make it in time?” behind me, Lucy, my mentor and guide, spoke fearfully: the clouds were beginning to darken in the distance and that darkness was getting closer.

“We need to speed up!” the booming voice of the group leader resounded across the expanse and I felt an instant haste.

For several minutes, the pace doubled and we hurried onwards. Above, the sky continued to darken.

“We’re not far now,” I gasped, my breath coming in thick bursts of mist in front of my face. Ahead of us, the edge of the ice shelf could be seen, falling away into a sparse, rocky canyon.

When we were about five hundred metres away, the heavens opened and the full onslaught descended: wind howled furiously from behind us, propelling us forward but reducing our ability to balance; hailstones the size of tennis

balls plummeted; thunder roared all around; lightning struck incessantly.

We were so close now. Close to the relative safety of the canyon. I felt a hailstone strike my left shoulder and I stumbled awkwardly, only just regaining my footing. The frequency of precipitation was now increasing. We didn't have long left.

Four hundred metres...three hundred metres...one hundred and fifty...fifty...

As my feet felt the firm ground of the canyon, the storm's rage seemed to ease and we were led into the depths of the nearest crevice. Safety.

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Several hours later, once the storm had unleashed its might, we crept carefully out into the fading light of the dusk. We walked for a further hour or so when we were finally greeted by the comforting facade of our destination. Its grand turrets stretched proudly into the sky; its mighty walls stood resolutely in the barren landscape.

We had reached the castle of the Ice Kings, the last refuge in the North. Now, the true challenge was to begin...