Somewhere in the White Void

By Nathan Hopp

 Dressed head to toe in layers of a thermal coat, I revved my snowmobile’s engine. It purred to life. I shielded my vision from the intense snowfall until it faded with the sunlight. Speeding out into the cold, lifeless environment, I spotted the excavation site two kilometers away in what used to be London, Great Britain.

 “Armstrong,” my coworker, a cougar in ever sense of the word named Covell, spoke. “I need you to be careful, like always. Follow the beacon and report back.”

 “Yessir,” I nodded.

 My fingers grasped the throttle again. I glanced in my rearview mirror to see the outpost’s hangar doors close themselves before disappearing into the winter fog. Meanwhile, the howling winds barely allowed me to hear my commlink.

 However, I remembered my orders: search Site #9 and report back with any items.

 A sudden gust of nasty frost covered the visors on my arctic mask. Annoyed, I wiped them and twisted the throttle, cautious of my speed. The frozen landscape was untamed and unchecked for thousands of years, while the city underneath existed even longer than the ice. The glaciers had slowed down in this region, allowing for more expeditions than previously planned. I could imagine the buildings, now carcasses of twisted steel and pillars, remain abandoned as skeletons below. Now forgotten by their builder’s descendants.

 Save for a determined few. ‘Project Atlantis’, though not the most original of names, revolved around mankind’s surviving efforts to catalogue the Northern Hemisphere’s historical sites. If they still lasted through Mother Nature’s wrath.

 “*Beacon within eight-hundred meters…*”

 The diamond-like ice under my snowmobile had to be over three times as thick, but a miracle occurred several days prior. An unexplored glacial cave was discovered by an explorer drone. Essentially, an air pocket as wide as several city blocks had formed beneath us, while both satellites and historic records indicated three locations of interests could still be intact for excavation. Luckily for me, our only exploration drones needed repairs, and they needed a volunteer to traverse the cavern on foot.

 After some time, I finally arrived at the checkpoint.

 Parking the vehicle, I stepped towards the tunnel freshly carved through the ice. My grip on the zipline tightened while plunging into the glacier’s depths. Part of me feared a cave-in, but that wasn’t from any human instincts I held. Several minutes later however, and my journey downward finally slowed to a steady halt.

 The sight alone took my breath away.

 Monoliths of metal ascended like spires, some leaning or demolished from centuries of rust, while bricks and chunks of the sidewalk brutally littered the icy floor. My beam of light could barely touch the glacial ceiling above, yet sunshine barely managed to glow through the glacier’s crystalline shell. Exploring these lost cities, it continued to amaze me how archaic, yet brilliant humanity’s former civilizations used to be.

 “Unbelievable…” I murmured, slowly soaking everything in. I felt like an ant in a model city crushed in half-frozen ruins. Carefully, my fingers adjusted the visor camera. “Are you all seeing this, guys?”

 “Loud and clear, Armstrong, though there’s some interference. Proceed and return to the Outpost within 15:00 hours.”

 I followed the map until finding Location-of-Interest #1, the front steps of a library whose walls were battered down from hundreds of years of Mother Nature’s wrath. I stepped over decaying books embedded into the frozen ground, the selves empty of man’s attempts to preserve the past. Evidence of manmade firepits in various parts of the building indicated nomads of the North might’ve burned the books in order to survive.

 *How disgraceful*, I thought to myself. *Couldn’t they have not torched the bad romance novels instead?* It eventually came to finding four pristine textbooks and a couple classical novels. *Fine, onto the next marker.*

 Location-of-Interest #2: a courthouse devoid of judges, lawyers, prosecutors and juries. I discovered several large paintings lying on the cracked ground. Each showed a man or woman of the past who no longer gave judgement within its halls.

 *Reminds me of the Nairobi Courthouse*, I mused. *Minus the trials involving terrorism.*

 Finding Location-of-Interest #3 however, led to an ancient museum nestled against the wall of the ice cave. After evidence piled up about the incoming new era, there were efforts to preserve the history of past civilizations through the ration wars and famines affecting the Equatorial Safe Zone. Not all artifacts survived, sadly. My navigating the walls and exhibits only led to finding empty picture frames and relics too damaged to be brought back to the Outpost, but one item captured my attention.

 Under a layer of solid snow stood a stuffed sabretooth tiger on a faux-boulder. The other displays had either been ransacked years ago or molted from age, but this one hadn’t. I stepped closer to feel curiosity get the better of me, so I took my mask off. Unlike this creature’s teeth that curled over his chin, mine had been trimmed for convenience. The air felt cool on my facial fur, and I could smell the pure winter of age’s past, but what separated me from the stuffed exhibit feature was the winter gear I wore and my upright stature.

 “Hey there, cousin,” I joked to myself. “Didn’t picture finding you here…”

 It was difficult to believe how far their species had come. Whether it be enduring the Saharan colonies or Pacific superstorms, the biomechanical bodies of an anthroid survived the harshest conditions. However, my genetic design as Sabretooth Class recently changed Northern Hemisphere exploration. I’d been made to combat subzero temperatures when my gear failed.

 Now here I was, staring at one of my ancestors like my human employers used to do.

 Before driving back into the Outpost’s hangar with the books in my backpack, I squinted back outside to see the skyscrapers. More history was out there, somewhere in the white void, and we were going to find them all. I just knew it.