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Extracts Booklet

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Passages One and Two are newspaper accounts on different days of the same drama at sea.

PASSAGE ONE

Russian submarine and crew saved

For Peter Nuttall and the team, it was make or break. Running on little except caffeine, adrenaline and hope, the six Britons controlling the tiny Scorpio rescue robot 190 metres below them, knew they had cut most of the fishing nets away from the Russian submarine over the last five, anxious hours. But there was one rope they could not reach, and the submarine's heavy anchor also
5 complicated the task.

Mr Nuttall, piloting the Scorpio via a complex system of levers and switches, felt his heart sink. "One wire from the net was out of reach," he reported from the Russian ship taking the rescuers back to land. "And the hardest thing was knowing the clock was ticking," he added. "If the vehicle broke down for any reason, that was it."

10 It seemed like a dead end. The team, led by Commander Ian Riches, had even resorted to using the Scorpio's robotic arms to push the submarine free, but the last obstacles seemed to have it trapped. Commander Riches knew the seven-man crew were sitting in a small chamber at 5°C, down to their last hours of stale air.

"We were being told conditions were getting worse, which means CO₂ poisoning," he said.

15 It was obvious that the air would run out by midday, so they had to take the risk of filling the tanks with precious air to try to lift the submarine clear.

In a flurry of bubbles, plankton, seabed dust and fragments of fishing net, the submarine rose up, but out of the line of sight of Scorpio's three cameras.

20 Commander Riches rushed from his control cabin to one side of the ship, scanning the sea. For a few agonising seconds, he saw nothing. Then a cry in Russian broke the tense silence. "We stood there watching, waiting for it to come up, only to see it rise on the other side of the ship," he said laughing. "That was just wonderful!"

PASSAGE TWO

Rescued submarine crew tell of 76-hour ordeal

The British team who aided the rescue of seven Russian submariners from the depths of the Pacific flew home last night, as details emerged of the crew's horrifying 76 hours spent in the icy dark, their vessel enmeshed in a fishing net.

5 Pictured strolling through the grounds of their hospital on the far eastern peninsula of Kamchatka, the crew said they had survived on only three to four gulps of water a day.

“The main thing was the lack of water,” a crew member told the state television. “There was also a problem with oxygen, not critical but the body felt it was not enough.”

10 His colleague, civilian engineer Gennady Volonin, said: “We understood we were trapped. We just had to wait for a decision. When they said they had put everything into action, we lay flat and began to wait.”

15 The captain of the vessel, Vyacheslav Miloshevsky, was so pessimistic about the Russian rescue operation that he wrote a letter to his wife bidding her farewell. “He wrote to me when he understood that our people [the Russian navy] were doing the rescue operation,” his wife, Yelena, told the Guardian. “He understood it would be hopeless. But when he discovered the British submarine was working, he became hopeful again.”

She added that her husband said they had just a few hours of air left when they were rescued on Sunday.

20 Meanwhile, the British team leader, Commander Ian Riches, and the robotic rescue vehicle's two pilots, Peter Nuttall and Stuart Gold, were yesterday thanked by the Russian defence minister, Sergei Ivanov. After a rescue without any technical hitches, the team were half an hour late to meet Mr Ivanov because their bus broke down.

Commander Riches said he was disappointed not to have met the Russian crew, as they were still in Kamchatka.

PASSAGE THREE

The following passage is an extract from a short story about crab-catching, a popular sport with children.

Boy Blue the crab-catcher

Boy Blue had missed his grip. A wave wrenched him and now he was actually in the sea. We shivered, dumb. A wave pushed him up, and another, completing the somersault, plunged him down. He screamed and we screamed too. He was out of sight and we screamed with all the strength of our lungs. And the waves washed our screams up on the shore. We screamed and the fisherman came out from behind the lighthouse. We motioned to the spot where we had last seen Boy Blue. There was a faint echo of his scream in the air. We could not understand how it had happened. We could not follow the speed of the fisherman's movements. He had gathered up the net and tossed it in the sea over the area we had indicated. He hauled earnestly and the bulk of the net emerged with the strangest of all catches. Boy Blue was there. He was rolled up like a wet blanket. We were dumb with fright. He looked so powerless in the net. His eyes were bloodshot and his body heaved with a great flood of wind. He gasped and gasped, like a dog that had strained itself in the chase. The fisherman hauled him up the beach and emptied the net as if it contained a useless dead thing. He looked at Boy Blue with a kind of disgust. Boy Blue was like a fly which had buzzed too long. You slapped it down and you were sorry that you had made such a mess of your hands. You might have left it. But you couldn't. The fisherman looked down at Boy Blue, unspeaking, in quiet disgust. Boy Blue sat silent, his teeth chattering and his whole body a shiver of flesh in the wind. We could not speak. We were afraid of the fisherman. The way he looked at us! He was like someone who had been sorry for what he did, and yet not sorry since he knew it had to be done. He looked so terribly repentant and at the same time there was an expression which we could not define. Under the marble eyes and the impenetrable stare there must have been something which cried out for life. We were frightened.

"I should have let you drown," he snarled, and his voice held terror.

"Thank you, sir," Boy Blue said, catching his breath. It was the first time Boy Blue had spoken.

"You should have drowned," the fisherman snarled again.

"You mustn't say that," Boy Blue said. We were stunned by the impertinence of the words. But Boy Blue was shivering like a kitten that had had a bath.

"Why the heck shouldn't I have let you drown?" the fisherman shouted. It was the first thing he had said that made us think he was really human like us. The way that he said it. He now looked angry.

"Tell me," he snapped. "Tell me to my face why I shouldn't have let you drown."

"Cause if I'd drowned I wouldn't have been able to tell you thanks," Boy Blue said. He was serious and the fisherman walked back towards the lighthouse.

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