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I've asked Justin, begged him, even tried to bribe him, to write these experiences down, publish them. But my wise and colorful friend is very happy to tell his tales whenever the mood or memory strikes him, act out certain parts in his own, over-the-top way, and be done with it.

One of my favorite stories takes place on a frosty Alaska morning. Justin and the good crew of the Polar Sea, while tendering salmon (whatever that means) in Prince William Sound, took a quick side trip to a place called College Fjord, where all the glaciers are named for Ivy League schools. Harvard Glacier is the largest of these, with a face is more than a mile wide and over 200 feet deep.

*"And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
As green as emerald."*

But as the frozen mountains came into view, Justin, standing at the bow, Nikon at the ready, observed that the glaciers, while spectacular in size, were dirty. Sooty. Especially at the tops. Whether this effect was natural, or manmade, Justin didn't know. But he was disappointed.

"Bummer . . ."

There came an unearthly, cracking noise, like the trunks of a dozen redwood trees, all breaking at once, or the opening of the Seven Seals of the Apocalypse. "It was the kind of sound you don't want to hear on dry land," Justin said, "let alone on a boat, surrounded on all sides by orca-infested, freeze-killing water." A column of ice, the size of a Jiffy Lube franchise, broke off, plunged into the ocean, sank, and then, like some new island, or an atomic mushroom cloud, rose back up to the surface as a crystal-clear block. The captain backed the boat up to the bobbing, mini iceberg and crew members brought a chunk on board.

What do you do with glacier ice? At the end of your shift, you and the crew drink sweet, stinging, tooth-sucking toasts, to a safe, plentiful harvest and to the many murkey gods and monsters of the Mighty Pacific — while sipping Seagram's and Seven, chilled by clinking chips of iceberg.

"There were dead Viking Kings in that old ice," Justin said. "Pirates and dinosaurs! Mastodons and woolly rhinos! Aliens, too! All coughed up from the very deepest, coldest, darkest caverns of the sea! You could taste the frozen history of it!" Justin let out a primordial roar that morphed into a hearty laugh. "It was awesome!" (Told ya.)

That scene belongs in a movie, far as Juan and I are concerned, an old time, widescreen, Irwin Allen blockbuster that you can only watch in an actual theater, with at least 500 people in the audience. Of course, in our movie, a Tyrannosaurus



The Harvard Glacier

comes crashing out of the ice after eons of deep REM sleep to menace the modern world. Ice Zilla!

In a gesture of gratitude, for Justin's friendship and for his great fishing stories, I took a pointed chunk of driftwood, sanded it, painted it white and blue and then added dinosaur bones, made of Super Sculpey, to depict two warring beasts, struck dead in mid-combat and then preserved forever as the Ice Age swept over them.

To be honest, I've heard some of Justin's stories more than once, but once he gets rolling, I don't ever stop him. A few months ago, just as a new school year was about to kick off, Justin and I met at a waterfront sushi restaurant, caught up, and tucked into some seafood tempura. As Justin started in a story I'd already heard, I savored the benthic taste of battered shrimp and salty dipping sauce, and imagined the movie scene:

It's another freezing, winter night on the deck of the Polar Sea.

*"And now there came both mist and snow,
And it grew wondrous cold."*

Justin stands at the sorting table, as a fuller-than-usual crab cage opens. Several hundred pounds of snow crab spill out to be sorted and sexed, and then either kept or thrown overboard to swarm and multiply.

Something else, some heretofore unseen, unnamed, non-crustaceal species jumps up and out of the wriggling, segmented heap, looking like a dark, mottled and very unhappy cross between a mako shark and a moray eel, about two feet long, with a chattering mouthful of serrated teeth, catfish whiskers and "eyes like two sucked-down Jujubes."



*"Dear Lord! It hath a fiendish look –
(The pilot made reply)."*

Our waitress, a young lady that had graduated the spring before, and who knew us both, brought a pot of fresh green tea. And interrupted. "Was it a Fiji Mermaid?"

Justin stopped, mid-sentence, looked up at the waitress, and for a second, I thought he was going to flick a hot scrap of batter at her. But I guess Justin saw audience potential, and so he pulled out the chair next to him. The waitress sat down and poured tea as Justin proceeded to act out the shocked reactions of the other fishermen — and himself:

"Look out!"

"What is that thing?"

"Throw it back! It will curse the boat!"

"Got ya!" One of the fishermen (Let's protect the man's true identity and call him Ishmael.) clamps his hand down on the weird little beast, holds it tight and hissing, as the same thought races through every sleep-deprived mind on the deck that day.

We're going to be rich!

The same thing occurs to the boat captain, watching from up in the warm wheelhouse.

*"As if through a dungeon-grate he peered
With broad and burning face."*

His rasping, Wolf Larsen voice roars above the wind and the waves, claiming rightful, contractual ownership of the weird creature and quoting some archaic

maritime law.

This doesn't go over well with the crew. Ishmael, still holding the mysterious, candy-eyed mako/eel, threatens to throw the beast overboard. The skipper makes his own threat: legal action and keelhauling.

This dramatic standoff ends when the snapping specimen sinks its teeth into Ishmael's hand, cutting right through his thick gloves, and causing blood to spurt and drip onto the rest of the catch.

Ishmael screams in shock and pain. He lets go of the weird beastie, which drops to the deck and starts slithering toward the rails — and saltwater freedom. But just before it leaps back into the icy deep, the hideous refugee from an HP Lovecraft short story turns to the crew, rears up, and glares at the fishermen.

Justin turned to the waitress, leaned closer — close enough for her to see little flecks of shrimp tail in his teeth. "And then it smiled."

I knew what was going to happen next.

"Smiled?" Our waitress, on the other hand, wasn't as prepared, and so when Justin shot up out of his chair, began singing, not at the top of his voice, but loud enough to startle the other customers — and the sushi chef, an old school, rice and order type — and started kicking his legs like a can-can dancer in a Toulouse Lautrec painting, she was a tad freaked.

*"Hello my baby, hello my honey
Hello my ragtime gal!"*

It was right out of that classic, 1955 Warner Brothers cartoon, about a bull frog that could sing and dance, but only when nobody was looking.

*"Send me a kiss by wire, by wire
Baby, my heart's on fire, on fire!"*

Justin sat back down, laughing and shaking his head. Our waitress smiled — nervously — and then she got out of there, probably to convince the sushi chef to put down that glinting, wicked-lookin' shobu-bocho, and that everything was OK.

I'll keep trying to get Justin to write them down. Here's a thought: Maybe I can convince him to perform on stage in front of an audience. I'll get back to you on that one. But, in the meantime, if you see a guy that looks like Gene Hackman, sorta, sitting in a (hopefully seafood) restaurant, or in a sports bar, or pretty much anywhere around town, gesturing and recalling some grand tale of deep-water weirdness, you might want to lean a little closer, and listen.

*"That moment that his face I see,
I know the man that must hear me:
To him my tale I teach."*

The End