[Snap Judgement intro]

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Okay, Snappers, I'm a home cook. Not a chef, not a gourmand or whatever. A cook. I can go down in the kitchen, I know all about feeding my people real food, real dinner. And this COVID has created a paradox. At first, everything was off the menu. Can't go to the restaurants, couldn't even find some of your favorite ingredients to cook. But then, the farmers, they respond. The stuff they normally save for the high-end restaurants, for the guys wearing the chef hat, now they'll bring their stuff directly to you, if you know where to look. Fancy mushrooms, high altitude greens, the perfect peaches. If you can find your own butcher or contract with your local fisherperson, it takes a minute, but now, if you can cook, if you've got some patience, everything's back on the menu. So, I'm thinking it's a seafood type of day. And what was that fish I had last year in that place with that pepper sauce? Chilean sea bass. I see it listed on the website. They call it toothfish. And all I have to do is click. What could be better?

Well, today on Snap Judgment, the epic tale behind, what is for dinner, or calling it Chasing Thunder. My name is Glynn Washington. Strap your lifejacket on tight, because you're listening to Snap Judgment.

Now then, today's story begins in a German prison, where a man is going to see his boss. This story does contain explicit language. Sensitive listeners are advised.

[riveting music]

**Peter:** I show up at the maximum-security jail in Frankfurt, and present myself to the guard at the gate. I give him my ID and I go through an x-ray machine.

**Nikka:** Peter Hammarstedt is walking into see his boss. I guess the big question here now is the uncertainty of it all. He's been in jail now for some days, and we don't know how long this imprisonment will last. In the entire time I've known Paul Watson, it's been being at sea with him in this space that epitomizes freedom and independence. And so, meeting him in a prison is the antithesis of the space in which I've always known him to be.

Peter's boss, Paul Watson, is the leader of the radical conservation group called Sea Shepherd. He's being held in a German prison because allegedly, he had rammed his ship into a boat of illegal shark hunters, smashing it apart. So now, he's facing charges. But this is just what it's like to work for Sea Shepherd.

**Peter:** We were putting our ship between the harpoons and whales to prevent it from conducting its illegal whaling operations. Physically getting in the way of sealers clubbing seals, blocking those clubs with our bodies.

**Nikka:** You've probably heard of them. They're often in the news. They've had their own reality TV show, and they're the butt of a lot of jokes.

**Person:** Yeah, butters, you want to help?

**Person:** No, no, I got stuff to do. But I wanted to tell you, there's these fellas on TV. They go out in the ocean and try to stop the Japanese wherever they are.

**Announcer:** Yeah, we're badass.

[Whale Wars theme]

**Announcer:** Any means necessary. We're not protesters. We're pirates.

**Peter:** So now for the first time the pirate crew, the Sea Shepherd, would be without a leader, which is why Peter was here to see Paul in prison.

[upbeat music]

**Peter:** And then ultimately, I'm sitting in the visitors' room across a table from my mentor. And he handed me a piece of paper. The piece of paper is handwritten. And it says, "Peter Hammarstedt will represent me," signed Paul. He just said he will be taking command of the next campaign that we're doing, and if anybody questions you, here's this piece of paper. And so, when he hands me this single, 8.5 x 11 piece of paper, it weighs nothing, but I feel this huge sense of responsibility weighing on my shoulders, because now, I'm being given this trust.

**Nikka:** Peter is in charge of the Bob Barker, a massive ship which flies an actual black pirate flag with the trident and a hook crisscrossed underneath the skull. This ship is menacing. Painted in military camo with sharp teeth on the bow. And now Peter, at only 27, will represent the entire Sea Shepherd fleet.

**Peter:** It is very confusing to poachers when we come across them, but a great number of them have heard of the vessel before, and the teeth and the flag reaffirm to them that they've just been found by the people they least want to be found by.

[ship horn]

**Nikka:** His first mission was to find a ghost ship, a renegade trawler that everyone was looking for, but that no one had seen. It was called the Thunder.

**Peter:** It had been blacklisted for 10 years, and this is just the second ship in history to ever have an Interpol notice issued for them. Usually, Interpol notices are issued for persons for war criminals and other international fugitives. And yet, for a year and a half, nobody had seen this ship.

**Nikka:** The high seas are notoriously lawless and the Thunder was the most persistent criminal enterprise to be found in the Antarctic. For nearly a decade, they'd made more than $76 million by illegally hunting toothfish.

**Reporter:** This is the Patagonian toothfish, a fish that lives in the wild waters of the Southern Ocean, off the islands of Antarctica. It's so valuable that it's known as white gold.

**Reporter:** A mile beneath the surface of the Southern Ocean, the toothfish swam in inky dark obscurity for thousands of years. And within a decade, the rich white flesh was showing up in some of the world's fanciest restaurants.

**Nikka:** But no one calls it toothfish because people at a fancy restaurant don't want to eat something called "toothfish." A merchant renamed them Chilean Sea Bass. And actually, one of the worst things ever happened to the toothfish was *Jurassic Park*.

**Hammond:** Alejandro has prepared a delightful menu for us. Chilean sea bass, I believe. Shall we?

**Nikka:** After *Jurassic Park* topped the box office, and audiences saw them eating toothfish on the big screen, they went crazy for its buttery white flesh. They nearly wiped out the entire population, and they're actually a critical part of the Antarctic ecosystem. And that is why Peter is hunting the elusive Thunder.

**Peter:** A lot of so-called experts around the world so that we are wasting our time, that we would never find the ship, and even if we did, they assume that we wouldn't be able to stop them. We don't know who the crew are. And so, we set off to find a ghost ship.

**Nikka:** They took two ships to hunt down the renegade trawler. Captain Sid Chakravarty was leading the Sam Simon, and Peter was at the helm of the Bob Barker. They sailed south to the most remote and dangerous waters on Earth.

**Peter:** As you head south, you pass to these latitudes, the 40s, the 50s, the 60s. They say that when you go south of the 40s, there is no law. South of the 50s, there is no God. And south of the 60s, there's no hope. And yet, for toothfish, it's this bountiful place where for them is a refuge.

**Nikka:** The Bob Barker and the Sam Simon pressed through the churning gray water, as they moved through a tide of icebergs, some the size of tall buildings, and they began to search the horizon for the ship that hasn't been found by law enforcement for 10 years.

**Peter:** And so, we're searching on the Bizzarri Bank, a place that's deep enough for there to be toothfish.

**Nikka:** This is a radio exchange on their first day.

**Captain:** Yeah, Jeremy, I've got a radar target about nine miles that looks like about 11 o'clock. Do you see anything over that way?

**Jeremy:** [unintelligible [00:08:58]

**Nikka:** 24 hours later, something on the radar screen caught Peter's attention.

**Peter:** It's got 100 possible targets, probably 100 of them being icebergs. And yet staring at this radar screen, I see that one of these begins moving at about 3 knots. Icebergs don't drift that quickly, and I know that we have a ship.

**Crew:** That's a ship.

**Crew:** Yeah. It is slowing down. It's turning around in another direction.

**Crew:** I've got four buoys in a row right here.

**Peter:** Around that time, I see some orange buoys in the water as we're motoring past. And I know, "Okay, this isn't just a ship. This is a fishing vessel. This is fishing gear."

**Crew:** All right, we've got ourselves a fishing boat.

**Nikka:** Peter changes course towards the unknown ship. And then, he hears a noise coming from the distance.

**Peter:** I can actually hear seabirds. I can see them diving into the wake of this ship, eating the slaughter remains from processing the toothfish. And when it's about a mile and a half on the bow, I pulled down from a shelf, this purple binder that's a collection of mugshots of illegal fishing boats.

**Nikka:** With most ships, you can get close enough to just read their name and ID them. But with poachers, that's not reliable because of this trick called the "James Bond License Plate."

**Peter:** They would essentially leave with the one name on their stern and then--

**Nikka:** What they do is they take one of these big metal plates, and they hang them over the edge of the boat with a different name.

**Peter:** Once Customs and Border Protection Service would fly over one of these vessels and document their illegal activity, as soon as that plane was over the horizon, the ship would already be operating under a different name.

**Nikka:** The Thunder is rumored to have had at least six other names, including the Arctic Ranger, Typhoon I, and the Wuhan N4. Peter has a folder of mugshots of illegal fishing ships. He memorizes the paint schemes and builds, and then he goes to match them with the ship he sees far off in the distance.

**Peter:** I pull up the binoculars, and it starts appearing out of the fog that kept it hidden.

**Crew:** Yeah, that’s the Thunder. I've got the Thunder.

[laughter]

**Peter:** I think what shocks me the most is that here's the most wanted fishing vessel in the world, hasn't been seen for a year and a half. It's still called the Thunder and it still has the same paint scheme. That's how audacious they were.

**Nikka:** Peter and the crew had found the Thunder after searching for just two days.

**Peter:** When I identified it as the Thunder, I immediately go to sound the ship's alarms that gets all of the crew out of their bunks immediately to essentially their battle stations. I have to assume that the Thunder is still actively fishing and that we may have to physically block them or physically intervene. And that means that nobody can be asleep in their beds. Everybody has a role to play. I quicken the pace of the Bob Barker to get in closer to the Thunder, close enough that they can see the name Bob Barker painted on the bow of the ship. And I grabbed the radio on marine VHF channel 16, and make my first contact. So, I grabbed the mic and I say, "Thunder, this is Bob Barker. Bob Barker. You are fishing illegally."

**Thunder's Captain:** [foreign language] no speaking English. Only speaking Spanish.

**Peter:** To which the Thunder replies, "Sorry, I only speak Spanish." "That's very lucky because we speak Spanish as well." And so, I tell them with as much authority as my voice can muster. "We're conservation law enforcement. We are placing them under arrest, and they are to come with us to Fremantle, Australia."

**Translator:** [Spanish language]

**Thunder's Captain:** [Spanish language]

**Peter:** To which the captain of the Thunder replies, "Negativo, negativo. No, no." And he says, "You have no authority over this vessel. And what is that pirate flag that's on your bow?"

**Nikka:** So, the captain of the Thunder is kind of right. Sea Shepherd is basically a group of ocean vigilantes.

**Peter:** We were going to be this searchlight lighting up their criminal activity to the world. The idea being that if we had eyes on them, they couldn't change their name. They couldn't change their flag. We were going to be this loud hailer exclaiming to the world, "This is where the ship is, right here, right now. Someone take over this citizen's arrest from us."

**Nikka:** Now that Peter had found the Thunder, the plan was that they were going to stay by their side no matter what, and force them into port or deliver them to law enforcement.

**Peter:** After the radio exchange, the Thunder changes course, and I can see in the distance that there's this heavy pack of ice ahead of them. I feel that their strategy is going to be to try to lose us in the most dangerous way possible in the ice. And the chase is on.

**Nikka:** As Bob Barker begins to pursue, Peter radios to their sistership, the Sam Simon, and tells them. "Go get the nets that the Thunder left behind so that they can be used as evidence later."

**Peter:** The net is a deep-sea gillnet. And that means that it's weighted to sit right on the ocean bottom. The marine creatures are not going to be able to see it. And so, they'll swim in, they'll get entangled, and as they try to reverse and swim back, the net has then caught their gills. It's hard to really comprehend how long this net really is. It's more than 40 miles long. That's the length of over 700 football fields.

**Nikka:** While the Sam Simon recovers the nets, Peter steers the Bob Barker into the ice pack.

**Peter:** You can imagine this ice pack being like a broken mirror, and we have to navigate our way slowly along and around and through the broken pieces.

**Nikka:** And it's really slow. So, what would normally take hours to cross, is going to take days.

**Peter:** As I'm navigating the ship, I'm in the middle of this ice field. We have to maintain a very, very slow speed to limit or try to mitigate any damage to the ship. And there's no sleep at all. I feel like my presence is always required on the bridge. When I do go below decks just to use the bathroom, I always have one ear to the sounds that are happening around the ship. I'm listening to the sound of the engine to see if there's any change in the sound of that. I'm listening to the sound of ice scraping along the hull. And because the ship is made of steel, it becomes like an echo chamber that amplifies the sound of the ice just dragging along the side of the hull. And I'm really on edge all of the time, because these pieces of ice are the size of cars and buses, and these are then potentially rams that might stick out that pose a danger. By disaster, I don't mean just that the Thunder gets away, but that we could breach the hull and we could take on water and we are a far, far, far away from rescue.

All of the crew are on standby as I'm picking my way through this ice because we need our damage control team ready. If there is a breach, a hole in the hull, then they have to quickly mobilize to try to plug that hole. So, very few crew are sleeping. Everybody's listening for that welcome sound of just water lapping against the ship again, that sign that we've gotten through the ice and made it out to open water.

I can see this blue band on the horizon. And I'm relatively sure that we're coming up to open water. And because we're following the Thunder, the Thunder is the first vessel in the chase to break free of the ice. So, I push through that and then everything changes.

[radio conversation]

I can feel the relief of the crew as I hear some of them cheering from the deck. I feel like a weight is lifted off my shoulder and I can finally step down from the bridge. But that sense of elation doesn't last long at all. I look at the weather chart and I can tell that having not lost us in the ice, they're going to try to lose us in bad weather. It looks like the Eye of Sauron in *Lord of the Rings*. This place saying, "Here is where evil resides. This is the place to avoid." And with the course and speed that we're on, we're heading right into it.

For every hour that passes as we approach the eye of the storm, the swell builds in size. And these storms build up very, very quickly because there's very little land to break up, almost like a runaway train that will beat you and batter you until you finally get north of it.

**Nikka:** To pass through this region, ships typically wait on the sidelines and slip between the storms. The Thunder, knowing this, just pushes straight ahead.

**Peter:** When I'm in the storm, we're being turned and rolled over at 35-40 degrees. This is where your stability is affected the most. And being on your side in bad weather, it's the last place you want to be. It feels like being on the elevator. And that elevator's going up six stories, and then as soon as it gets to the sixth floor, it drops down to the ground floor again. And it's being in that elevator, going up six, dropping six, going up six, dropping six, over and over again.

**Nikka:** Plus, everything around you can become a projectile.

On day six, a loud crash vibrates the front of the bridge.

[loud crash]

[suspenseful music]

**Glynn:** It's not over. When we return, Peter finds out exactly what was smashing into his ship. Stay tuned.

[suspenseful music]

**Glynn:** From Snap Judgment's underground lair, welcome back to Snap Judgment, the Chasing Thunder episode, where Peter had just heard a very loud crash because something hit his ship.

[thud]

**Peter:** I run up to the forward-facing windows and I look outside, and I see one of these one- to two-ton rubber Yokohama fenders that we have these big, big, essentially almost like balloons if you can imagine them, this has come loose, and like a big black wrecking ball is swinging around the deck.

**Nikka:** Peter decides to send his crew out to try and secure the wrecking ball.

[sailors conversing]

**Crew:** Bridge, bridge, bridge-- [crosstalk]

**Crew:** Bridge, go ahead.

**Crew on radio:** Better be ready to go out [unintelligible [00:20:34].

**Crew:** Okay, as soon as you get to the forward-facing bit of our superstructure, you need to clip in right away.

**Peter:** It's not as if they're just going on to the deck of a ship. You've got to imagine that they're almost at the top of a skyscraper. The danger of falling overboard is almost as real in terms of the likelihood of death. And therefore, I'm on the radio with the crew going out on deck, "Make sure you're always harnessed in. Make sure you always have one point of contact with the ship." The crew are struggling to move back on the ship. And because they're concentrating on putting one foot in front of the other, it's up to me to really look at what the waves are doing.

**Nikka:** They make it to the fender and scramble to get it into place. And just then, Peter sees a monster wave coming.

**Peter:** And so, I get on the radio, and I tell them, "Here's a big one, it's coming. Hold on tight, and it's white knuckle and brace for impact."

**Crew:** Hold it. Hold on, hold on.

[waves crash]

**Peter:** The wave smacks against the side of the ship, we roll over 40 degrees, and all I see is white in front of the window, looking ahead, all of my visibility obscured. As the ship rights itself, I see that they're still holding on, they're able to tie down this fender.

**Crew:** One, two, three. There you go. Push it.

**Peter:** And they then scramble back into the ship.

**Crew:** [on radio] All safely inside. They are all safely inside.

**Peter:** Closed down the hatch and they're safe.

[somber music]

**Peter:** After three days in this terrible weather, we emerge from the storm, and I can feel the mood of the crew lift. Although there isn't a single seabird in sight, there's almost a psychological feeling that you can almost hear birds chirping, that calm has come.

**Nikka:** On the 20th day of their pursuit, Peter had chased the Thunder through a broken field of icebergs. He chased them through raging winds, and five-story waves. All the way to the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. Always right on their tail. When suddenly, the Thunder stops, cuts its engines, and gives up running. It just sat there drifting, waiting.

**Peter:** There's this great uncertainty. We don't know how long the Thunder will drift for. It feels like the First World War in the trench warfare where the two warring parties just covered no ground at all. Spent most of the time just looking at each other, and shelling one another's positions, but not gaining one way or the other. Nothing has changed.

**Nikka:** It seemed like the Thunder had a new plan. They were going to try to wait out Peter.

**Peter:** I'm woken up at 2:00 in the morning. It's almost a daily thing that the Thunder captain drunk calls the Bob Barker, simply to call me a piece of shit or say something terrible, ahem, about my mother. And to every radio call he gives me, I'll just say, "Thank you for your time. I appreciate it." And I just kind of let him rant.

**Nikka:** The crew had not planned for this kind of hunt. Otherwise, they probably would have brought more boardgames.

**Peter:** I play Settlers of Catan, this board game with some of the crew, but there's really only so many times you can play it.

**Nikka:** After a few days, Peter realizes that this might not be ending anytime soon. So, he starts to figure out his fuel reserves to see how many days they can actually stay at sea.

**Peter:** Now that our engine was shut down, we were only consuming what the generator was burning. I was able to calculate that if the Thunder drifted indefinitely, then we could be out at sea for over two years. And that was a dreadful thought.

**Nikka:** Most of the members of the Sea Shepherd crew are actually volunteers. So, Peter decides to give them the option of leaving on their sistership, the Sam Simon, or staying here in the standoff, indefinitely.

**Peter:** And I remember bringing them all together into the mess, the dining area of the ship, and having a meeting where I said, "Okay. Well, here are the two options. Either you can move on to the Sam Simon and you can be home in two weeks. Or, you stay onboard the Bob Barker, we remain at sea, possibly for two years, with no guarantee of how this will turn out. We could have a mechanical issue a year and a half from now that makes us lose the Thunder. We could escort them into port two years from now, and the government in whatever port we end up in, could release the ship and there's no repercussions whatsoever. And yet, we've put two years of our lives into this. But we are in the best possible position that we can be to shut them down. And if nothing else, every day that we're with this ship is a day that they're not able to poach toothfish. If that's all we accomplished, then that's something." I gave them 24 hours to think about it.

**Nikka:** Peter decided that no matter how many people left, he would keep up his pursuit. But he hoped that his crew would stay with him. And after 24 hours, he found out, only 10% of his crew chose to leave. And the Bob Barker stayed at the Thunder side.

**Peter:** I had a lot of strength and a lot of support from the other 26 people who were willing to see this through to the end, and I wasn't going to let them down. I wasn't going to let Paul Watson down. And I wasn't going to let our supporters down either. And I wasn't going to let the toothfish down.

**Nikka:** So, they dug in for the long haul, and rationed out their food.

**Peter:** We're starting to enter this new phase of eating on board where the food is more rice and beans. And that becomes more apparent with every meal that were served as there's less and less lettuce on the plate.

**Nikka:** So, yeah, they're vegan pirates. But despite the lack of lettuce on their plate, they still plan to Super Bowl party on the 50th day of their chase.

**Peter:** I was watching the Superbowl with the crew. The galley had spent all day making football, Super Bowl snacks, and it was down to the last four minutes of the game. It was the New England Patriots against the Seahawks where everything was decided in those last four minutes. It had taken us three or four days over our satellite connection to get the Super Bowl. And there have been a pact among the crew that nobody was allowed to ask at home who the winner was. And four minutes before the game was over, I was radioed, I was told to come up to the bridge, and for whatever reason, after 50 days of pursuit, the Thunder had decided, when there was just four minutes left with the Super Bowl remaining, to start fishing again. I remember seeing their trawl door open, their deck alight.

**Crew:** We've got to get ahead of them.

**Peter:** And a net then come out. It was a sprint to get there with the ship.

**Crew:** Get some life jackets on, get on the bow.

**Crew:** Yeah.

**Crew-** The people you need to do it, grab a radio.

**Crew:** Yeah. [crosstalk]

**Peter:** I had several crew members lined up on the bow with grappling hooks ready to fish it out of the water. Four or five grappling hooks went over the bow into the water.

Got it. Got it. Pull it up. Come on.

[crew on radio]

**Peter:** On the first hook, the line was snagged. They pulled it up onto the bow. And at that moment, I see the Thunder turn around.

**Crew:** Where they at now?

**Crew:** Dead ahead.

**Crew:** Dead ahead, yeah.

[crew on radio]

**Crew:** Tell them to hurry up because the Thunder is coming at us.

**Crew:** [crosstalk] -Peter says, "Hurry up, the Thunder's turned back towards us--[crosstalk]

[crew on radio]

**Peter:** The Thunder Captain radios the Bob Barker and he says, "We're going to take our gear back, either the easy way or the hard way." And I interpret that to mean that he's going to ram my ship.

**Crew:** They're going to come in pretty aggressively now.

**Nikka:** Peter had been a pirate for a decade, but he'd never been in a situation like this.

**Peter:** The Japanese whaling ships we chased could be quite aggressive but there was also a bit of restraint there because they were backed by a government. They were also concerned about public perception and public relations. I didn't think that they were going to kill us, for example. But with the Thunder, this is an operation that's tied not to a government, but to a criminal syndicate. And we don't know how far they'll go to protect those commercial interests.

[waves crashing]

**Peter:** And at that moment, I radio down to the crew and I say, "Cut it from the ship. Cut it from the ship. We've got to go. We've got to go. I'm dead in the water."

**Crew:** Tell them to tell us as soon as it's up and cut free from the ship.

**Crew:** Boyd, can you please tell us as soon as we have free from the line? Over.

[bell rings]

**Nikka:** The Thunder is barreling down on the Bob Barker. So, Peter throws the engines into reverse.

**Crew:** Standby for possible impact.

**Crew:** It's going to be close.

[ship loud horn]

**Peter:** We narrowly missed. And I watched from the bridge of my ship as the bow just passes a couple of feet from the stern of the Thunder as they go across. We're so close that I can see the crew on the Thunder and I can make out the expressions on their faces.

**Crew:** Nice, Peter.

**Crew:** That must have been a meter-- [crosstalk]

[laughter]

[crosstalk]

**Nikka:** The chase was back on. And on day 62, 400 miles from South Africa, Peter looks out to see thick black smoke rising off the Thunder.

**Peter:** When I see them burning on the deck of their ship, it's an eerie sight. It almost looks like an offshore oil rig burning off gas. They're destroying the evidence on board, and maybe we won't have enough evidence to get them for this crime. I'm left with no other choice but to sit by and watch as possibly years off their sentences or millions of dollars off their fines is disappearing.

**Nikka:** The fire burns for two days. And on the Bob Barker, Peter and his team come up with a plan.

**Peter:** If the Thunder goes into port having burned all the physical evidence that was on the ship, then the only thing that we really have to go off of is the testimonials of the Indonesian crew. Those testimonials can be influenced. The captain can coerce the crew. So, we have to get to them first. Sid and I come up with this idea of delivering this message in a bottle.

**Nikka:** So, they clean out a dozen peanut butter jars, add a little rice for weight, and in each one, they put a note.

**Peter:** "We should work together. We have more fuel and food--" [crosstalk]

"The captain and the owner must be brought to court to answer for their illegal fishing. Any information about the names of the officers and the owner of the ship will greatly help us. Sincerely, me, Captain Bob Barker."

**Nikka:** Then, Peter sent out his team on a speedboat to launch the jars onto the deck of the Thunder.

**Peter:** As my crew is throwing these messages in a bottle onto the deck of the Thunder from the small inflatable boats--

**Crew:** [crosstalk]

**Peter:** I see a large-built man wearing gray sweatpants and a balaclava on his face come out onto deck.

**Crew:** Balaclava man's got something to throw.

**Peter:** And he immediately starts throwing metal implements at the small boat team. A bit of chain whizzes by the head of our ship's photographer. A bolt, the size of my fist, comes and hits him in the groin.

**Nikka:** Fearing for the safety of his crew, Peter radios them back.

**Crew:** You okay?

**Crew:** Yeah. It was a bolt about three, four inches in diameter. Straight out and it just hit me right inside of my groin.

**Crew:** He threw bolts at your nuts.

[laughter]

**Crew:** He's a pretty good shot, okay.

**Crew:** You okay?

**Crew:** Yeah, it's cool. I mean it bounced right off into the water, unfortunately.

**Nikka:** Day 110, the crew is fatigued and restless. Peter is sick with the flu when he gets a call to the bridge.

**Peter:** I'm woken up around 6:30 in the morning because my bridge crew sees that the Indonesian crew on the Thunder are walking around wearing lifejackets. I grab a pair of binoculars and I stare intently at the scene that's developing in front of me. And then notice, all of a sudden that, one of their life rafts goes overboard.

[beep]

**Crew:** That’s a distress call.

[riveting music]

**Glynn:** Don't go away, Snappers. When we return, this doesn't end the way anyone expects. Stay tuned.

[riveting music]

**Glynn:** From Snap Judgment's Orbiting Hall of Justice, welcome back to Chasing Thunder. My name is Glynn Washington. And when last we left, Peter had just heard the mayday call from the Thunder.

[beep]

**Crew:** That's their distress call.

[crew on radio]

**Crew:** He says he's got a problem and they're sinking.

**Crew:** He's got a problem and they're sinking?

[crew on radio]

**Crew:** 15 minutes, he said.

**Crew:** It's not going to sink in 15 minutes.

[indistinctive chatter]

**Crew:** Let's keep doing circles. We've got to get a boat in the water.

[bell ringing in the background]

**Nikka:** As the Thunder starts listing, Peter surveys the weather, and it's calm as can be. There's hardly any waves, there's hardly any wind, and the ocean is really deep at this point. So, it's impossible that they hit something.

**Peter:** I'm immediately skeptical. I see that some of the Indonesian crew are going down the rope ladder into the life raft. They're clearly abandoning ship.

[crew on radio]

**Crew:** We're not disrespecting the law.

**Crew:** Oh, come on. Tell them where they all seem [unintelligible 00:35:54], we're dealing with this the safest way possible, tell him to take care of a sinking ship.

**Crew:** [Spanish language]

**Peter:** The captain of the Thunder has set his crew adrift, but he's delaying abandoning the ship himself. Very, very strange behavior for somebody who wants to be rescued. Once I see the water reach the hauling area on the Thunder, I know that the vessel for certain is going to sink.

I suspect that the Thunder captain refuses to leave the boat because he's probably sinking his own ship.

**Crew:** Yeah.

**Peter:** They don't want anybody to get the boat, the boat's evidence, and he wants to ensure that the vessel will actually sink before disembarking.

**Crew:** This is a real desperate move, no matter how you're looking at it.

**Peter:** With the ship sinking is all of the potential evidence on board, the toothfish, computer hard drives, nautical charts, all of the things that I hoped we'd be able to present to Interpol, that we'd be able to present to the authorities and the port of whatever country we would eventually end up in.

Tell him to get the rest of his crew off so we can take all of them on board.

**Crew:** [Spanish language]

**Peter:** Tell the son of a bitch, tell him, his crew have attacked my crew. We cannot take them on board until I know that all 40 people are on the life rafts.

**Crew:** [Spanish language]

**Peter:** We can deal with all of this later. Tell him to get off his fucking boat so we can take him on board. We're going to argue about this for an hour while he's sinking.

**Crew:** [Spanish language]

**Nikka:** But then, the captain of the Thunder quickly scrambles down the ladder and jumps into the life raft.

[indistinctive chatter]

**Nikka:** Peter radios Sid, the captain of his sistership.

**Peter:** Hey, buddy, what do you think about putting somebody on the Thunder to see if they left any paperwork behind on the bridge?

**Sid:** I think that's a great idea before she lists any further.

**Peter:** Okay.

**Sid:** [unintelligible [00:38:10]

**Nikka:** The chief engineer of the Bob Barker volunteers to board the sinking ship.

**Peter:** I tell him that it's got to be his choice. I can't order him to do it. But I also know that I'm ultimately responsible for all of these people. We're so close to getting these guys, and I can't stomach the idea of seeing all that potential evidence going underneath the surface of the water. So, I'll approve it if he can find two other volunteers, and those other two volunteers come very quickly.

We have to scramble quickly because we don't know how much time we have before the ship sinks. The captain of the Thunder is now in a life raft. He looks elated to be off. He thinks that he's gotten away with it. And I see that demeanor change very, very quickly as he sees my crew scramble up the pilot ladder onto the side of the ship and getting on board.

**Nikka:** In his last communication with the volunteers, Peter tells them to radio every 5 minutes, and no matter what, get off the sinking Thunder in 10.

**Peter:** The reason I choose such a small window is because it's past the point of no return. So, we're running against the clock. It happens almost in the blink of an eye that they're on the deck and then inside the ship that we'd been pursuing for 110 days. And then, we are laying claim on this vessel and anything on board.

**Nikka:** They've officially become pirates.

**Announcer:** Yeah, we're badass.

[Whale Wars theme]

**Announcer:** Any means necessary. We're not protesters. We're pirates.

[upbeat music]

**Crew:** It's going down fast. Just give them another five minutes onboard, and let's get these guys off. I don’t want them staying too long.

**Crew:** We're now in the bridge, over.

[indistinctive chatter]

**Peter:** My crew go right for the bridge, that's where they're going to find nautical charts, computer hard drives, and they basically turn the place upside down, trying to grab evidence and stuffing it into big black garbage bags to be brought back to the Bob Barker.

I really want these guys to disembark.

**Crew:** Yeah, they're supposed to be leaving now.

**Peter:** And after about 20-25 minutes, finally one of them appears, they throw some evidence in a plastic bag into the small boat.

**Crew:** It's time these guys get off.

[crosstalk]

**Peter:** I'm thinking, "No, no, no, get back onto the boat. We don't have enough time. You leave what you have. And you've got to get out." We don't know where that critical point of no return will be where the ship actually capsizes.

**Crew:** Everyone, everyone, Bob Barker, get off that ship, over.

**Crew:** Is there any way we can get to the engine room to stop this from sinking? Engine room is this way. Yes.

**Peter:** If they're in the engine room, or if they're in the fish hole, then all of a sudden, they may be almost upside down, and they won't be able to escape. And this ship will become a coffin. And not only that, but even if they weren't able to get off just last minute, the force and pull of that vessel go down may pull them down with it. So, they need to get off that ship as soon as possible.

**Crew:** Are they still on the boat?

**Crew:** Yeah. They have been told repeatedly to get off, and they're really drawing it out here.

**Crew:** All right, Gemini, Bob Barker bridge, yeah, this boat's going down much quicker now, so get them off.

**Nikka:** But the three volunteers scrambling around the sinking Thunder are searching for one last piece of evidence, a dead toothfish.

**Peter:** The vessel is leaning more and more and because the water has now completely submerged the engine room of the Thunder, there is no generator working, so this ship is in a blackout. My crew are working their way through unfamiliar compartment down to unknown corridor, using just their flashlights and headlamps and Hero cams.

**Nikka:** They record damaging evidence on their cameras.

**Crew:** Clean the place out.

**Peter:** They see that every door that they go through is open, which means that this vessel was rigged to sink, that the captain had ensured that water would be able to freely move from one area of the ship to the other flooding compartment after compartment.

**Nikka:** That also means they're taking on water faster and faster, and they need to get off the Thunder. But they still haven't found their dead toothfish.

**Peter:** When my chief engineer enters the fish hold, the deck of which is slick and wet, he slips and falls and hits the deck. He slides down the incline, almost like it's a waterslide and smashes against the side of the wall. And that's where they see toothfish for the first time.

**Crew:** I saw a toothfish there. There's bags and bags of them.

**Crew:** Take a bag, just take a bag.

[crosstalk]

**Peter:** They grab one of the toothfish, about four or five feet in length. They grab it, put it in a bag, and then they're ready to disembark the sinking Thunder.

**Crew:** [on radio]

**Crew:** Roger that. Good job.

**Peter:** Finally, after 37 minutes on board, they get into the small boat and come back to the safety of the Bob Barker. With the net confiscated by the Sam Simon, with the evidence that we were able to secure from the sinking Thunder, we had the best possible case that we could to seeing a prosecution of the captain. It wasn't anywhere near as watertight as escorting the Thunder into port. But we had as much evidence as we could gather.

**Nikka:** Now, there's nothing left to do, but watch the ship go down.

**Crew:** Attention all crew. Attention all crew. Looks like the Thunder's going down.

**Crew:** That's insane. That's fucking radars and antennas and thousands of dollars' worth of gear, they're just sinking. It is hard to fathom.

**Crew:** In a way, it just shows how much money they're making.

**Crew:** I know.

**Crew:** They're just willing to give all this up.

**Peter:** We see this vessel go from leaning over to one side, to then going stern down into the sea, and now it's just the bow, the front of the boat's sticking up skywards. This looks like a monolith, this vessel sticking up vertically, in a way that ships aren't meant to stand. It's a beautiful sight to see a ship that had been pillaging the Antarctic for 10 years sinking.

[indistinctive chatter]

**Crew:** Time is 12:52.

**Crew:** 12:52. The Thunder is gone.

**Nikka:** They have traveled more than 10,250 miles, burned through 300 tons of diesel fuel, with over 60 crew members working across two ships day and night for 110 days. And it had come down to this 33-tons of frozen toothfish in plastic bags and a massive steel ship sitting on the ocean floor for eternity. And Peter saw it as a big win, but so did the captain of the Thunder.

**Peter:** My small boat crew reported that the captain of the Thunder was elated. And for a captain who had just lost his ship, he was pumping his fist to the air and cheering. And the rest of the crew were chanting, "Thunder, Thunder, Thunder, Thunder," as the ship sank below the waves.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** The Indonesian crew of the Thunder was flown back home. The Thunder's captain, the chief engineer, and the second mechanic were tried and convicted of forgery, pollution, damage to the environment, and recklessness. They were also collectively fined $17 million, but were mysteriously released, even though their appeal had failed in court.

Thanks so much to Peter Hammarstedt for sharing his story with the Snap. We first heard about the story, thanks for the reporting of Ian Urbina, and his book, *The Outlaw Ocean: Journeys Across the Last Untamed Frontier*. It's got the complete Sea Shepard story and so much more. And finally, big thanks to Brick City TV and Mark Benjamin for sharing the audio from their documentary, *Chasing the Thunder*. You can find any of these links and more, go to our website, *snapjudgment.org*. Original score for this story was by Renzo Gorrio, it was produced by Nikka Singh.

[upbeat music]

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