

An Encounter with Casper

We were cruising the seas near Svalbard, a Norwegian archipelago about half way between the Arctic Circle and the North Pole in July, a time of perpetual daylight. At about ten in the evening, the call went out that a polar bear had possibly been spotted and the captain of the *National Geographic Endeavour* pulled the ship into the fast ice and shut down the engines to maintain quiet.



Many passengers had turned in for the night but the call went out with people walking the corridors knocking on cabin doors. The crew decided not to use the PA system to avoid making too much noise. Some people did not hear the knocks and, come morning, were upset that they hadn't been called. One lady, a recent divorcee travelling alone, thought it was a ruse to get her to join a party in the ship's bar. When she realized what had happened, she was mightily upset, but mostly with herself.

In the distance was Casper who decided to see what this big, noisy, smelly thing was. As he approached, he couldn't quite believe his eyes and had to lay down to rub them, assuring himself



that his vision was not deceiving him.

As he moved closer, he walked carefully, side to side, never entirely certain what this thing was but continually intrigued by the delicious smells. He knew that dinner was in this thing, but how to get to it? There had to be a door, or a ramp, or even a can-opener; but where?



Finally, after almost an hour, he reached the ship and started walking around it, looking for the way in, looking up at

what should be his dinner peering down at him over the railing. But how to get in? There must be a way; there must be a door.



Frustration set in and Casper just walked back and forth around the bow of the ship, looking up, smelling the delicious smells

Finally, after eleven thirty, Casper gave up. He started walking slowly away from his dinner, sometimes just sitting down with his back to the apparition, not knowing whether to believe it or not, dejected, confused, and alone.

Would he tell his friends and children about this, would they believe him, would he just be too embarrassed? In the morning, would he believe what he saw or was it just a bad dream, a nightmare?



By midnight, Casper was off in the distance, the captain pulled the Endeavour out of the ice, and we went on our way. Many of the passengers had an experience they'll remember for a lifetime. The rest of the passengers will remember missing an experience of a lifetime.

And Casper? Will he forever think it was an apparition, a vision, or a nightmare. But those smells were so real! It was an experience of a lifetime he may not want, or dare, to remember.