## N <br> NISEI

## MIDNIGHT SபN Booster

A calm swept the eroded tundra, an exhalation after a blizzard had rolled through with its howling swirls. The distant mountains were cloaked, hooded by their icy caps of silent fear, framed by waning light as the sun hid behind frozen peaks. The sound of nothing was almost as crushing as the cacophony of the storm, broken up only by the soft crunch of boots on snow as Sundog made his way slowly to the edge of the ridge before him.

The runner had weathered the day's storm in a hastily dug foxhole, drinking self-heating coffee and quietly praying for it to be a short one. With the dark of night approaching by the time the blizzard had passed, he'd had to hustle hard to make it up to the ridge line before conditions became too bleak to scale the slope. Over the crest the environment changed drastically, the soft white of fresh snow giving way to an enormous steaming crater. The strip mine stretched to the horizon, ending near the tributary far to the north. Usually frozen at this time of year, the river instead oozed slowly into the Laptev Sea, carrying with it countless tons of contaminant and mining byproducts. The once crystalline blue waters now glinted with a pallor in the fleeting sun-corrupted veins of Sakha.

This was why he was here. The mine site operations base lay at the foot of the gentle slope below, over a kilometer away, but well within range for a drone hub to roll down and provide Net access. It was just a matter of plotting the right path down before the twilight left entirely, and then settling in for a run through the night. Sundog fumbled around in his side pack, finding both drone and binoculars, before lowering himself onto the snow with a soft sigh. Thick clothes and gloves be damned, it was still cold as hell up here. The mirrorfiber of the auto-cloak kicked in, detecting his prone position, and projected a rough approximation of the surrounding tundra over his outerwear.

It was going to be a long night.
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