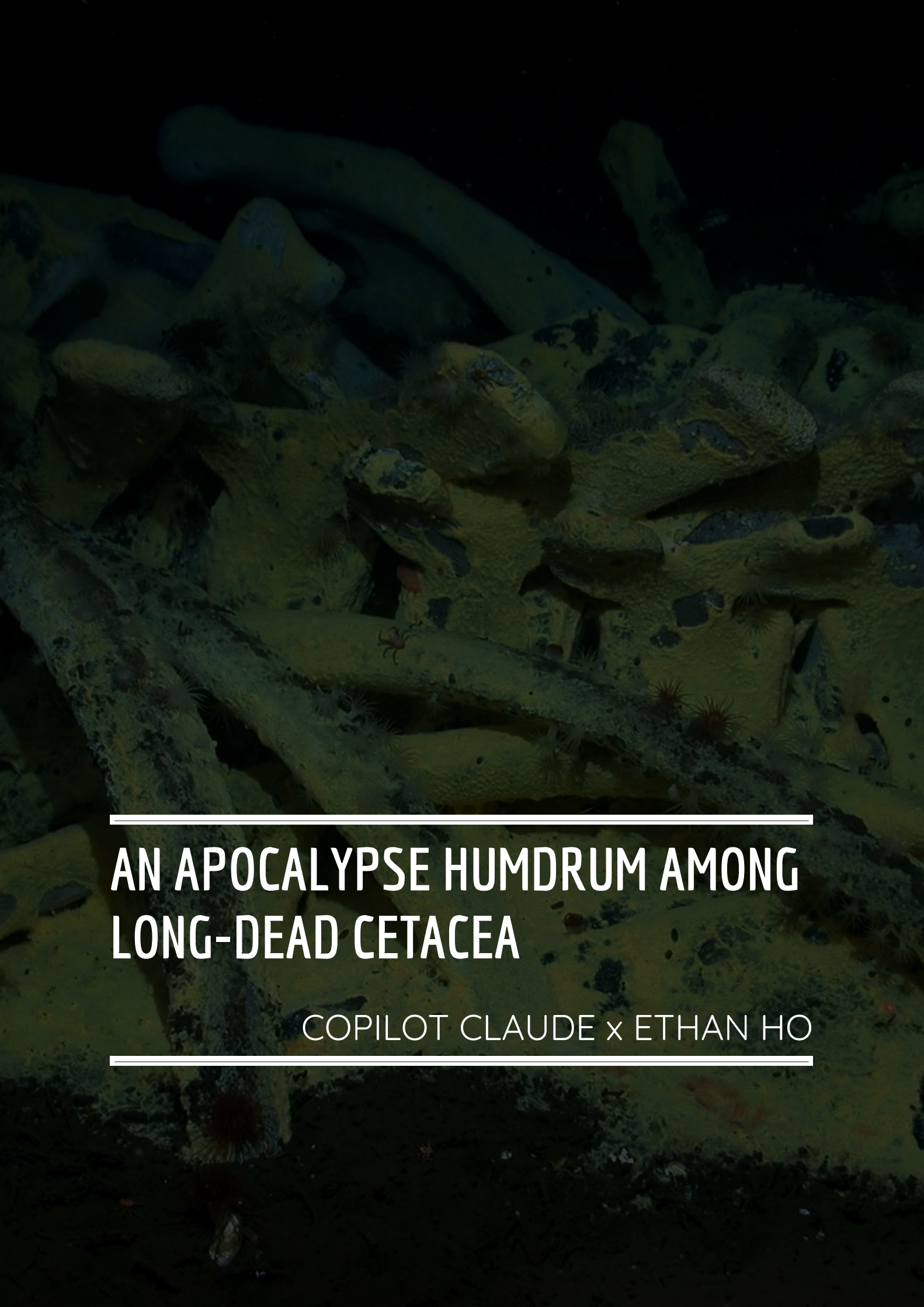




AN APOCALYPSE HUMDRUM AMONG LONG-DEAD CETACEA

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A Whale-Fall, in marine biology, is the event of a whale or other large sea creature dying over very deep water, 3000 metres or more in depth. In shallow water a large organism falling to the sea floor is quickly devoured by scavengers, but in the colder, slower deep sea a whale carcass can last for 70 years or more.

It passes through several distinct stages of decay – iterant octupi, blood red bone worms, sulphurous bacterial blooms – but eventually its energy and carbon content are depleted and it becomes unable to support life. Every creature on it must find a new home across endless miles of barren seabed, or die.

Whale eaters deal with this inevitable end of days in different ways. The octopus can swim, and has a highly developed sense of smell. Boneworms can release spores. Some creatures – the “fugitive” species – simply let go and drift for years or decades in a dormant state. Waiting.

Waiting to land by impossible, infinitesimal chance on another fall, and be saved.

An Apocalypse Humdrum will be an examination of whale fall and the “slow time” of the deep sea, in the form of a looping video with no beginning or end.

Our conception of time up here on the surface is linear. Things start somewhere, exist for a time, and then end somewhere else, at which point we stop paying attention. The tendrils of this idea are everywhere – in buy-use-bin consumerism, in those neatly resolving film plots, in Utopia/Dystopia themed arts festivals... (the implicit question: “what will happen? You know, in the end?”)

Whale fall ecosystems both reinforce and undermine our linear mindset. Comparisons between the progressively mutilated whale and our steadily depleting home planet are easy to draw. But whale falls are like the rest of nature, and unlike us so far – they are cyclic. Decades of abundance. Depletion and decay. Decades adrift. And then – another gift from the waters above.

May we learn to think in circles.
