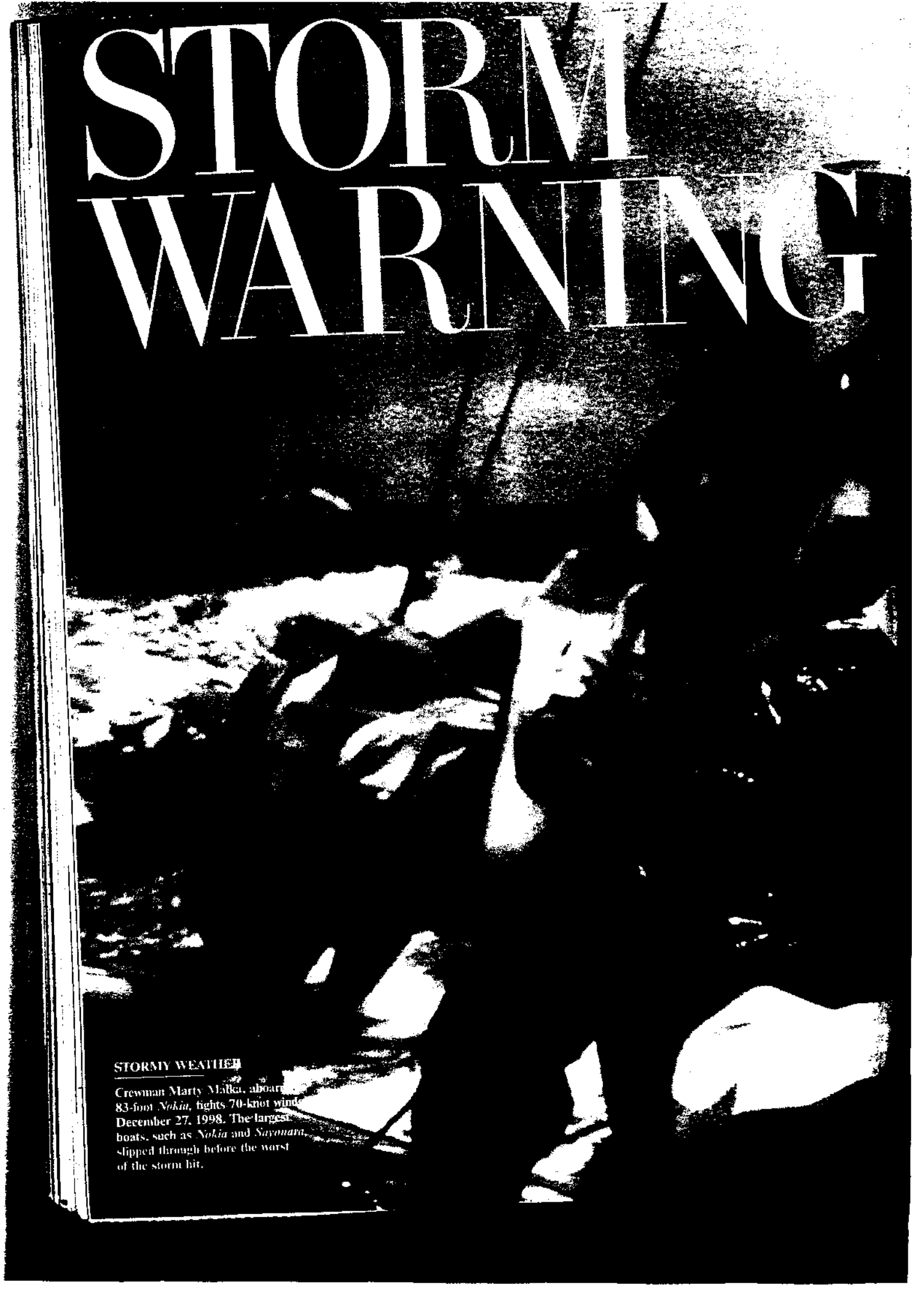
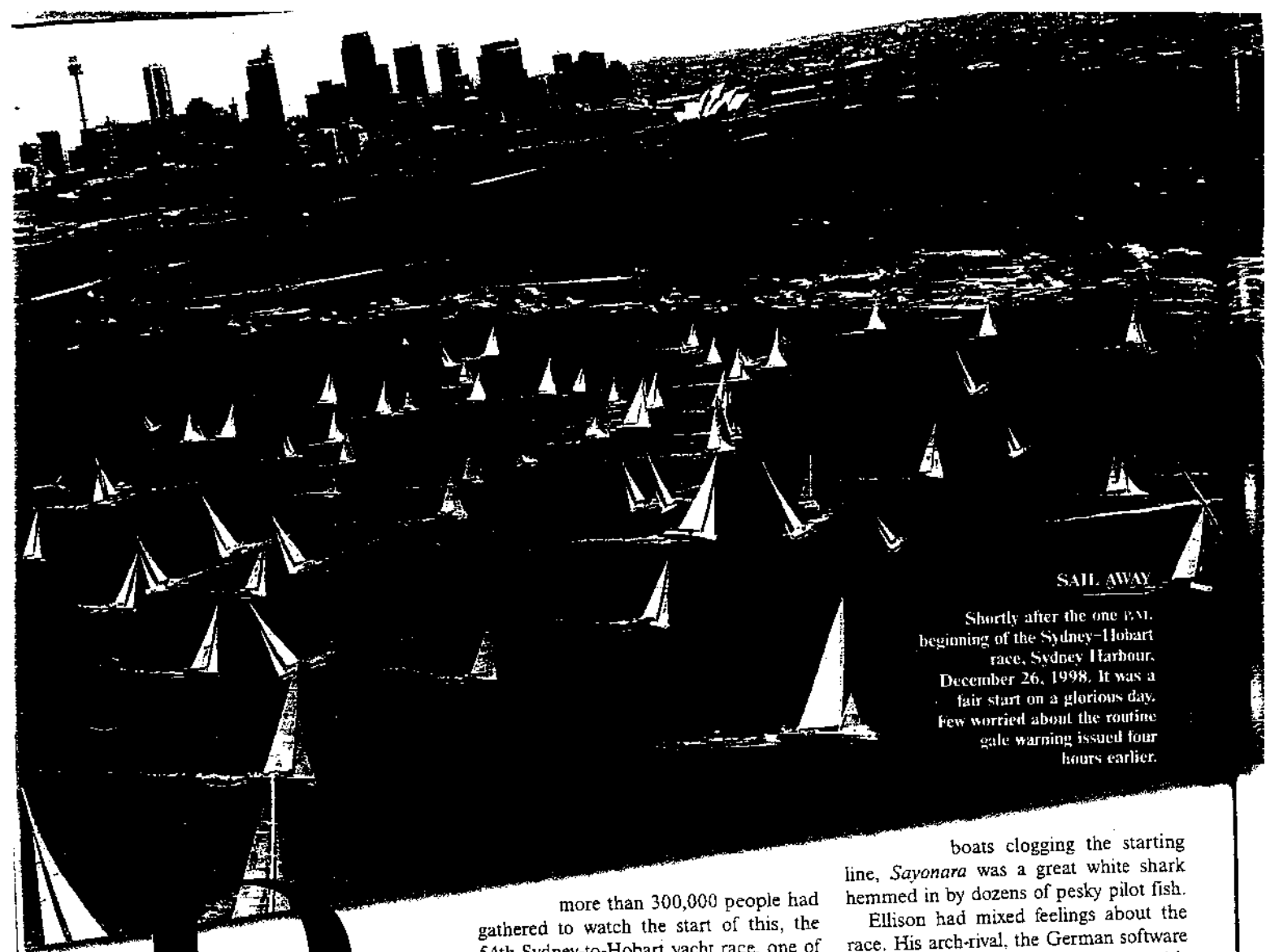
STORM WARNING



STORMY WEATHER

Crewman Marty Malka, aboard the 83-foot *Nokia*, fights 70-knot winds December 27, 1998. The largest boats, such as *Nokia* and *Sayonara*, slipped through before the worst of the storm hit.

115 sailboats left Sydney Harbour
day, December 26, for the 54th Sydney–
was shining
Bacon's 80-foot
day morning,
fury, seven boats had
by waves
80 feet,
sailors were
survivors,
news, and the
Australian
Maritime Safety Authority's "war room,"
BRYAN BURROUGH reconstructs a
coasts, the daring rescue
operations, and the tragic finale



SAIL AWAY

Shortly after the one P.M. beginning of the Sydney–Hobart race, Sydney Harbour, December 26, 1998. It was a fair start on a glorious day. Few worried about the routine gale warning issued four hours earlier.

BOOOM!

The little black-powder cannon's powerful report, signaling five minutes till the start of the race, could barely be heard over the cacophonous chopping of helicopters hovering above the sailboats in Sydney Harbour. It was a glorious, sun-washed Saturday afternoon, the December 26 Boxing Day holiday in Australia, and all around the harbor—from the black-wire uprights of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, which locals call "the Coat Hanger," to the scalloped hood of the famed opera house, to the multimillion-dollar mansions blanketing the hillsides above Rushcutters Bay—more than 300,000 people had gathered to watch the start of this, the 54th Sydney-to-Hobart yacht race, one of the three jewels in the crown of international ocean sailing.

As they inched toward the starting line, out by Shark Island, the 115 boats appeared from the air to be a swarm of vibrating gypsy moths. Down on the water, chaos reigned. Officials of the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia had elected to kick off the 630-mile run down the coast of New South Wales to Tasmania by starting all sizes of boats at once—which is not how it's done with many other ocean races. This irked Larry Ellison, who surveyed the scene from the cockpit of his gargantuan, 80-foot-long *Sayonara*, hands down the world's fastest and most advanced racing yacht; *Sayonara* was so vast that Ellison had hired the cream of New Zealand's national racing team to crew it for him. Ellison, who as the playboy chairman of the American software giant Oracle Corporation is worth more than $7 billion, was the odds-on favorite to win the multi-day race, barring a collision or other unforeseen disaster. And that was what bothered him. Looming over the 40- and 50-foot boats clogging the starting line, *Sayonara* was a great white shark hemmed in by dozens of pesky pilot fish.

Ellison had mixed feelings about the race. His arch-rival, the German software magnate Hasso Plattner, had kept his yacht, *Morning Glory*, out of the race, which took some of the fun out of things; now Ellison could only hope to beat *Morning Glory*'s race record (set in 1996), not the boat itself. His girlfriend, who had flown into Sydney with Ellison on his Gulfstream V jet the previous Thursday, had begged him not to go. Everyone knew the Sydney–Hobart was a rough race; Bass Strait, the shallow channel that separates Tasmania from the Australian mainland, is a notoriously treacherous swath of ocean, renowned for its steep waves and unpredictable storms. In his only other Hobart race, in 1995, Ellison had brought along News Corp. chairman Rupert Murdoch, who promptly lost a fingertip to a screaming rope in Sydney Harbour. This year Ellison had invited Murdoch's reserved 27-year-old son, Lachlan, a rising star in his father's media empire, to come along. "Lachlan came with us," Ellison said, "because his father ran out of fingertips."

Ellison ignored his girlfriend's warnings

Those poor people are heading into a massacre," said forecaster Kenn Batt. After a moment he began to cry.

about the race, he said, because he wanted to see how good a sailor he had become. At 52, the lean, garrulous executive was popular with his crew, but like most rich yachtsmen, he was nowhere near their equal on the ocean. After 1995 he had frankly grown leery of the Hobart. "The Sydney–Hobart is a little like childbirth," Ellison liked to say. "It takes a while to suppress the pain, and then you're ready to do it again." Like Ellison, many of the other captains in the harbor that afternoon were wealthy men, some out to prove their manhood, others just hoping for a good time. Securely in the latter camp was Richard Winning, a bearded 48-year-old Sydney executive who ran his family's appliance company. Two years earlier Winning had bought a vintage wooden yacht named *Winston Churchill* and poured a quarter of a million dollars into updating it with the latest technology. Neither Winning nor any of the eight chums he invited aboard for the race, however, had any illusions about their intentions. "Gentlemen's ocean racing—that's our game," Winning told a Sydney reporter that winter.

Australians like to believe theirs is a classless society, and indeed, for a nation where more than half the population lives near the ocean, big-time yacht sailing has little of the snootiness that clings to the sport in America and the United Kingdom. The 1,000 or so sailors that day came from every walk of life, from the slim British Olympian Glyn Charles to schoolgirls who had won their way aboard boats in an essay contest. For every Ellison or Winning there was a bloke like 43-year-old Tony Mowbray. Mowbray was a stout, balding laborer from the coastal Australian coal-mining town of Newcastle, and he had mortgaged his modest house to buy and outfit a 43-foot sailboat he hoped to take around the world. He had spent much of his savings, about $50,000, on a sparkling aluminum mast, bright new sails, and shelves of electronic equipment for his boat, which he grandly named *Solo Globe Challenger*. For Mowbray, the Hobart race was a test run, a chance to see if his boat was ready for the big water. His crew was a collection of pals, several of whom worked in the mines.

Like golf, sailing is run on a handicap system, so while everyone knew Ellison's *Sayonara* would be first to Hobart, the harbor was full of Australian captains who thought they might win the handicapped race. Groups of friends from yacht clubs all across the country, from Adelaide, Melbourne, Brisbane, Townsville, even as far as Perth, had pooled their money to prepare their boats and buy bus tickets to Sydney. The nine Tasmanian sailors aboard the 40-foot *Business Post Naiad* were typical. The boat's skipper, a meticulous 51-year-old plant manager named Bruce Guy, had won a regatta in Bass Strait earlier in the year and thought he might have the stuff to win a big race. He had gathered pals from across the island's northern coast—Steve Walker, a sailmaker, Rob Matthews, a public-housing inspector, even his back-fence neighbor, a gentle locksmith named Phil Skeggs—who had pitched in $500 apiece to get the boat ready.

As the final seconds ticked away before the one-o'clock starting time, Ellison gripped *Sayonara*'s wheel and mentally went through the race's first minutes. It would be a difficult upwind start, forcing him to tack back and forth several times within the narrow confines of the harbor. With luck no one would hit them.

BOOOM!

The little cannon rang out again, and across the water hundreds of men, and a scattering of women, lunged forward on their boats. There were screams and curses as some of the lesser boats banged hulls, but for the most part it was a clean start beneath a brilliant blue sky. As they furiously cranked their winches and raced to and fro, no one had any idea that several of their number would not live to see Monday morning.

Just after eight o'clock on Saturday morning, Peter Dunda, a 33-year-old forecaster in the Australian Bureau of Meteorology's New South Wales regional office, sat at his low-slung, L-shaped desk overlooking the busy tracks of Sydney's Central Railway Station, 16 floors below. Before him, on the wide screen of his IBM workstation, were the latest satellite photos, taken the previous night, and a computerized model of the weekend's weather generated by an NEC supercomputer at the bureau's headquarters in Melbourne. One photo showed a giant cold-air mass, a fluffy pancake of bright-white speckled clouds, moving northeast along the western shore of Tasmania toward Bass Strait. It was a classic "southerly buster," the kind that had buffeted the last several Sydney–Hobart races, a whirring system of winds and waves that regularly shot up the coast of New South Wales. It would make for rough sailing, but nothing most skippers in the fleet hadn't encountered many times before.

What interested Dunda wasn't the front itself—forecasters had seen it coming all week—but a development in the computerized model on his screen, called the Meso Limited Area Prediction System (LAPS), which generated weather maps at three-hour intervals over the course of 36 hours. In the corner of his computer screen the model indicated a strong low-pressure system, a swirling knot of gray-white cumulus, forming by Sunday afternoon about 400 miles east of Tasmania. While it looked as if the low would be safely out of the Sydney–Hobart fleet's path, it would mean higher winds along the system's western edges.

At 9:04, Dunda issued what the bureau called a "priority gale warning" to race organizers, posted it on a special Web site for race participants, and made it available to the bureau's weather-by-fax system. In the warning he predicted winds of 30 to 40 knots off Australia's southeast coast by Sunday night. (A knot is about 1.15 miles an hour; a 40-knot wind blows about 46 miles an hour.) Down at the yacht club's modern brick building on the harbor, where the bureau had set up a booth to hand out packets of meteorological charts and predictions, a forecaster named Kenn Batt, who had given the fleet's weather briefing on Christmas Eve wearing a jaun-

ty Santa's cap, quickly photocopied Dunda's alert and jammed it into his packets.

Three hours later, as the boats spent their final hour in Sydney Harbour, Dunda received his next set of satellite photos and LAPS models. What he saw took his breath away. In the year or so since the bureau had begun working with the new, detailed computer models, he had never encountered anything like the picture that now appeared on his screen. It showed an unusually strong low-pressure system forming not safely east of Tasmania but at the eastern mouth of Bass Strait, directly in the fleet's path. The system looked like a boxer's left hook, a forearm of white clouds jutting from the vast empty spaces of the Southern Ocean northeast into the strait, its northern end a curled fist of thunderheads. The model predicted winds of 30 to 40 knots in the area by nightfall, rising to 55 knots by Sunday afternoon, with gusts as high as 70 knots—more than 80 miles an hour.

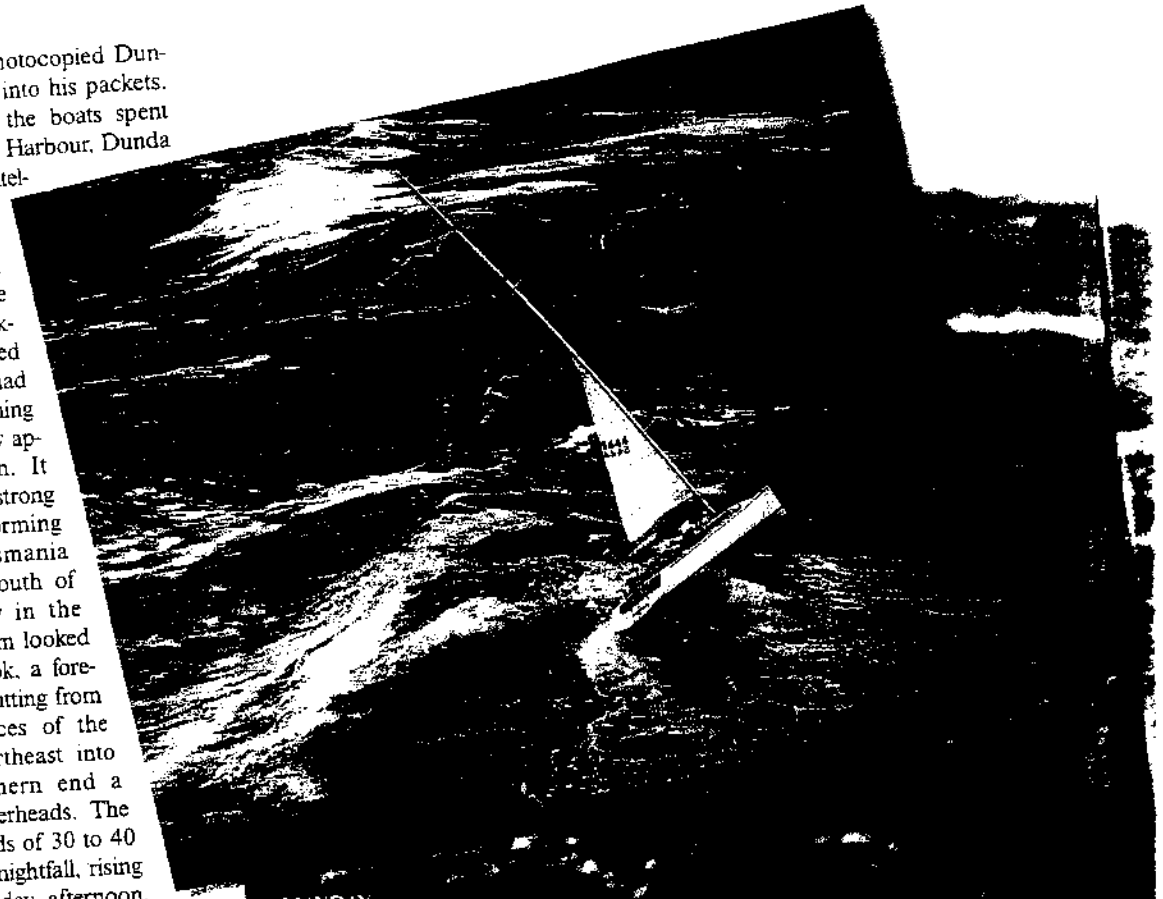
Dunda's phone rang. It was Melbourne.

"Have you seen this?" his counterpart there asked, the alarm clear in his voice. "It certainly looks like a storm warning."

"Yes."

A storm warning was highly unusual for Australia's southeast coast; the bureau had issued only one all year, on August 7, in the depths of the Australian winter. Still, at 1:58, with the fleet just clearing Sydney Harbour, the Melbourne office issued the warning. Sixteen minutes later Dunda did the same. In it he predicted that waves off Gabo Island, at the continent's southeastern tip, would average 15 to 20 feet by Sunday afternoon, with the highest waves reaching perhaps 40 feet.

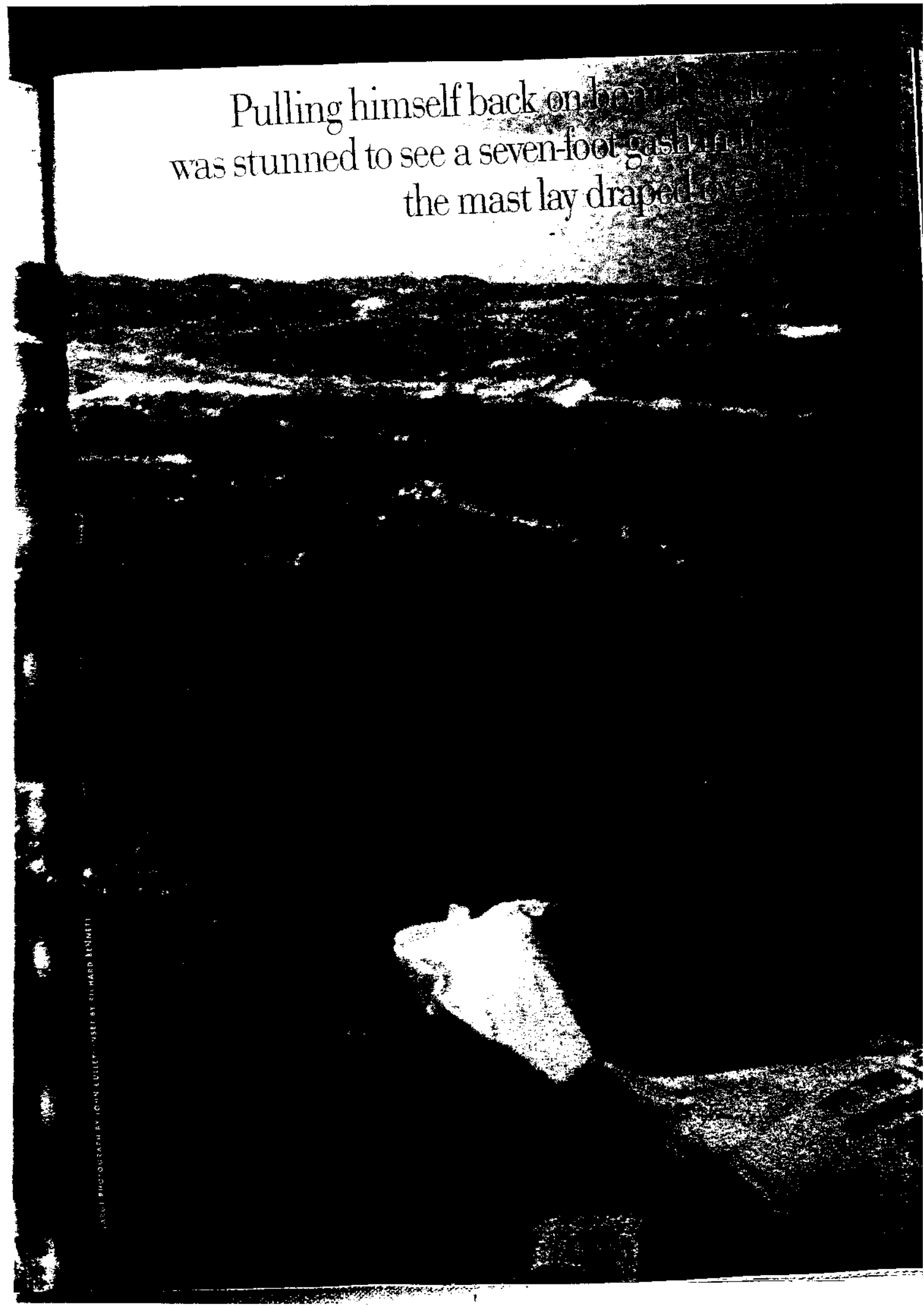
Returning from the harbor, Kenn Batt, who had dozens of friends sailing in the race, grew emotional as the enormity of the situation sank in. "Those poor people are heading into a massacre," he said, taking a deep breath. After a moment he walked out onto an adjoining terrace and began to cry. Down at the yacht club, a private meteorological consultant named Roger "Clouds" Badham, who was supplying forecasts to *Sayonara*



MAYDAY

Mike Marshman and Hayden Jones from the 41-foot *IC Offshore Stand Aside* at three P.M., December 27. Minutes earlier a wave resembling a tennis court on end had flipped the boat, slamming it facedown into the sea. *Inset*, the 66-foot *Bubsled* battling the waves.

Pulling himself back on board [illegible]
was stunned to see a seven-foot gash [illegible]
the mast lay draped [illegible]



[illegible] PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN KELLEY—USED BY RICHARD BENNETT


"It was an incredible moment of clarity," recalls Larry Ellison. "That said, if I live to be a thousand years old, I'll never do it again. Never."

and more than a dozen other big boats, looked over his own new set of computer models in amazement.

"Oh, shit," he said to no one in particular. "This is Armageddon."

The entrance to Sydney Harbour is barely 1,500 yards wide, flanked by high basalt cliffs. Shaking free its lesser brethren, *Sayonara* was the first to burst through the gap, followed immediately by George Snow's streaking *Brindabella*. As the yachts wheeled to the south, surfing by the crowds baking on Sydney's famed Bondi Beach, a strong northeasterly wind billowed their sails. Aboard *Sayonara*, Ellison ordered the spinnaker hoisted, and set a course due south. A spreading host of smaller boats helmed by well-known Aussie captains soon followed, led by Martin James's *Team Jaguar*, Rob Kothe's *Sword of Orion*, the mammoth 70-footer *Wild Thing*, and the Queensland yacht *B-52*. Thanks to the strong winds, by midafternoon much of the fleet was on a record pace—with the gentlemen's boats, such as Richard Winning's striking *Winston Churchill* and Tony Mowbray's beloved *Solo Globe Challenger*, in the rear.

Few in the fleet were alarmed by Peter Dunda's storm warning, which was broadcast at three P.M. by the *Young Endeavour*, an Australian Navy brigantine whose radio was staffed by race volunteers. Sailing off Australia means an occasional blow of 50 knots or more, especially in Bass Strait, and few in the race expected to finish without encountering such winds. "The warning on Saturday didn't CONTINUED ON PAGE 202

FULL FATHOM FIVE

Nokia survives the growing storm, December 27. *Inset, Sayonara* sails down the Tasmanian coast, December 28, on its way to a first-place finish.

and also to Pennsylvania, where he has a 400-acre estate, Rainbow Farms, near a place called Eagles Mere.

Marden's preoccupation with Chinese calligraphy inspired what are arguably his greatest, certainly his most ecstatic paintings: the *Cold Mountain* series (1988–91). These commemorate the so-called Cold Mountain poet, a seventh-century Chinese hermit named after the holy mountain where he had his hermitage. In these six huge paintings (not to speak of numerous related drawings and a suite of etchings), Marden animates the calligraphic characters in the poet's formulaic couplets and transforms them into a layered tangle of dancing, proliferating strands. In their intricacy and density, the *Cold Mountain* paintings recall Jackson Pollock, one of whose dried-up pots of silver paint Marden keeps as a sacred relic in his New York studio; for better or worse, however, Marden's work is less tortured, more lyrical than Pollock's.

In 1995, Marden harnessed his work to yet another Asian art form. On a trip to China he visited the Garden for Lingering in Suzhou, with its celebrated centerpiece, the Cloud-Capped Peak, a natural rock formation like a column of petrified smoke. The "flow of energy" from the Cloud-Capped Peak has fueled much of Marden's recent work. He was also very taken with the cave paintings at Dunhuang—especially those depicting the "Ribbon Dance," which inspired the joyous *Chinese Dancing* in the Dallas show. That kind of movement, Marden says, is figural. "You're painting it with a long brush, so you're moving. In a sense it becomes a transference of your own dance to the canvas." Marden's concept of dance was reinforced by reading Robert Graves's *Greek Myths*: "I like it when [Graves] talks about the Muses as maenads, these Bacchanalian women wildly dancing in the mountains. That's what I was working with in *The Muses*. Just a group of figures dancing, the Peloponnesian landscape, Dionysian madness." Look hard into this painting and you will be able to distinguish in the tangle of lines the nine Muses, who stand for music, poetry, history, science, and the arts. (Too bad there are no Muses of painting or sculpture.) This work also envisions something more personal: the artist's beautiful, maenadic daughters cavorting on the slopes of Hydra much as the Muses supposedly did on Mount Olympus. As for the "Dionysian madness," I suspect this is what Marden kept hidden away underneath all those volcanic deposits of paint. □

Aussie Race

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 165 say anything more than what you could expect in any Hobart," recalls Rod Hunter, navigator on the Adelaide yacht *VC Offshore Stand Aside*. "It was for the 40s and 50s, a southerly buster. We sail in 40s and 50s all the time. It's normal. It's just a fact of life." Recalls Ellison, "There was a sense of 'Storm? Piece of cake!' Of course, no one said anything about a hurricane."

Back in the pack, the nine veteran Tasmanian sailors aboard *Business Post Naiad* greeted news of the storm warning with hearty laughter. Almost all had been sailing Bass Strait since they were boys, and they were accustomed to fighting the strait's steep, choppy waves and 50- and 60-knot winds. The skipper, Bruce Guy, speculated that the coming blow might actually give them an advantage the next day. "The guys from behind, who haven't been in Bass Strait before, they're going to get a bit of a dustup," observed Rob Matthews, the housing inspector.

The powerful wind at their backs, Ellison would later say, should have been a warning. It was "explosive, gusty," he notes, and it quickly began to take a toll on *Sayonara*. By late afternoon, as *Sayonara* and *Brindabella* left the rest of the fleet miles behind, the gusts had blown out three different spinnaker sails aboard Ellison's boat and had snapped the brass fitting of one of the spinnaker poles, damage Ellison had never seen before. But the boat was simply going too fast for this to worry anyone. That afternoon *Sayonara* hit a boat record, 26.1 knots, and was already on pace to break *Morning Glory*'s 1996 record time.

As darkness fell around nine, the wind swung around, as predicted, and began blowing hard out of the south. Raindrops pelted *Sayonara* as the boat crossed the incoming front, and the crew of 23 slipped into their bright-red heavy-weather gear. By 11, *Sayonara* was plowing into a 40-knot head wind. Waves grew to 15, then 20 feet, and almost everyone on board began to experience seasickness. "Anyone that said he didn't get sick out there is lying," recalls Ellison. "We had guys who've sailed the Whitbread [round-the-world race] puking their guts out, like five times in the first 12 hours. We were on the Jenny Craig plan—a great weight-loss experience."

By the time *Sayonara* entered Bass Strait after midnight, Ellison was having difficulty driving the boat. Heavy, dark clouds hung down, obscuring the horizon, and the flying spume and rain stung his face. A small rip developed in the mainsail, and when crewmen went to fix it they found the giant sail was tearing out the metal track that fastened it to the mast. Around three Ellison realized he couldn't take it anymore.

"You take over," he yelled to Brad Butterworth, a veteran New Zealand sailor standing to his side in the cockpit. "Get me outta here!"

Ellison went belowdecks to check the weather forecasts with his navigator, Mark Rudiger. Just as he walked up to the nav station, Ellison saw a new satellite photo downloading onto one of Rudiger's laptops. Stunned, both men looked for several seconds at the ominous doughnut of white clouds forming above Bass Strait.

"Mark," Ellison finally said, "have you ever seen anything like that before?"

Rudiger slowly shook his head. "Well, I have," Ellison said. "It was on the Weather Channel. And it was called a hurricane. What the fuck is that thing doing out here?"

Will Oxley, a strapping 33-year-old marine biologist, crouched on the deck of *B-52* and watched the front move in. Lightning zigzagged across the horizon to the south, and as the first raindrops wet his face, Oxley felt satisfied. He glanced at his watch. It was 12:15. As the boat's navigator, Oxley had worked with "Clouds" Badham to predict that the front would hit them at midnight.

For *B-52*, like many of the 114 boats trailing *Sayonara*, the night passed uneventfully. At 8:30 the next morning, as winds continued gusting up toward 50 miles an hour, Oxley stepped down the companionway to check the latest weather reports. He faxed the weather bureau in Melbourne for a coastal update and was surprised to see that winds off Wilson's Promontory, the southernmost point in Australia, had registered 71 knots—over 80 m.p.h.—two hours earlier. While the peninsula was well west of the racecourse, it served as an early indicator of the winds Oxley expected to blow through the strait. He guessed they might hit a 60-knot blow, which worried him. He listened to an oil-rig weather forecast and heard the same. Oxley caucused with skipper Wayne Millar, and the two men agreed that by later that day they would be in "survival mode" for several hours but should be able to begin racing again by the evening. "Looks like it's going to be a bit bouncy, mates," Oxley told the crew.

All that morning as the fleet moved briskly south, the winds picked up to 30, 40, then 50 knots. By noon some boats were already retiring from the race. At 10:30 the race's first major casualty oc-

curred when the mast broke aboard *Team Jaguar,* a sleek 65-footer owned by the prominent Sydney attorney Martin James, forcing the boat to wait nearly 18 hours for rescue by a fishing trawler.

2:30 P.M.

Simon Clark sat on the starboard bow of *Stand Aside* and dangled his legs into the booming waves. Clark, a 28-year-old who had sailed since he was a boy, and three friends had joined up with Adelaide businessman James Hallion's eight-man crew, and Clark thought Hallion had driven a bit conservatively early in the race. Nevertheless, they had busted down the coast at an average speed of 15 knots, even hitting 18 and 19 at times.

Around noon, as winds continued to pick up, they had taken down the mainsail and put up a storm jib, expecting heavy weather. Clark wasn't too worried, nor was anyone on board. By two, winds were hitting just 35 or 40 knots, while Clark had seen only one "green wave"—that was what he called it—a rogue wall of water that looked as if it had risen straight from the mossy bottom of Bass Strait.

Suddenly he saw another. As the wave rose up before him, Clark thought it looked like a tennis court standing on end.

"Bear away!" he shouted.

Hallion was unable to steer down the wave. The boat rode high on the wave and slithered to the left. Just then the wave crested and crashed onto the deck, rolling the boat hard to port. As *Stand Aside* fell down the face of the wave, its roll continued. For a fleeting second it felt as if they were airborne. Then they landed, upside down.

Slammed facedown into the roiling ocean, Clark felt a terrific pain in his left knee; his anterior cruciate ligament had snapped like a rubber band. Underwater, he unhooked his safety harness and floated to the surface just as the boat righted itself. Pulling himself back on board, Clark was stunned to see a seven-foot gash in the cabin; the mast lay draped over the side, broken. His crewmates were no better off. His friend Mike Marshman had somehow lost a chunk of his finger. Another man had broken ribs, still another a nasty cut across his forehead. Within minutes *Stand Aside* began sending out the first of what would be many Maydays that afternoon.

3:00 P.M.

As the storm system intensified, the first to encounter the full force of its lashing winds was a group of a half-dozen yachts led by *Sword of Orion,* which was running seventh overall as the afternoon began. Like so many others, Rob Kothe, the boat's 52-year-old skipper, had shrugged off the storm warnings, but as he staggered down the companionway to call in *Sword*'s position at the 2:05 radio check, he realized conditions were growing far worse than anything they had been warned of. Now about 100 miles south of the sleepy port of Eden, Kothe's boat began to experience winds above 90 miles an hour. The sharp, spiking green waves towered 40 and 50 feet over the boat, crashing into the cockpit, churning his crew's bodies like laundry and stretching their safety lines to the breaking point.

In a race, weather data is a jealously guarded secret, something boats rarely share. As Kothe sat at his radio console belowdecks wiping seawater from his face, he tuned his HF dial to the race frequency and listened as boat after boat, going in alphabetical order, radioed in its position and nothing more. When it came to the *S*'s, Kothe listened to *Sayonara*'s position report, then made a decision that probably saved many lives: he gave a weather report. "The forecast is for 40 to 55 knots [of wind]," Kothe announced to the fleet. "We are experiencing between 65 and 82. The weather is much stronger than forecast."

Kothe listened as the radio operator aboard *Young Endeavour,* obviously struck by news of winds approaching 100 miles an hour, repeated the warning to the fleet. Back in the pack, about two dozen boats, including the Queensland yacht *Midnight Special,* decided to quit the race and head for the port of Eden.

3:15 P.M.

Tucked away on an inland plateau two hours from the sea, the drowsy Australian city of Canberra is one of those kit-designed capitals where office workers and diplomats brown-bag their lunches around concrete fountains and sterile, man-made lakes. Downtown, the airy, third-floor war room of the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, lined with purring Compaq desktops and sprawling maps of the continent, could pass for the office of almost any government bureaucracy, a geological survey maybe, or a census bureau. But the tiny red target symbols that began popping up on Rupert Lamming's screen that afternoon weren't minerals or voters. They were distress calls.

When Lamming, a sober 41-year-old with 15 years in the merchant marine behind him, arrived for his shift at three, there was just a single target in Bass Strait, and it appeared to be a false alarm. A Thai-registered freighter, *Thor Sky,* had radioed in that it had accidentally activated its forearm-size emergency beacon, known as an Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB). Every hour, one of seven satellites in polar orbit—three Russian, four American—tracks across Bass Strait; the EPIRB's signal bounces off these satellites, then ricochets down through ground stations in Queensland, Western Australia, and New Zealand to the computers on Lamming's pristine white countertop.

Trouble was, *Thor Sky*'s beacon broadcast at 406 megahertz; clicking his mouse on the red target on his computer screen, Lamming saw that the beacon emanated from an older, smaller model, broadcasting at 121.5 megahertz. Aware that the Hobart fleet was sailing into treacherous weather, Lamming decided to take no chances. He had a colleague dial a charter air service in Mallacoota, a tiny beach town near the continent's southeastern tip. A half-hour later the plane radioed back: it had a Mayday from a yacht named *Stand Aside.*

3:35 P.M.

After finishing his impromptu weather report, Rob Kothe emerged onto the deck of *Sword of Orion* to find that the winds had suddenly fallen to 50 knots—"a walk in the park," as he later put it. Had the storm passed? Or were they merely in its eye? At 3:35—he looked at his watch—Kothe got his answer. As if a door had swung open, the winds slammed back hard, spiking up above 80 miles an hour. Kothe gave orders for everyone but two crewmen, a young bowman named Darren Senogles and the 33-year-old Olympic yacht racer Glyn Charles, to remain below. Kothe ran down the companionway, then radioed the *Young Endeavour* that *Sword of Orion* was quitting the race and heading back north, toward Eden.

Sword's decision to turn north, however, sent it back into the strongest winds wrapped around the eye of the storm. "The storm," Kothe later observed, "didn't give a rat's ass whether we were still racing or heading to port." After 15 minutes, as Kothe hunched over the radio, he felt the boat rising up an especially steep wave. Suddenly *Sword* rolled upside down and they were airborne, falling down the face of the wave for a full two seconds, until Kothe felt his boat hit the ocean with a sickening crack. Seconds later the boat rolled back over, righting itself, and he found himself facedown on the floor of the cabin, bound up with ropes and shattered equipment as if he were a broken marionette. As Kothe struggled to regain his footing, he heard Darren Senogles's waterlogged screams from above deck: "Man overboard! Man overboard! Man overboard!"

It was Glyn Charles. When the wave hit, Charles had been at the helm, attempting to muscle the seven-foot-wide wheel through oncoming waves. The force of the wave apparently swung the boom around

like a baseball bat into a fastball; it struck Charles in the midsection, driving him against the spokes of the wheel and snapping his safety harness. As everyone else scrambled up onto the broken deck, Charles could be seen in the water, about 30 yards away.

"Swim! Swim!" people began shouting as Senogles frantically wrapped himself in a long rope and prepared to dive in after his friend. Charles, obviously stunned, raised a single arm, as if the other was injured. Someone threw a life ring toward him, but Charles was upwind, and the ring sailed helplessly back onto the deck.

Just then another huge wave broke and boiled onto the deck, knocking people and equipment about. By the time Kothe regained his feet, Charles was 150 yards off. The roll had actually torn the deck loose from the cabin below, and the men on deck, crouching unsteadily, were powerless to retrieve the struggling Brit. In the roiling seas Charles could be seen only when he crested a wave. Everyone watched in agony for a seemingly endless five minutes as he floated farther and farther from the boat. And then he was gone.

Kothe had already raced to the radio and began sending out an urgent Mayday. But the boat's mainmast lay broken in five places and had lost its aerial. Kothe broadcast Maydays for a solid two hours, but no one in a position to help Glyn Charles heard a word Kothe said.

4:00 P.M.

The storm system's hurricane-force winds and steep black waves had begun to engulf the rest of the fleet. Aboard *Solo Globe Challenger,* Tony Mowbray thought he was handling the mountainous seas well. In 32 years of sailing, he had never seen such conditions. The waves weren't normal waves. He thought of them as cliffs—cliffs of water—that rose to impossible heights and suddenly fell onto his boat, one after another, with a stultifyingly rhythmic Bang! ... BANG! ... Bang! When a large wave landed atop you, all you could do was hold on to something and twist your body away as the boat shuddered with the impact; if it struck you square in the ribs, it felt like a Mike Tyson body shot. Mowbray had pulled down all his sails a bit early, at noon, just to be safe. He had heard *Sword of Orion*'s weather warning, but thought he could still make it across the strait.

But *Solo* couldn't survive the marine equivalent of a one-two punch. Mowbray was below when the first wave socked it in the bow, swinging it around for the enormous 65-foot wave that suddenly reared up behind the boat and fell on top of it. The gleaming white yacht lurched to port and fell sideways. Then it rolled to 145 degrees and seemed to dig in as the mighty wave shoved it through the ocean, not quite facedown in the water, for what Mowbray later estimated was a full 20 seconds. The force of the "shove" shattered the interior cabin's seven-foot skylight. Seawater poured in.

When the boat finally righted itself, Mowbray charged up on deck to see what fate had befallen the four crewmen there. Glen Picasso, a 40-year-old coal miner, was in the water clinging to the stern; he had been pulled behind the boat by his safety line and had sustained broken ribs. Tony Purkiss lay on the floor of the cockpit, his head drenched in blood from a deep cut. But it was 45-year-old Keir Enderby who was in the worst shape. The mast and rigging, broken into pieces by the force of the wave, had fallen across his legs. He was screaming, "Get it off me!" Hurriedly Mowbray and others shoved the mast into the sea, then took Enderby below and tucked him into a bunk. Picasso soon followed, overcome by shock. The emergency beacon was activated.

Those uninjured bailed out the cabin, stuffed sleeping bags into the gaping hole where the skylight had been, and prayed. Mowbray spent the next few hours staring at the waves and hoping his crippled boat wouldn't founder. "I'll never look at waves the same again," he says. "Those waves were out to kill you. That was our attitude. You could see death working in that water."

5:00 P.M.

As her medevac helicopter struggled to maintain its position in the shrieking winds 50 feet above *Stand Aside,* Kristy McAlister leaned far out its right-hand door and gulped. McAlister, a trim, girlish 30-year-old paramedic with Canberra's South-Care helicopter-ambulance service, had been working on choppers for only two months, and this was her first ocean rescue. Below was a scene unlike any she had dreamed of: evil black waves, as blocky and stout as apartment buildings, crashing this way and that. The helicopter's altimeter swung wildly, registering 60 feet one moment, 10 feet the next, as a dark wave swept up beneath its underbelly. The winds hit McAlister's face with a force she knew only from sticking her head out the window of a car speeding down the highway at 80 miles an hour. One thought crossed her mind: Oh, God ...

Another helicopter had already winched eight sailors out of a life raft beside the boat and then, running low on fuel, had wheeled about and headed back toward land. Below, a man was in the water, floating briskly away from the raft. McAlister, wearing a black wet suit, a navy-blue life vest, and a lightweight helmet, had no time to waste. Grabbing an oval rescue strop, she held her breath—and jumped.

The water felt like concrete as she hit it, and a wave immediately drove her under, down, down, forcing seawater into her mouth and down her throat. She fought her way to the surface, coughing and hacking, and found herself barely 10 feet from the man loose in the ocean.

"I'm going to put this over your head and under your armpits!" she shouted, indicating the strop. "You must keep your arms down or you will fall out!"

The man nodded just as a wave drove both of them underwater for several seconds. When they returned to the surface, the helicopter winched them both skyward.

Within minutes McAlister had returned to the roiling ocean, this time landing beside the life raft, where two shivering sailors awaited rescue. When the last man was safely aboard, McAlister rolled to one side and began vomiting seawater. Ten minutes later she was still retching.

5:15 P.M.

As the winds swirled and howled around them, the nine Tasmanian sailors aboard *Business Post Naiad* remained in high spirits. Roughly 10 miles east of *Sword of Orion,* they had listened to Rob Kothe's weather report, but had decided to press on. Rob Matthews, like almost everyone else on board, had survived winds of more than 70 knots in Bass Strait, and had been forced down to "bare poles," with all sails lowered. A few minutes past five, Matthews was behind the wheel, attempting to drive the boat's bow through the incoming waves, when he heard Tony Guy, Bruce's nephew, pipe up behind him. "I've lit a fag, Robbie," said Guy, proudly displaying a cigarette.

"Tony reckons he's going to have a smoke in 70-knot winds," Matthews yelled to Steve Walker, the boat's helmsman. Walker grinned.

Moments later, as Matthews attempted to maneuver the boat up the face of a 50-foot wave, the boat slid sideways just as the wave crested. To the dismay of Matthews and the four other sailors on deck, *Business Post Naiad* rolled to its left and plummeted down the wave's face, then rolled still further as it fell. It landed upside down in the trough of the wave with a thunderous crack. All five men were plunged facedown into the raging sea. Then, almost before anyone had a chance to realize what had happened, the boat righted itself. The five men, thrown over the starboard side to the end of their safety lines, popped to the surface to find the deck suddenly awash.

"Fuck, the mast is over the side!" someone yelled.

It was true. The mast had broken in half and was lying across the starboard side, its top buried in the waves. "That wasn't in the bloody brochure," Phil Skeggs said, try-

ing to make a joke. But as the full crew of nine men struggled to pull the broken mast back on deck, their mood turned somber. For *Business Post Naiad*, the race was over. Grudgingly the crew agreed to rev up the motor and set a course toward Eden.

5:30 P.M.

"Mayday! Mayday! Mayday! Here is *Winston Churchill, Winston Churchill.* We are taking water rapidly! We can't get the motor started to start the pumps! We are getting the life rafts on deck!"

His mast and long-range aerials still intact, Richard Winning broadcast a furious Mayday even as seawater lapped onto the deck and the rest of the crew dropped the boat's life rafts over the side. Winning had been at the helm a half-hour before when a sneering green wave had slapped the old wooden yacht, knocking it flat on its side. Below, John Stanley, a taciturn 51-year-old Sydney marina manager, had been thrown into a wall as the three starboard windows imploded and foamy saltwater sprayed across the cabin. When the boat righted itself, Stanley noted with horror that a full six feet of *Churchill*'s inner bulwarks was gone. "Must've sprung a plank!," Stanley yelled to Winning.

They were going down fast. As seawater began sloshing across the deck, Winning and his eight crewmates, ranging from a Sydney merchant banker to a friend's 19-year-old son, scrambled into the life rafts—Winning, the boy, and two others in one, Stanley and four friends in the other. The inflatable black rubber rafts were both topped with bright-orange canopies, which could be tied shut, though seawater still poured in, forcing the men to bail constantly. As *Churchill* sank, Winning managed to tie the two life rafts together, but the waves tore them apart barely 10 minutes later. The two boats, climbing, then falling down the faces of 50-foot waves, lost sight of each other soon after. Winning could only hope his Mayday would be answered.

6:15 P.M.

On the deck of *B-52*, Mark Vickers, a 32-year-old ceramic-tile layer, was standing at the giant, seven-foot wheel when he caught a glimpse of a mammoth wave rising up behind the boat. A wall of bluish-green water that towered over the boat's mast—Vickers later estimated its height at 60 feet or more—the wave began to crest and fall forward just as he called out to his friend Russell Kingston, who was crouched forward.

"Oh, shit, Russell!," Vickers called out. "This one's gonna hurt!"

With that the massive wave came crashing down directly onto the boat. *B-52* half rolled, half pitchpoled—an end-over-end flip—and landed upside down. The wave had hit with such force that Vickers was driven through the wheel's spokes, breaking them and badly denting the wheel. For several seconds he felt as if he were inside a blender as the sea furiously tossed him about. Coming to his senses, he opened his eyes and at first saw only blackness. Disoriented, he glanced upward and saw light flashing through portals in the ship's hull. Only then did he realize the boat was upside down and he was beneath it.

He couldn't swim free. The rope to his safety harness was wrapped twice around the wheel. He unhooked the harness but still couldn't find a way clear of the lines and equipment swirling around him. Eventually, with his breath running out, he kicked down and swam out, coming to the surface about 10 feet from the boat's stern. He saw Kingston clinging to ropes at the overturned boat's edge.

The boat was drifting away from Vickers, and quickly. Exhausted, he began dog-paddling faster and faster, but the boat seemed only to be pulling away, eventually reaching a distance of about 100 feet. Somehow, with a helpful wave or two and the last of his energy, he reached a rope leading to the boat just as it righted itself.

The rest of the crew scrambled up the companionway to find the mast broken and deep cracks zigzagging through the deck. They activated an emergency beacon, began bailing, and prayed they could make it through what promised to be a long night.

7:00 P.M.

Peter Joubert, a wry 74-year-old engineering professor at the University of Melbourne, had quickly grown tired of fighting the waves in this, his 27th Hobart. The spume blasting his 43-foot *Kingurra* felt like a pitchfork jabbing into his face; the only way he could steer was to wear goggles. Around six he curled up in a bunk and fell into a deep sleep, leaving the driving to the group of younger men who had the energy to fight the waves.

At seven Joubert woke with a start to the sound of a "horrific crash like none I'd ever heard before." The boat pitched hard to port, and he felt a massive pain spread across his chest; a slumbering crewman in another bunk had flown across the cabin, slamming into his ribs, breaking several and rupturing his spleen, Joubert later learned. As seawater gushed into the cabin, he lurched out of the bunk and crawled to the nav station, where his 22-year-old grandson helped him flip on the pumps. Glancing up the companionway, he saw three crewmen, including his friend Peter Meikle, lifting an American named John Campbell, 32, back on deck.

Just then Joubert heard someone cry, "Man overboard!" It was Campbell. Halfway back onto the boat, he had slipped out of his jacket and safety harness and slid back into the ocean, wearing nothing but long underwear.

Joubert grabbed the radio. "Mayday! Mayday! Mayday! We have a man overboard!" he shouted.

As Joubert began to go into shock, Campbell floated swiftly away from the boat. *Kingurra*'s motor wouldn't start; the storm jib was shredded. There was no way to retrieve him.

"Mayday! Mayday!," Joubert repeated. "We need a helicopter!"

About 7:20 P.M.

Barry Barclay, the 37-year-old winch operator on a Dauphin SA 365 helicopter operated by the Victoria Police air wing, had just finished refueling at his base in Melbourne when the call came in that racers were in trouble. Scrambling east over the mountains known as the Great Dividing Range, Barclay and his two crewmates stopped to refuel once again, at the dirt airstrip in Mallacoota, before heading out into the howling winds in Bass Strait. First ordered by the Maritime Safety Authority's war room to rescue sailors off *Stand Aside*, Barclay's crew detoured en route when word came of a man overboard off *Kingurra*. Cutting through the swirling clouds at speeds topping 200 miles an hour, the helicopter reached *Kingurra*'s last reported position in 10 minutes—only to find nothing there. "I think we've overshot them!" pilot Daryl Jones shouted. "I'm heading back!"

Just then Barclay spotted a red flare arcing into the sky. Jones made for it. It was from *Kingurra*. Barclay hailed the boat on his radio. In a shaky voice Joubert told him Campbell had last been seen about 300 yards off the port bow. Jones wheeled the copter around as Barclay scanned the seas below. It was almost impossible to see. Even at an altitude of 300 feet, the waves seemed to be reaching for them, trying to suck them into the sea.

"Got something!" yelled Dave Key, another crew member. Barclay hung out of the copter's left-hand door and saw a white life ring winking among the waves; he thought he saw someone waving from inside it. But as they neared its position, the ring shot high in the air and flew off, tumbling crazily over the wave tops. There was no one inside.

Just then, out of the corner of his eye, Barclay caught a flash of movement. Peering down through the spume, he could just make out a man in the water, clad in blue long johns, waving. It was Campbell.

"I've got him! I've got him!," Barclay shouted.

Hovering above him, Barclay played out a hundred feet of wire cable and slowly lowered Key into the ocean. Three times he raised and lowered Key, like a tea bag, as the waves engulfed him and drove him under. When Key finally reached Campbell he was limp, at the edge of consciousness, and unable to help as the paramedic tried to slip the strop over his head. Eventually Key got him into the strop, and Barclay began winching them toward the helicopter.

Just as the two men were about to reach the open doorway, the winch froze. Barclay hurriedly cycled through a series of switches, trying to unlock it. It was no use. Campbell and Key hung two feet below the doorway, Campbell too exhausted to pull himself into the copter. Finally, giving up on the winch, Barclay reached down, grabbed Campbell by his underwear, and yanked him into the aircraft. Key soon followed. Campbell lay on his back, saying over and over, "Thank you thank you thank you thank you."

8:00 P.M.

By late Sunday afternoon *Sayonara* had been pushed well east of the cyclonic winds that were smashing the rest of the fleet. Eighty miles northeast of Tasmania, however, Ellison's boat suddenly began to encounter conditions worse than anything it had seen so far. A high-pressure system had developed east of Hobart, and where it brushed against the raging low the seas had taken on the character of an industrial clothes washer. *Sayonara* would surge to the top of a wave, then free-fall three, four, sometimes five seconds before landing in the trough behind it. On deck, this sent men flying up toward the rigging, then slammed them down hard each time the boat landed.

When Phil Kiely, the 44-year-old head of Oracle's Australian operation, shattered his ankle and had to be tucked into a bunk writhing in pain, Ellison began to grow worried. It wasn't just bones breaking that concerned Ellison; it was the boat. At least one of the titanium rope connectors on deck had exploded. The port-side jib winch, made of carbon fiber and titanium, had simply levitated from the deck.

Ellison had just gone belowdecks and climbed into a bunk when he noticed Mark Turner, whom everyone called Tugboat, tapping the carbon-fiber hull inside the bow.

"Tuggsy, whaddya doing?," Ellison asked.

"Trying to make sure the boat's O.K."

Ellison pulled himself out of the bunk and lurched over to where Turner stood. The constant crash of the waves, Turner discovered, had caused a section of the hull to begin delaminating, or wearing through; it was the worst thing that could happen on a carbon-hulled yacht. Turner took out a Magic Marker and drew a circle around the weakened area. There was no telling how long they had before it gave way.

"This is wacko!," Ellison shouted at Mark Rudiger, the serene navigator. "I'm not sure how much more of this the boat can take." Maybe, Ellison suggested, it was time to tack upwind, toward the shelter of the Tasmanian coastline.

"I'm not sure that's the right race decision," Rudiger averred. The move would give *Brindabella* a chance to catch them.

"Well, we can't win the race if the boat sinks," Ellison shot back. The two men talked it over with skipper Chris Dickson, who like Rudiger was reluctant to give *Brindabella* an opening. But in the end it was Ellison's boat—and Ellison's life. "Tack the fucking boat!" he ordered.

11:00 P.M.

By the time Brian Willey began his shift in the Canberra war room at 11, chaos reigned. Fifteen blinking EPIRB beacons pleaded for help on his computer screen, but there was no way to tell who was who, or who needed rescue the most. Almost every yacht in distress had lost its mast, and with it its radio aerials, leaving Willey and his dozen co-workers fumbling in the dark, confused and depressed. At nightfall four Australian Navy Sea King and Seahawk helicopters had flown toward the racecourse, but while the navy helicopters had night-auto-hover capabilities, they had no night-vision equipment. Willey was reduced to gathering scattershot and unreliable reports from the helicopters. The crews were so busy battling hurricane-force winds, normal conversation was all but impossible.

At one point Steve Francis, the 56-year-old former air-traffic controller in overall charge of rescue efforts that Sunday night, was in contact with one of the helicopters when he heard the pilot shout, "Look out for that wave!"

Francis thought the helicopter had gone down. Then the pilot came back on for a moment before shouting again, "Look out for that fucking wave!"

A burst of static came through the phone. Again Francis feared the worst. But the pilot came back on again. "Sorry, mate, had a bit of a problem there," he reported. "Trying to stay between the waves and the clouds, you know."

Precious hours were wasted looking for boats that no longer needed rescue. At one point Francis discovered that several yachts on his search list had been sighted, safely at anchor in the harbor at Eden. "They musta run outta beer," he grimly cracked.

When Rob Matthews emerged from belowdecks to take his turn behind the wheel of *Business Post Naiad*, the Tasmanian boat was a wreck. The splintered mast lay roped to the deck. Below, the contents of the refrigerator had spilled out and were sloshing about in eight inches of water along with shattered plates and cups; the stove had broken free of its mounting and was careening about with every wave. Bruce Guy, the boat's owner, flipped on the pumps, but they jammed with debris within minutes and failed. Reluctantly, the crew had activated an EPIRB and, after rigging a new aerial, had radioed in a request for a helicopter evacuation.

As Matthews took the helm, flying spume sandblasted his face. Phil Skeggs, the easygoing locksmith and the boat's least-experienced sailor, stood beside him in the cockpit, shouting out compass readings, as Matthews attempted to ram the boat through waves he could barely see. At one point the moon broke through the clouds, giving Matthews a view of the enormous waves just as they crashed onto the deck. He decided he liked it better in the dark.

Just past 11, after the moon disappeared, leaving them once more wrapped in darkness, Matthews felt the familiar sensation as they began to creep up the face of what seemed like an especially large wave. Then, suddenly, the boat was on its port side and they were airborne once again, falling down the face of the wave. In midair the boat overturned, landing upside down in the trough. Plunged underwater, tangled in a morass of ropes and broken equipment, Matthews held his breath. He tried to remain calm as he waited for the boat to stabilize, as it had before. When it didn't, he attempted to shed his safety harness so he could swim out from beneath the boat. But he couldn't unfasten the hook. Just as he was running out of breath, a wave tossed the boat to one side, allowing a shaft of air into the cockpit, then slammed the boat down on his head yet again.

Coughing and sputtering, Matthews was driven underwater once more. The cockpit walls jackhammered his head and shoulders. Now convinced that the boat would not right itself, he struggled again to get out of the safety harness. Finally managing to undo it, he kicked free of the boat and surfaced at the stern, where he grabbed a mass of floating ropes, "hanging on like grim death," as he later put it. There was no sign of Skeggs. "Phil! Phil!" he began shouting.

The scene belowdecks was bedlam. Water began gushing into the cabin from the companionway as the six men, trapped upside down, struggled to find their footing on the ceiling. The only light came from headlamps two of the crew had thought to grab, which now, as they lurched about, filled the cabin with a crazy, strobelike effect. Bruce Guy and Steve Walker, fearful that the boat was sinking, rushed to clear the companionway of debris, then

Aussie Race

kicked out two boards that blocked their exit to the sea below. In a minute the water level stabilized as the trapped air prevented more seawater from entering, leaving the men up to their waists in water. Guy began trying to muscle one of the black life rafts out the companionway.

"Bruce, wait," Walker said. "We're not taking on any more water. You're going to get another wave shortly. I reckon it'll flip us back over." Just then, the sound of a waterfall, the next giant wave, filled their ears. "We're goin' over!" someone shouted.

The boat flipped once more, sending everyone in the cabin toppling. As the boat righted itself, seawater began cascading over the cockpit into the cabin. Now Walker was certain they were about to sink. As others leapt by him to wade up on deck, Guy suddenly slumped into the water. Walker grabbed him before he went under. He held his friend's head and watched as his eyes rolled back, then shut. Guy, Walker realized, was having a massive heart attack; before he could do anything, Bruce Guy died in his arms. Walker dragged him to a bunk, where he cradled his head and attempted to clear his mouth, but it was too late.

Meanwhile, in the moments before *Business Post Naiad* righted itself, Rob Matthews had clung to the side of the boat, sitting on the broken mast in neck-deep water. As the waves tore at him, he saw he would need to raise himself onto the keel or risk being sucked into the sea. Exhausted, he was just about to set his feet on the submerged mast when the boat began to right itself. To his dismay, the mast beneath him shot upward, flipping him into the air like a flapjack. Matthews landed with a crunch in the cockpit just as the boat finished rolling over. He looked down and saw Phil Skeggs's motionless body, wrapped in a spaghetti of ropes on the floor of the cockpit. As his crewmates hustled up the companionway and administered CPR, Matthews was too exhausted to do anything but watch. Their efforts were in vain. Skeggs, the gentle locksmith, had drowned.

About 4:00 A.M.

The orange-canopied life raft holding John Stanley and his four friends from *Winston Churchill* began to disintegrate sometime after three that morning. By then everyone aboard was fighting hypothermia and injuries. An outgoing Sydney attorney, John Gibson—"Gibbo" to his mates—had cut two of his fingers down to the bone trying to manhandle a rope during their rushed exit from *Churchill* 12 hours before. Stanley had broken his ankle and torn a net of ligaments in his hip when a wave had tumbled the raft, wildly throwing the five men together. There was no first-aid kit, nor, aside from the biscuit Stanley had stashed in his jacket, any food.

The real problems had arisen after midnight. An unusually large wave—Stanley could often identify the big ones because they sounded like freight trains—had tossed the raft upside down, leaving all five men up to their necks in the water, their feet resting on the submerged canopy, the bottom of the raft inches above their heads. It was impossible to right the raft from inside. Someone would have to swim out through the submerged canopy opening, with no lifeline, and try to pull them upright. Jimmy Lawler, the Australian representative for the American Bureau of Shipping, said it wasn't possible. He couldn't get through the opening wearing a life vest, and wasn't willing to shed his vest.

In 20 minutes they began to run out of air. Stanley found himself gasping for breath. To get air, they agreed Lawler would use his knife to cut a four-inch hole in the bottom of the raft. He did so, and for a time they were actually comfortable. But then it happened: another wave flipped the raft upright again. Suddenly the five men found themselves sitting in a life raft with a constantly growing tear in its bottom. The weight of their bodies gradually ripped apart the underpinnings of the raft. In a half-hour they were forced back into the water, this time clinging to the insides of their now doughnut-shaped raft. They tried to maintain their spirits, but it was difficult. Other than Gibson, who kept up a steady patter of jokes, the men were too tired to talk much.

In the darkness before dawn no one heard the black wave that finally got them. One moment they were inside the raft, shoulder to shoulder, breathing hard. The next they were airborne, hurtling down the face of the gigantic unseen wave. Stanley was driven deep beneath the raft, but somehow managed to keep his hold on it. Fighting to the surface, he looked all around and saw nothing but blackness. "Is everyone here?" he shouted.

"Yeah!" he heard a sputtering voice answer to one side. It was Gibson, the only one of the five who had worn a safety harness he had clipped to the raft.

Stanley craned his head, looking for the others. His heart sank: about 300 yards back he could see two of the three men. He was never sure whom he missed: Lawler, John Dean, a Sydney attorney, or Mike Bannister. All three men were gone.

"We can't do anything for them," Stanley said. "It's impossible."

"Just hang on," Gibson said. "For ourselves."

Dawn, Monday

As the eastern horizon reddened around 4:30, the scene at the small airport in the resort town of Merimbula resembled something out of China Beach. At first light 17 aircraft were sent searching for *Winston Churchill*. The second priority, curiously, was finding Glyn Charles, who, in the unlikely event he was still alive, would have been in the water more than 12 hours.

Around six, David Dutton, a paramedic aboard one of the SouthCare helicopters flying out of Canberra, spotted a dismasted yacht southeast of Eden. Below him, *Midnight Special*, a 40-foot Queensland boat, was rolling violently. The boat had taken on the solemn air of a floating hospital. The crew, nine longtime friends who sailed out of the Mooloolaba Yacht Club, near the resort city of Brisbane, were older men, most in their 50s, with a variety of occupations and an even wider range of injuries. Ian Griffiths, a lawyer, had a broken leg and crushed cartilage in his back. Neil Dickson, a veteran ocean sailor who at 49 was the youngest crew member, had hit his head against the cabin ceiling during a rollover, which had knocked him momentarily unconscious and left him with a concussion. Peter Carter had crushed vertebrae in his lower back. The others had collected an assortment of cracked ribs and gashed foreheads.

On Sunday the crew had surprised themselves by surfing into Bass Strait in 18th place. Had they not ranked so high, Roger Barnett, the yacht club's commodore, felt, they might have headed back earlier. As it was, *Midnight Special* had plunged south through the mountainous waves until injuries incapacitated much of the crew. Around three P.M. the five men who jointly owned the boat had gathered belowdecks and engaged in a lively debate about whether to forge on. Dickson recalls that in the middle of this discussion, a gigantic wave struck the boat, flinging Griffiths across the cabin, breaking his leg and a large part of the ship's cupboard. That ended the debate. *Sword of Orion*'s three-o'clock report of 75-knot winds ahead of them in Bass Strait silenced any doubters.

A little after three the crew started the engine and began plowing back the 40 miles northwest toward Gabo Island. Conditions worsened as the boat fought heavy seas. Twice *Midnight Special* was slammed on its side, tossing the crew belowdecks, breaking noses and cracking ribs. Then, later that night, a giant wave crashed out of the darkness directly into the cockpit, rolling the three-year-old boat through a 360-degree arc. Windows smashed everywhere, and as water began pouring into the crushed cabin below, large cracks began to appear in the deck. Frantically, Neil Dickson began stuffing sleeping bags into the widening cracks in a vain attempt to maintain the integrity of the hull. When waves tore the sleeping bags out, the crew resorted to cramming spinnaker sails into the openings. The sails did the trick, but their trailing ropes fouled the boat's propeller, leaving *Midnight Special* dead in the water. The radios were destroyed, and an EPIRB was activated. As red flares from other boats lit the sky all around them, those who could spent the rest of the night bailing.

At dawn the crew spotted a P3C Orion flying overhead; it wagged its wings, buoying their spirits. Not long after, Dutton's chopper arrived, and he motioned for crew members to jump into the waves and begin swimming toward the dangling rescue strop. It was decided that David Leslie should go first. He was their doctor—well, a dermatologist—and could brief the rescuers on their injuries. Leslie plunged into the sea, swam toward Dutton, and slipped his upper body into the strop. Trevor McDonough, a 60-year-old bricklayer, and Bill Butler, a nursery owner, stood on deck and watched as Leslie was slowly lifted up toward the helicopter. The other six crew members stood safely belowdecks, at the bottom of the companionway, swapping smiles. "We're outta here!" someone said joyfully.

No one saw the wave. It hit without warning and, as Dutton and the helicopter crew looked on helplessly, rolled the boat upside down. The first thing Dickson knew, he was on his hands and knees in the pitch-dark cabin, with water inching up his thighs. This time Dickson wanted no part of any of his partners' debate; he just wanted out. Without a word he plunged headfirst into the flooded companionway. The exit was blocked by boards and debris, but he found an opening about two feet in diameter and managed to get his shoulders, then his waist through and into the swirling ocean outside. But then, as he fought to get his thighs through the hole, he became stuck. A rope had looped around his midsection and was holding him tight against the boat. Dickson frantically kicked his legs, trying to get loose.

Trapped beneath the boat, both McDonough and Butler fought to free themselves from entangling ropes; neither was able to do so. In fact, all three men—Dickson, McDonough, and Butler—were as good as dead. And then, with a vicious jerk, the boat swung around and righted itself. After several moments spent gasping for breath Dickson ripped himself free and charged up onto the deck, where he was met by this seriocomic image: Butler standing perfectly upright, mummylike, still trapped in ropes. McDonough lay in the cockpit, seawater streaming from his nose.

As the three men recovered, they were met by a sight that left no one laughing: Dutton's helicopter, low on fuel, was forced to head for land. As the helicopter flew off, Dickson and his crewmates could do nothing but watch, dumbfounded. The boat beneath was sinking slowly by the stern, and every wave threatened to roll it over once more. It took another unnerving half-hour before a second helicopter finally rescued the men on *Midnight Special*.

All down the east coast of New South Wales and out past Gabo Island, the rescues continued in the first hours after dawn. The remaining sailors aboard *Sword of Orion* scrambled aboard a hovering Seahawk, while a medevac out of Canberra winched the seven survivors off *Business Post Naiad*, leaving the bodies of Phil Skeggs and Bruce Guy to be picked up later. *B-52* struggled under its own power into Eden harbor just after lunchtime. In the hour before dawn the yacht's port-side windows had imploded, sending gushers of seawater below; the crew had somehow managed to nail wooden planks over the windows and had spent the rest of the morning bailing with buckets. Tony Mowbray's *Solo Globe Challenge* would be one of the last to reach port, limping into Eden on Wednesday morning.

Late Monday afternoon the lifeboat carrying Richard Winning and three other survivors from *Winston Churchill* was spotted, and everyone was winched aboard a waiting helicopter. Like those aboard *Churchill*'s other raft, Winning's group had capsized twice during the night. Unlike the occupants of the other raft, however, Winning had bravely swum outside and forcibly righted the rubber inflatable, which had then survived the night intact.

9:00 P.M.

Night began to fall with no sign of *Churchill*'s second life raft. At the rescue center in Canberra, hope was dwindling that the men would be found. At Merimbula the civilian aircraft—those without any night-rescue capabilities—began landing, one by one. None had seen anything that looked remotely like a life raft. Then, just after nine, a P3C Orion on its way back to Merimbula saw a light flashing in the darkening ocean below. Descending to 500 feet, the pilot spied two men clinging to a shredded orange life raft. It was John Stanley and "Gibbo" Gibson, still alive after 28 hours in the water.

"Gibbo!," Stanley rasped, swinging a handheld strobe. "I think they've seen us!"

Within minutes, during which the sun set, Lieutenant Commander Rick Neville had his navy Seahawk hovering 70 feet above Stanley and Gibson. Petty Officer Shane Pashley winched down a wire into the waves below and, as Neville fought to maintain position in the gusting winds, managed to get a rescue strop around

Aussie Race

Gibson. As the two men were lifted skyward, a terrific gust blew the Seahawk sideways, dumping the pair back into the waves. Neville swung the chopper around once more, and this time the two waterlogged men were successfully winched aboard.

It was too much for Neville. His Radalt auto-hover system was being overtaxed by the winds, and he was unwilling to send Pashley back into the ocean. Stanley, he decided, would have to make it into the rescue strop on his own. As Neville maneuvered the Seahawk back over the raft, Pashley dangled the strop down into the sea, and Stanley somehow grabbed it and hoisted his upper body into it. The winch lifted him into the air, but when he was 20 feet above the waves, Stanley felt a weight around his ankles and realized, to his dismay, that he was still hooked to his life raft, which was sagging in midair below him. Reluctantly he shrugged himself out of the strop and dropped like a stone back into the sea, where he managed to unhook the raft. Once again the strop was dangled to him, and once again he got into it. This time everything worked. After more than a day in the ocean, Stanley and Gibson were on their way home.

8:00 A.M., Tuesday

As *Sayonara* tacked the last mile up the Derwent River toward the Hobart docks, a small launch with a bagpiper aboard swung alongside. It was the most stunning sunrise Ellison had ever seen, splashes of rose and pink and five different hues of blue, and as the pipes played a mournful tune, the enormity of what the fleet had endured hit all 23 men aboard the winning yacht. *Sayonara*'s sideband radio had shorted out, and it hadn't been until late Monday afternoon that the crew learned of the tragedies in their wake. As they reached the dock and piled out to hug their loved ones, Ellison was overwhelmed. "It was an incredible moment of clarity, the beauty and fragility of life, the preciousness of it all; that's when people appreciated what we had been through," he recalls. "Having said that, if I live to be a thousand years old, I'll never do it again. Never."

Amid all-too-predictable recriminations, Hugo van Kretschmar, commodore of the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia, stoutly defended the club's decision to continue the race despite warnings of bad weather. Even as he announced an internal investigation, van Kretschmar pointed out, correctly, that the decision whether to race is traditionally left up to the skipper of each boat. Yacht-club officials, after all, had the same forecasts that every skipper had. As a result, few of the sailors who survived the race were willing to attack the organizers. One exception was Peter Joubert of *Kingurra*, who emerged from several weeks in the hospital sharply critical of race management. "The race organizers weren't properly in touch with what was going on out there—they just didn't know enough," Joubert says. "It's only a yacht race. It's not a race to the death." Outside Australia, the judgment was just as harsh. "They should have waited: there is ample precedent for waiting," notes Gary Jobson, the ESPN sailing analyst. "But race officials were under a lot of pressure. Live TV, all these people, a major holiday."

Three days after *Sayonara* crossed the finish line more than 5,000 people gathered on Hobart's Constitution Dock for a memorial service for the six men who died in the race. The funerals of Bruce Guy, Phil Skeggs, James Lawler, and Mike Bannister were to follow shortly; the bodies of John Dean and Glyn Charles have never been found. "We will miss you always; we will remember you always; we will learn from the tragic circumstances of your passing," van Kretschmar said as the muted bells of St. David's Cathedral rang out. "May the everlasting voyage you have now embarked on be blessed with calm seas and gentle breezes. May you never have to reef or change a headsail in the night. May your bunk always be warm and dry." □

Dominick Dunne

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 157 switching of place cards at the last minute, and I was quite aware of it that evening. "Thank God I didn't ask Ethel," I heard the hostess say in passing as she re-entered the living room to greet Sarge and Eunice Shriver.

Hi, Max. It's a little heavy going, isn't it? I had to have two cups of coffee.

—Senator Ted Kennedy, overheard talking to Georgia Democratic senator Max Cleland after one lengthy session of speeches.

It was interesting to watch it all from above. During breaks, you could hear senatorial conversations wafting up. Democratic senator Bob Kerrey of Nebraska took the most copious notes. He had an 8-by-10-inch notebook, and he wrote on both sides of the paper in complete sentences. After observing him for weeks, I began to wonder if maybe he was using the time to write a book. Republican senator Bill Roth of Delaware has the worst toupee. House manager Steve Chabot of Ohio has the worst comb-over; it comes from two directions. The most attentive individual was 96-year-old Strom Thurmond, Republican from South Carolina, who sat up rigidly listening to every word and never once nodded off. He went over to presidential counsel Cheryl Mills after she delivered her speech and gallantly congratulated her on it, even though he was going to vote to remove the president from office. Jesse Helms did nod off, fairly often in fact, with his head down on his chest. Colorado senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell, who used to be a Democrat and changed to a Republican, wears the only ponytail in the Senate. Without any sort of fanfare, he would pay for coffee for the tourists waiting in line outside the Capitol to get in to watch the trial. During breaks, Judge Rehnquist had tea and Edy's ice cream served to him by Senate doorkeepers.

I went to a Super Bowl Sunday party at the Georgetown home of Lloyd Cutler, former White House counsel for President Clinton, and his wife, the artist Polly Kraft. Polly's another one of the social forces in Washington. That was where I got to meet presidential special counsel Gregory Craig, one of the very classy members of the president's legal team, who had given a great speech early in the trial. He couldn't talk about the trial, being part of it, but he talked about his regular Sunday-morning football games with Stuart Taylor of *The National Journal* and Evan Thomas of *Newsweek*, two of President Clinton's severest critics. That's Washington, people said. Evan Thomas asked me if I knew Warren Beatty's phone number. He's writing a book about Bobby Kennedy and needed some information. Three of the couples I knew at the party had just come back from a large and very successful house party at Camp David, given by Bill and Hillary, as they all called the First Couple. They didn't want to be identified, but I found out from one of the group that Harvey Weinstein, the co-chairman of Miramax, and his wife had been there. Weinstein took along a print of *Shakespeare in Love*, but Hillary had already seen it at the premiere in New York. Carly Simon and her husband, James Hart, were also at Camp David, and a couple of Wall Street billionaires. Everyone spoke about the tenderness that had existed between Bill and Hillary throughout the weekend. "There was enormous affection," one said. "We took wonderful walks," said another. "The president was fascinating." All their memories were of a tranquil nature. I had to re-

THE INCREDIBLY CHARMED LIFE OF NATALIE

May 1999

WILL THE 'STAR WARS' QUEEN CHOOSE HARVARD OVER HOLLYWOOD?

BY LESLIE BENNETTS

MR. DUNNE GOES TO WASHINGTON

WHAT I SAW AT THE IMPEACHMENT TRIAL

BY DOMINICK DUNNE

THE PENTAGON'S DIRTY SECRET

THE MYSTERY BEHIND GULF WAR SYNDROME

BY GARY MATSUMOTO

DEATH AT SEA

BEHIND THE SCENES AT AN OCEAN-SAILING RACE GONE TERRIBLY WRONG

BY BRYAN BURROUGH

$3.95 U.S.
$4.95 CANADA + FOREIGN

05>
38020
0 31946 6 9

Plus:

JOHN RICHARDSON on BRICE MARDEN
WILLIE MORRIS on EUDORA WELTY
MICHAEL SHNAYERSON on DICK SNYDER
CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS on SIDNEY BLUMENTHAL
and DAVID HAJDU on DUKE ELLINGTON