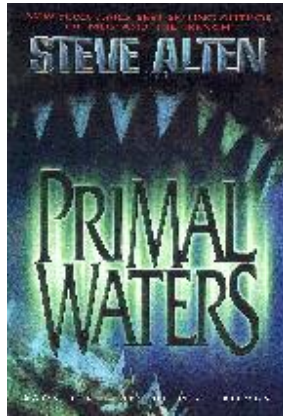


## SNEAK PEEK

### PRIMAL WATERS: Part 3 of the MEG Series written by Steve Alten All Rights Reserved



**Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light...**

—Dylan Thomas

## PROLOGUE

*Northwestern Pacific Ocean  
18,000 years ago*

*Late Pleistocene*

***And an Ice Age once again dominated the Earth. . .***

It had begun some 1.6 million years ago, ushering in a series of harsh glacial events lasting tens of thousands of years, sandwiched between thousands of years of inter-glacial warming periods. This last tropical interval would come to an abrupt end 74,000 years ago, when the Toba caldera, located on Samosir Island in Indonesia, erupted in one of the largest volcanic explosions the planet had ever experienced. The event released 1,700 cubic miles of debris into the atmosphere (Mount St. Helens released 1.5 cubic miles), which trapped the Earth's heat, triggering a runaway greenhouse effect.

As global temperatures rose, great sections of polar ice from Greenland and the Arctic Ocean began melting. This deluge of freshwater inundated the Gulf Stream's North Atlantic Current, the conveyor belt of warm water that transfers heat to Europe and the Northern Hemisphere. The freshwater diluted salt redistribution, preventing the process of down-welling, which, in turn, stifled the current's flow.

Temperatures plunged as much as 100 degrees. Snow blanketed the north, freezing herds of Mammoth as they grazed. The bright snow cover reflected the sun's energy back into space, dropping temperatures even farther.

The ice had reclaimed the planet with a fury.

Over the next 50,000 years, glaciers would continue to advance and grow, some of the continents of ice towering as high as 13,000 feet. In North America, the Wisconsinian ice sheet encroached as far south as Pennsylvania, Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, as far east as Long Island. In Europe, the Eurasian Ice Sheet covered Scandinavia all the way to the Barents Sea.

The Pleistocene Ice Age was a period of great transition. Some species evolved, while others perished. Among the primates, Neanderthal man yielded to Cro-Magnon, who, in turn, gave way to the ascension of *Homo sapiens* - modern man. With much of the water locked up as ice, sea levels dropped over four-hundred feet, altering migration patterns. Animals that survived the initial onslaught of ice were forced to relocate south in order to stay ahead of the weather. A land bridge formed in the Bering Strait, connecting the Eastern hemisphere with the West, allowing prehistoric man and beast to cross-over Asia into North America.

And while the cold affected the land dwellers, it also distressed the creatures that had dominated the seas for tens of millions of years. . .

The fish moves just beneath the surface of the ocean, its head--flat and wide, its hide--reddish brown. At thirty-two feet and 29,000 pounds, the whale shark is still a juvenile and will add another five tons and fifteen feet by the time it reaches maturity. Despite its prodigious size, the creature is a gentle giant, feeding

on fish larvae, krill, squid, and sardines.

The whale shark circles back suddenly, charging the surface to ram feed. The broad slit of its lower jaw yawns open, creating a suction that forces large volumes of krill and seawater against the brushlike gill rakers located towards the back of the shark's pharyngeal cavity. The bristles strain food from sea, allowing three hundred rows of file-like teeth to gnash the mouthful of planktonic organisms into pulp. The soup-like morsels are flushed down the whale shark's tight gullet, the seawater diverted out its five-slitted gills.

Slapping its heavy tail along the surface, the spotted shark turns upon its tiny prey again, unaware that it too is being stalked by a far larger adversary.

\* \* \*

The big female moves east through depths cloaked in perpetual darkness, guided by her primordial senses. At thirty-two tons, carcharodon Megalodon easily dwarfs the whale shark, at fifty-seven feet, the gargantuan cousin of the Great White is, by far, the largest fish in the sea.

Like other members of its species, the female is a rogue hunter, traversing the oceans in a seasonal migratory pattern that has remained uninterrupted since the day it was birthed. Fixed firmly atop the food chain, the Megalodon is the apex predator of all time, a creature as intelligent as it is formidable, challenged only by other members of its own kind--

--and a world undergoing evolutionary changes.

Endowed with size, power, six to seven inch serrated teeth, and senses that would put a nuclear submarine to shame, Megalodon has ruled the oceans for tens of millions of years. It has survived the cataclysms that wiped out the dinosaurs and adapted to climate changes that devastated other prehistoric marine species. But this latest Ice Age has done far more than simply cool the oceans, it has caused massive eustasis--a process that freezes titanic volumes of water. As a result, sea levels have dropped, creating land bridges that have cut off tropical currents, causing huge environmental extremes in ocean temperatures. Food chains have been altered, many wiped out.

Whales--staple of the Megalodon diet--have responded to these climatic changes by altering their own migration patterns, abandoning coastal areas for polar regions rarely inhabited by their monstrous enemies. While Megalodons' sheer size allows it to function in even the most extreme cold, the mature adults, bound by

an overwhelming sense of territoriality, are loathe to abandon their established domains. As such, the sharks are systematically starving themselves into extinction.

Female Megalodon are larger than their male counterparts, and this mature female is quite pregnant. Nestled within her swollen left oviduct are near-term embryos—live young—four-to-seven feet long, each weighing upwards of a thousand pounds. Undernourished, the unborn sharks typically subsist on ovulated, unfertilized eggs. With its mother's abbreviated feeding pattern interrupting nourishment in the womb, the surviving pups have instinctively turned to cannibalism, the larger infants killing and feeding upon their smaller, less fortunate siblings.

What was once a litter of thirteen has dwindled to eight.

The big female slows, making a slight course adjustment. A thin current of ocean streams inside her slack-jawed mouth, frozen in its demonic grin. Concealed behind this mask of complacency are rows of scalpel-sharp triangular teeth. The upper front anterior teeth are the largest, six-to seven inches in length, four inches wide along the root, the edges all finely serrated, like a steak knife. Behind each nightmarish tooth, folded back along the gum-line, are columns of replacement teeth, always ready to replace a damaged or lost member. Twenty-four rows of teeth span the upper two quadrants of the jaw, twenty-two rows occupying the lower, in a bite so wide and devastating it can engulf, crush, and swallow a small elephant.

Located along the underside of the female's snout is the ampullae of Lorenzini—dark jelly-filled capsules attuned to electrical discharges in saltwater. As the huntress turns, these receptors target faint electrical fields in the water.

The hungry female homes in on the electrical discharges generated by the whale shark's beating heart and moving muscles. She can feel the disturbances of her prey as it thrashes along the surface, she can taste the remnants of krill as the whale shark inhales the sea.

The female rises through sun-streaked curtains of gray, her snout pushing upward, drawing out her cantilevered upper jaw--

--suddenly breaking away, her primordial senses on fire.

Circling two hundred feet directly beneath the feeding whale shark is the male. At forty feet and twenty-six tons, he is still a juvenile, nearly a third smaller than his former mate and not nearly as broad. His

teeth are smaller--narrower and sharper--but he is swifter and far more aggressive than the near-to-term female, and a definite threat to her unborn pups.

Sensing the female, the agitated male banks away from the bottom and charges the surface, its upper jaw jutting forward, its fang-like rows of teeth fully exposed. Tail pumping harder, the male's soulless ebony eyes roll back an instant before--

Wa-boosh!

The sea erupts, the stunned whale shark exploding clear out of the surf, its impaled lower torso bursting open in crimson geysers, its broken body entrapped within the still-rising monster's puncturing open jowls.

The male Megalodon's upper torso seems to hang in the air for one horrifying moment, and then gravity takes over, thrusting both predator and prey sideways back into the sea.

Like a speared fish, the whale shark struggles to free itself.

Biting down harder, the male shakes its great head, losing half a dozen teeth in the process. Serrated edges saw through the whale shark's thick denticle-covered skin, the softer underbelly eviscerating within the male's mortal embrace. Several feet of intestines untangle from the gushing open wound as the Meg whips its conical head to and fro like a rabid dog, its serrated teeth slicing its prey to bits.

The pregnant female circles at a distance, wary of the overly aggressive male. Grapefruit-size nostrils inhale the pungent sea, her hunger peeking as she impatiently awaits the scraps.

Swarms of surgeonfish and mackerel storm the banquet, feasting on a blizzard of flesh and tissue, cartilage and gore.

Hours pass. Night falls, but the satiated male refuses to abandon its meal. The female leaves just before dawn, hunger and her unborn young gnawing at her gut.

For two days and nights she will trek east, devouring nothing larger than a tortoise as she follows a migration pattern genetically engraved upon her brain.

On the afternoon of the third day, the famished leviathan, close to death, arrives at the remote island chain.

# 1

*Tampa Bay, Florida*  
*Present Day*

The engine powered off and I knew I was in trouble. I kicked at the battery. . . nothing. The heavy Lexan nose-cone of the Abyss Glider sank, bobbing me upside-down along the surface like a cork. Staring into the depths of the Monterey Bay Canyon, I saw the female's conical head appear from the shadows, her ghostly albino glow paralyzing me in fear.

I watched as her hideous mouth yawned open, anticipating her next meal—me!

The thought of this enraged me. Reaching forward, I grabbed the emergency lever and turned it counterclockwise, then yanked it back, igniting the mini-sub's fuel. Instantly, my body was slammed backwards within the pod's safety harness as the mini-sub rocketed downward like a torpedo and into the awaiting gullet of my worst nightmare—

The telephone rings, shattering his concentration. Jonas Taylor grabs the cursed instrument off its cradle, strangling the receiver in his grip. "What?"

"Uh. . . Mr. Taylor?"

"Speaking."

"Sir, this is Ross Colombo."

"I don't know any Ross Colombo."

"With American Express. We spoke last week."

Christ. . .

"Sir, we still haven't received the payment, the one you assured me you had mailed."

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Jonas's blood pressure ticks a few notches higher. "Look, Russ--"

"Ross. Sir, did you send the check?"

"Sure, I sent it. Can't believe you haven't gotten it yet. Tell you what, call me next week if it still hasn't arrived."

"Could you tell me the check number?"

"My wife handles all that stuff, and she's not home. Call her back next week, okay?"

Jonas slams the phone on its receiver, causing the taser-like star pattern of his screen saver to evaporate back into text. *Damn bill collectors. . .*

He takes a deep breath. Stares at his computer monitor.

Writing his memoirs had been Terry's idea. To Jonas, it seemed like a waste of time, a last desperate attempt to regain his long-gone fifteen minutes of fame. Still, he had to make a living, and his once overflowing well of requests for speaking engagements had run dry long ago. *You're a has been, Jonas. Yesterday's news. The sooner you face that bit of reality, the sooner you can move on.*

"And do what?" he whispers aloud. "You're not a scientist and you're too old to be a submersible pilot." He rereads the last paragraph on screen and shakes his head.

Reviewing his life on paper had forced Jonas to come to grips with the reality of his life. He was almost sixty-five years old, at a time when most men his age thought about retirement. He glances at the stack of bills. *Yeah. . . retire to what? And from what? What have you even done with his life? What had happened to all those dreams?*

For that matter, what happened to his youth?

*Snap out of it, you big baby. You're not over the hill, you're just approaching the crest. So what if you've grayed a bit and your back feels like somebody ran over it with a pick-up truck. And who really cares if you can't run keep up with the other players on the basketball court or pump as much iron? Hey, at least you're still active. Most guys my age would. . .*

He stops himself.

You're not old, Jonas. . .you're just not young anymore.

The truth was, the more he wrote, the older he felt, and the more he came to realize how much of his life

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was based on illusions. The illusion of fame, of being important. He stares at the stack of bills. The illusion of being a good provider.

Jonas twists his head from one side to the other, his neck cracking like gravel beneath a tire. His daily existence is now dominated by the constant struggle to support his family. Health insurance, car insurance, mortgage payments, phone bills, electric bills. . . every month the mountain of debt gets bigger. He has borrowed against the house, maxed out his credit cards, dipped into the kid's college funds. . .and still the mountain grows, along with pessimism and the constant fear of poverty.

His eyes focus upon the top statement in the stack, his annual life insurance bill—the irony of his life.

*Bankrupt in life, rich in death. . .*

“Enough whining.”

He tosses the bill aside, then massages his temples, praying the spot in his vision is just the sun's glare on his monitor and not another migraine.

*Stay focused. Finish the book. Terry will sell it, and the rest will take care of itself. . .*

He returns to the keyboard.

”Darkness rushed at me, but before I could comprehend the consequences of my actions, I was jolted into unconsciousness. When I awoke, I was startled to still be alive, the pod still intact. The capsule rolled in the horrible darkness, the nosecone's exterior light occasionally illuminating refuse from the monster's last meal. A dolphin. Molten blubber. The upper torso of my former Naval commander—“

The heavy bass of gangsta rap pounds through the ceiling above his head.

Jonas stops typing. Looks up.

“Danny?”

No response.

“Danny!”

Jonas gets up from his desk. Walks to the staircase. “Danielle Kaye Taylor!”

No response.

Jonas's blood pressure creeps up another notch. Cursing beneath his breath, he climbs the worn beige-

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carpeted steps two at a time, turns right at the landing, then trudges down the hall to his daughter's room. Tries the handle. Locked, of course. Pounds on the door. Pounds again.

The door opens.

"What?" The blonde-haired seventeen year old stares back at her father, her Indigo-blue eyes furious.

"I'm trying to work."

"So? I live here, too."

"Can you just turn it down a bit?"

She lowers the volume, just enough so Jonas can comprehend the lyrics. "Geez, Dani, do you have to listen to that crap?"

"Dad, don't start--"

"A song about a three brothers gang-raping their mother?"

"It's just a song."

"Well I don't like what it's saying. Turn it off."

"Excuse me, but you can't tell me what to listen to. This happens to be a free country."

"The only thing free is what you're paying in rent. As long as you're living under my roof, you'll listen. Now turn it off."

She slaps at the CD player, shutting it off. "Two more months and I'll be eighteen, then I am so out of here."

"You'd better hope financial aid comes through, or you'll be commuting."

"Wrong. I've already decided, I'm not going to college."

"And what're you going to do to make a living? Waitress? Flip burgers?"

"Maybe I'll write my memoirs!" She slams the door in her father's face.

Good comeback. He pauses. Hears her crying. So much for my Father-of-the Year award. . .

Seeking absolution, he turns and knocks on his son's door. Opens it.

The twelve year old with the mop of brownish-red hair poking out from beneath the Philadelphia Eagles cap never looks up, too absorbed in his video game.

"David?"

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“I already did my homework.”

He kneels beside his son. Watches the boy’s hands adeptly work the controls—a replica of his old mini-sub.

On screen, the blunt white nose of the Megalodon rises, its jaws chomping down upon the fluke of a fleeing Killer Whale. Crimson blood pours from the wound, dispersing across the animation like smoke from a chimney.

ORCA. MORTAL WOUND: 250 POINTS. CONTINUE FEEDING.

“Why do you always control the shark? Why not the mini-sub?”

“Angel’s more fun.”

The image of a torpedo-shaped mini-sub soars by. David manipulates the controls, sending the Megalodon after it.

“You like stalking your old man, huh?”

“It’s a thousand points.”

“A thousand points. Be sure to engrave that on my tombstone, will you?”

“Shh!”

Jonas ignores the impulse to shut-off the cursed video game off, a reminder of a life that could have been. Endorsements, merchandising. . . all gone.

Gone with his youth.

He turns and leaves. Pauses again at Dani’s door. Hears her talking on the phone, complaining about her life in some adolescent code.

The illusion of parenthood. . .

The front door opens. “Jonas?”

He heads downstairs. Greets his wife with, “Where the hell have you been? I’ve been calling you for hours.”

“I told you, they disconnected my cell phone yesterday.” Terry Taylor’s long onyx hair is pulled up in a tight bun, accenting her Asian features. Twelve years his junior, she is still quite the beauty. “How come you’re not working?”

“I can’t work in this house, all I get is constant interruptions.”

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“Since you’re not working, can you get the groceries out of the trunk?”

Jonas sighs. Heads outside to the SUV in his stocking feet. Gathers as many plastic bags from the open rear hatch as he can handle, then glances at the car parked next to his wife’s. Notices the dent in the hood.

Registers the twinge in his left arm.

Jonas drops the groceries. Examines the hood, which no longer seals shut.

It just keeps getting better. . .

“Terry!”

She pokes her head out the front door. “What’re you screaming about?”

“Did you see the hood of the Chrysler?”

“I saw it. She says it happened last night while she was parked.”

“Where did she park? At a demolition derby? Damn car costs us two-fifty a month, plus another three grand a year for insurance.”

“Jonas, calm down.”

“A little appreciation, a little respect, that’s all I ask.” Blood boiling, he opens the front door of his daughter’s car. Snarls at the heavy scent of tobacco. Reaches down to pop the hood--

--and spots the bag of marijuana joints, hidden beneath the seat.

“Terry!”

--as the migraine squeezes tighter behind his eyeball.

***Tanaka Institute  
Monterey, California***

The deep blue hill of water rolls toward shore, its weight rumbling over the shoals as it crests, its bulk split as it kisses the submerged concrete walls of the man-made canal. The Pacific wave crashes into foam, half of it racing to a quick death upon the beach, the other half rushing into the canal, picking up speed as it is redirected into the southern end of the Tanaka lagoon.

The old man follows another wave in, his soul soothed by its crashing thunder, his mind as restless as the undulating splashes that echo throughout the deserted arena like crackling paper. From his vantage—a cold aluminum bench in the upper deck of the western bleachers—he can see everything: The incoming Pacific, the ocean-access

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canal, the lake-size man-made lagoon, its surface glistening beneath a dying afternoon sun.

Eighty-two year old Masao Tanaka fixes his collar against the harsh ocean breeze that howls inside the empty concrete fish bowl, his weathered eyes squinting against reflections coming off the lagoon's surface. Azure waters have stagnated olive-green, algae growth surpassing maintenance. The once-shiny A-frame, perched at the southern end of the arena like a giant steel scarecrow, is caked with layers of rust.

Masao shakes his head at the irony of his existence. The whale lagoon had been more than the marine biologist's dream, it had been his life, and now he is dying with it. He had risked everything to construct the facility, depleting his family's estate, mortgaging their future. When those funds ran dry, he accepted a high-risk contract with the Japanese Marine Science Technology Center, allowing JAMSTEC to purchase twenty-five of the Institute's Unmanned Nautical Information Submersibles as part of a new Early Warning Earthquake Detection System. Masao's team would deploy the units, the location: Seven miles down in the Mariana Trench, the deepest part of the ocean.

When several of the UNIS devices began failing, Masao was forced to call in a favor from an old friend.

Jonas Taylor had been the best deep sea submersible pilot ever to wear the Navy uniform—until something happened to him on his last dive in the same Mariana Trench, causing him to panic in 33,000 feet of water. Jonas had launched his vessel into an emergency ascent, the duress of the maneuver over stressing the pressurization system, costing the argonaut the lives of the two Naval scientists onboard. His naval career over, his confidence shot, Jonas went back to school to study paleobiology, intent on convince the world that the unexplored 1,550 mile long gorge was inhabited by sixty-foot prehistoric sharks.

Offering a chance at redemption, Masao hired Jonas to accompany his son, D.J., into the abyss to retrieve one of the damaged UNIS systems.

But Jonas was right, members of the Megalodon species had survived extinction in the hydrothermal-warmed region at the bottom of the trench. The Institute's foray into the abyss ended in D.J.'s death and the surfacing of one of the monsters—a pregnant female.

More death would follow as the albino predator stalked the surface waters of the Pacific. Jonas would eventually kill the beast and capture its surviving pup, "raising" it in Masao's whale lagoon.

"Angel. . ." Masao whispers the cursed creature's name.

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The captive female had attracted millions of visitors and even more dollars, and for a while, all seemed well. But a series of devastating lawsuits forced Masao to sell majority share of his facility to energy mogul Benedict Singer, and his company, Geo-Tech Industries. Losing control of his beloved Institute was bad enough, the undue stress on his family even worse. Terry's first pregnancy was still-born, and Jonas was not there for her, too preoccupied with his concerns over keeping Angel secured in the lagoon. Eventually the female did escape, nearly taking the lives of Masao's daughter and son-in-law in the process.

Benedict Singer's demise would return the Institute to its rightful owner. Three years after Angel's escape, the lagoon's new canal doors were reopened for the advancement of cetacean science.

That was fifteen years ago. . .

The old man shakes his head, cursing his bad karma.

The return of his Institute meant Masao could once more pursue his life's dream—to create a natural environment to study cetaceans. Each winter day, as tens of thousands of whales migrated south from the Bering Sea, Masao would wait by the open canal doors, hoping a pregnant cow would select his protected cove to birth her young.

But no whale would venture near the lagoon, "spooked" by the Megalodon's lingering presence. Jonas, enjoying the celebrity life, invested his savings into draining and scrubbing the main tank.

Still the whales refused to enter.

Desperate for money, Masao agreed to lease the facility to Sea World. A half dozen Orca, all born in captivity, were transported from their cramped tanks to the much larger ocean-accessible lagoon. Upon entering the water, the Killer Whales panicked, circling the tank in a frenzied state. With nowhere to beach, they began bashing their heads against the canal doors, desperate to get out.

Two of the animals died, along with the Sea World contract.

As time passed, so too did the public's interest in Jonas. Forced to sell their home, the Taylors moved their family to Tampa, Jonas accepting a public relations job at a new marine park. Masao stayed behind, hiring Jonas's best-friend, Mac, to maintain the facility while they attempted to sell it.

Masao stretches, his arthritic joints creaking with the effort. Across the lagoon, his eyes catch movement.

Atti. . . The old man waves.

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Athena Holman waves back, then continues sweeping the empty eastern bleachers. Cerebral palsy has affected the young African American woman's right hand and legs, causing her to walk with a heavy gate that swings her long brown hair from side to side. Despite her challenges, the nineteen year old has always been the Institute's hardest worker, her dark brown eyes and quick wit stealing Masao's heart long ago, making it impossible for him to let her go with the rest of his employees.

The arena turns gold, the sun setting at his back. Masao's favorite time of day, yet all he feels is remorse. Once the driving force behind his family's business, life's mishaps have reduced him to nothing more than a burden.

He waits until the horizon bleeds scarlet and magenta, then stands, his back and knees aching. Like his facility, Masao is breaking down, yet his soul is still too restless to move on.

He hobbles down the bleachers to the concrete walkway.

Two men step out of the shadows. Late thirties. Italian suits. Expensive manicures and salon-bought tans.

Drew Dietsch flashes a false smile. "Tanaka, thought I'd find you out here. You remember my younger brother, Devin."

The dark-haired, pony-tailed man offers a cold stare.

Masao nods uncomfortably. "I assume you received the letter from my attorney."

Drew looks away, gazing at the lagoon. "Oh, we received it, received it in triplicate, as a matter of fact. Wasn't too happy with it, but I guess you already know that, seeing as how you haven't returned any of our calls."

"I'm sorry."

"Sorry?!" Devin's green eyes flash wide in anger. "We sank over a million bucks just in site surveys and soil samples, not to mention the money it cost to grease the zoning commissioner's office."

"Easy, Devin." Drew steps in between his charging brother and the old man. "Let's just keep everything civil for now. Tanaka, you can understand why my brother and I are a little upset about the way things played out."

"I understand. A lot of money at stake, but I am no longer interested in turning the lagoon into a condominium and shopping marina."

Devin yells, "We had an agreement, old man."

"In principle only. You agreed to pay me pennies on the dollar for prime real estate--"

"With a nice chunk of the back-end dividends," Drew finishes.

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“Assuming everything goes as you promised. My attorney was not so satisfied I was protected. Too many loopholes. Put more money up front and we’ll talk, otherwise I’ll wait. Dietsch Brothers is not the only fish in the sea, you know.”

Masao pushes past them and heads for the exit.

Devin balls his fist.

Drew drags him back by the jacket collar. “Okay, Tanaka, hey, if that’s the way you want to play it, fine by us. Our lawyers are on retainer, what about yours? Can you afford to keep paying an attorney to prevent us from getting a judgment? I doubt it. And what about your daughter?”

Masao slows.

“Yeah, I heard Terry and Jonas are hurting for money. Guess you should have never allowed them to sink their life savings into this white elephant. Face it, Tanaka, pennies on the dollar is the best you’re ever gonna see. So why don’t we settle this like men, before the judge does it for us.”

“A better offer, gentlemen,” Maso grimaces, “preferably before I die.”

## 2

*North Pacific Ocean  
452 nautical miles west of Cape Blanco, Oregon*

**Present**

The Pacific Ocean: Occupying sixty million square miles, it is the largest body of water on Earth and its deepest, possessing an average depth of 14,000 feet. Covering nearly half the planet, it separates the Americas from Asia and Australia and encompasses the titanic Pacific Plate, the most seismically active region in the world.

Descend beneath the chaos of waves, past the upper layer until the deep blue sea turns black and you arrive in a vast mid-water habitat, the largest living space on the planet. In this permanent realm of darkness, mysteries abound, for despite man's curiosity and infinite know-how we have only managed to visit five percent of these ocean depths while exploring even less. In this boundless, three-dimensional world of night, Nature has provided animals with the ability to produce their own light, endowing them with special chemicals--luciferins--or luminous bacteria that inhabit their bodies. Gelatinous species, like the twenty-foot siphonophore, illuminate in a symphony of color, blinding any would-be predator. Anglerfish dangle luminescent bulbs before their open mouths, luring unsuspecting prey. Hatchet fish use light-producing organs as camouflage. In the silent blackness of liquid space, light has become the preferred form of communication.

As we move deeper still, the enormous weight of the water causes pressures to increase. For man, this becomes the ultimate barrier, the primary challenge to scientific exploration, the reason we know more about distant galaxies than the most populated region on our own planet.

Hidden in primal darkness, the abyss is the very incubator of life. As cold sea water flows along the boundaries of separating tectonic plates, it seeps into deep fractures, bringing it in contact with molten rock. Superheated to temperatures exceeding 700-degrees Fahrenheit, the seawater dissolves manganese, iron, silicon, and other minerals before dispersing upward from the ocean floor. As these vents spew their debris, they form mineral chimneys, or black smokers, each harboring an oasis of life.

Life began in the sea. Lacking sunlight to process organic carbon compounds, Nature turned to chemical reactions, or chemosynthesis. Bacteria flourish around deep-sea vents by consuming sulfur, producing carbohydrates for food--the byproduct which serves as the basis for a thriving ecosystem.

Clusters of ghostly-white tube worms, the tips of their seven-foot stalks dipped vermilion, flutter like exotic cornfields in the shimmering hot seawater. Snow-white fish dart in and out of this Riftia forest, amid swarms of microbe-feeding shrimp. Colonies of giant alabaster clams and mussels lavish along the sea bed. Undiscovered

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species of fish pirouette in and out of megaplumes as they participate in a food chain that dates back to the Jurassic Age.

The Pacific is the most seismically active ocean on the planet. The edges of the Pacific Plate are constantly colliding with other oceanic plates and continents, forming a network of volcanically active island chains. Known as the Ring of Fire, this 30,000-mile-long subduction zone snakes north along the Asian coastline to Kamchatka Peninsula, follows the Aleutian Islands east toward Alaska, then moves south along California's San Andreas fault through Mexico and clear down to the western tip of South America.

Subduction creates trenches, the deepest locations on the planet. A series of the gorges shadow the Ring of Fire, the deepest being the Mariana Trench, an arcing 1,580 mile long depression, averaging forty-three miles in width.

At 35,827 feet below sea level, the Challenger Deep is the lowest point on Earth, located at the southeastern tip of the Mariana Trench. Follow this canyon north around the volcanic Mariana Island chain and the gorge flows into the Kuril Trench, an immense depression that runs past Japan clear up to the Kamchatka Peninsula. From here, the Pacific Plate runs east, its subduction activity creating the Aleutian Islands and Trench, the latter stretching clear across the Northern Pacific to the coast of Oregon.

\* \* \*

The monster glides in a world of silence and perpetual darkness, its movement relentless. Its skin, as pale as death, seems to radiate against the pitch blackness, while its albino gray-blue eyes remain soulless and unblinking. The slack jaw quivers against the steady stream of seawater, its gill slits, arranged like six vertical blinds along each flank, ruffling as it breathes.

The shark, an adolescent male, is an absolute brute, sixty-one feet from the tip of its snout to the points of its crescent tail, its girth exceeding 64,000 pounds. Birthed almost two decades ago, the shark and its smaller sibling mate, another male, have survived the ravages of their dominant mother by inhabiting the Mariana Island Basin, a vast underwater valley located west of the main trench, separated by the Northern Mariana Island rise and trough.

Battle scars mark the male's alabaster hide. A semi-circular scar of deep puncture wounds located along the top of its right pectoral fin mark a failed attempt at copulation with an unwilling female. A gouge behind its left gill slits are more serious, the wounds inflicted by the big male's smaller sibling in a territorial dispute years earlier.

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The larger male had triumphed, biting off nearly a third of its rival's dorsal fin in the process. Forced to abandon the Philippine Sea, the smaller shark headed south to parts unknown.

Since its birth, the big male has inhabited the depths surrounding the Mariana Island chain, its languid metabolism subsisting on a diet of squid, bottom feeders, and exotic life forms that date back to the Jurassic Age.

Nature endows its creatures with a simple genetic plan - survive and procreate. Once a flourishing mid-water species, the Megalodons of the abyss have become a dying breed. Dwindling numbers yield fewer opportunities for sexual encounters. Mature females must acquire the extra nourishment her young need to grow large before birth, a process that can take upwards of five years. Upon entering an estrus cycle, the female secretes a powerful pheromone trail, the lingering scent designed to entice males from hundreds of miles away. Should a male home in on the ovulating female, the chances of achieving a successful pregnancy are still poor. Subduing its larger mate can be quite dangerous, and it can take inexperienced males a dozen attempts before copulation is finally achieved.

It had been a decade since the big male crossed paths with another female. Driven by its primordial urges, the predator had moved into a different, more northern section of the Mariana Trench, where it immediately detected the powerful scent of an ovulating female.

That this female was, in fact, the big male's birth mother had no bearing on its intended course of action.

The hunt had begun.

Angel, once the star attraction of the Tanaka Institute, now a fully mature adult female, is seventy-four feet and thirty-eight tons, making her the biggest and most dangerous predatory fish of all time. Raised in captivity, she had returned to the abyssal waters off the Mariana island chain to breed. In eighteen years she has birthed three litters of pups, including the big male now in pursuit.

The Mariana Trench, once a warm-water hydrothermal refuge for tens of thousands of ancient species, has become a desolate hunting ground. Gone are the last of the Kronosaurus, crocodile-like creatures long the staple of the Megalodons' insatiable appetite. Dwindling too are the giant squid and bottom-feeding sharks, swarms of hatchet fish and eel pouts. A prehistoric chemosynthetic food chain, millions of years in the making, has collapsed beneath the appetites of its surviving apex predators, leaving only bottom-feeders and clusters of tube worms in their wake.

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For the once-captive Queen, the presence of the trailing male had been an unwelcome interruption. Prey had become too scarce in the northern region of the gorge to allow the female to build-up the necessary store of reserves to support another womb of pups, and the big male was too large and aggressive to fend off.

Forced to abandon the primal waters of her ancestors, Angel continued north until she had reached the Kuroshio current, a fast-moving river of water that flows past Japan for hundreds of miles. Orienting by way of the Earth's magnetic field, the albino shark had then followed the colder Oyashio stream until it bled into the North Pacific Current, an easterly conveyor belt of water that crosses the Northern Pacific before twisting south along the northwest coast of Oregon towards California.

Eighteen years after her escape from captivity, Angel had found her way back to the waters of her birth. . . waters teeming with prey--

--leaving a pheromone trail in her wake that spans half an ocean.

**Sorry, that's all the PRIMAL WATERS you get for now.**

**Stay tuned to [www.SteveAlten.com](http://www.SteveAlten.com) for the official**

**Primal Waters release date.**