



**A new MEG series of novellas (ebook & audio)
that takes place during the four year gap between
MEG (1) & The TRENCH (2)
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PROLOGUE

(Excerpted from The MEG)

Pacific Ocean

1.2 miles west of Monterey, California

The fishing trawler circled Terry Tanaka. Alphonse DeMarco tossed her a life ring. She reached for it as gouts of blood began pooling around her body.

“Terry—”

“Al, it’s okay, it’s the Meg’s blood. I saw a fireball. Jonas must have ignited the rest of his hydrogen tank.”

“He’s still alive?”

“Get me a mask and snorkel.”

“Terry—”

“Just do it!”

DeMarco located a snorkel and mask and tossed them to her. She pulled the mask over her head, positioned the mouthpiece, and peered below.

* * *

The escape pod’s ascent slowed as it took on water.

Below, the Megalodon continued sinking into the depths, trailing a river of blood. Jonas Taylor watched until the albino creature disappeared from view. He had escaped certain death twice, but to survive this day he still needed one more miracle.

Physically and mentally drained, lying in three inches of water, Jonas held his palms to as many leaks as he could. He stared helplessly at the depth gauge as it dropped below 270-feet, his mind calculating.

You’re rising about forty feet per minute with three inches of water, adding another inch every minute or so. Got to at least make it within a hundred feet of the surface before you abandon the pod ... a hundred and twenty feet at the most. If you lose ten feet of rise with every inch of water ...

“I’m not going to make it.”

Twisting around to face the escape hatch, Jonas began breathing slowly and deeply, attempting to expand his lungs as much as he could. He removed his rubber boots, then, locating the face mask, he detached the empty pony bottle.

He glanced over his shoulder as the water rose past his chest.

One-ninety ... one-eighty ... one-seventy ...

The pod slowed, barely rising.

Don’t let it start to sink. Anticipate and get out quickly.

* * *

“Terry, get out of the damn water now,” DeMarco demanded.

Terry ignored him, keeping her face down in the water, breathing through the snorkel. The Megalodon was dead, that she knew. But her heart told her that Jonas had survived.

Andre Dupont felt dazed and depressed. All his efforts to save the creature—the lobbying, the

expense—all for naught. The greatest predator of all time ... lost.

“I could have died today,” he whispered to himself. “For what? To save my killer? What would the Cousteau Society tell my wife and children? ‘Ah, Marie, you should be a proud widow. Andre died in the most noble of fashions, giving his life to feed an endangered species.’”

Dupont stood, stretching his sore back. The morning sun reflected sparks on the water.

That was when he sighted the fin.

“Hey ... get the girl out of the water!”

* * *

The bone-chilling Pacific reached Jonas’s chest, the additional weight slowing the mini-sub’s ascent to a crawl. He shivered in his bio-suit, afraid to move, then glanced at the depth gauge as the pod stopped rising.

One hundred and forty-two feet.

Inhaling a deep breath, he fixed the mask to his face and twisted open the rear hatch.

* * *

The two-foot-tall dorsal fin circled the fishing trawler. Eleven men as one screamed for Terry to get out of the water.

“That’s a Great White; Terry, it’s homing in on the Meg’s blood. You need to come aboard!”

The trawler’s captain went below and returned with a shotgun. The dorsal fin circled the girl. The captain took aim.

Terry surface dived, disappearing below the waves.

The shark followed.

* * *

It had taken precious seconds to pull himself free of the sinking pod. Starting toward the surface, he took long, easy strokes and kicks, counting backwards by three from a hundred and fifty. The pressure in his ears and sinus cavity was overwhelming, and he realized he could not pinch his nose to equalize while wearing the face mask.

Pulling it off, he squeezed his nostrils together and blew air into his cheeks, the pressure easing his pain.

By the time he reached a hundred and twenty feet, Jonas’s muscles felt like lead.

Just a walk in the park ...

Eighty feet—he could no longer feel his legs.

Don’t ... stop.

At fifty-eight feet, the periphery of his vision became clouded by darkness.

At thirty-three feet, Jonas Taylor lost consciousness.

* * *

Terry grabbed her man by his right wrist as his body began slipping back into the depths. She kicked hard, pulling water with her left hand, using her right hand to pinch Jonas’s nose and keep his mouth clamped shut. She felt the shark circling closer and swam harder.

As her face broke the surface, Terry pulled Jonas’s head free of the ocean. His lips were blue and he wasn’t breathing. She attempted to level him out to blow a few precious mouthfuls of air into his mouth as the dorsal fin surfaced eight feet away, the juvenile predator over-stimulated by all the

blood in the water.

The fishing boat shot past Terry, its trawl net scooping up the shark as it launched its attack on Jonas.

Terry waited anxiously for the boat to circle back. Ninety long seconds passed before it returned; Jonas's pulse dangerously weak.

I'm losing him ...

A minute later they were sprawled out on deck, Terry giving him more effective breaths without any results.

She pulled away as Jonas vomited a lungful of seawater. His blue complexion faded to white, then red.

Terry was teary-eyed and all smiles as he opened his eyes. "Are you all right?"

He nodded. "Just ... a bad case of indigestion."

He winced as invisible pins and needles stabbed his blood vessels.

"Jonas?"

"Nitrogen bubbles ..."

"Try not to move. We're en route to the lagoon. We have a recompression chamber on site."

* * *

The young shark thrashed back and forth within the trawl net. Andre Dupont followed the captain into the pilothouse, attempting to reason with him. "Captain, you can't kill it," the Frenchman pleaded. "Great Whites are a protected species."

"Look at my boat. She's busted up. I'll kill this fish, stuff it, and sell it to some tourist from New York for twenty thousand. You gonna give me that much, Frenchy?"

Dupont rolled his eyes. "Good luck in prison."

Ten minutes later they arrived in the deep canyon waters located just outside the Tanaka Lagoon's canal entry. The giant steel doors had been left open for the *Kiku*.

The trawler entered the canal.

* * *

Jonas moaned, his head in Terry's lap. Every joint in his body was on fire, his muscles consumed with stabbing pains. "How much farther?"

"We're entering the canal. Medical personnel are waiting for us. We'll have you in a hyperbaric chamber in three minutes."

He looked up at her. "I love you."

"And I love you."

The pain increased; he was dizzy, nauseous. His felt as if the Megalodon's teeth were biting down on his back.

"Let me sit up."

Masao Tanaka was waiting by the north bleachers, his head heavily bandaged. Mac was there, too, leaning on crutches.

Terry saw her father and waved.

Tears of joy flowed down Masao's cheeks as he waved back, grateful his daughter was safe.

Doubled over in pain, Jonas focused on what appeared to be a juvenile Great White being towed

in a trawl net along the port side of the stern. The shark was small, seven feet long, weighing between three and four hundred pounds. It was struggling fiercely, twisting within the confines of the fishing net, the action serving to wash the dead Meg's blood from the female pup's hide.

Jesus ... it's an albino.

For a brief moment, man and beast regarded one another, the creature staring at Jonas with its soulless gray-blue eyes, Jonas marveling at the presence of the Megalodon offspring. He closed his eyes at the irony and smiled.

And then the pain became overwhelming and the submersible pilot lost consciousness as two paramedics loaded him onto a gurney.

MEG: Angel 1.1

(One hour earlier ...)

1

Monterey Coast, California

The relentless Pacific rolled in beneath a gray pre-dawn sky—its endless assault of white water targeting a gauntlet of rocks standing sentry in the shallows. Wave after wave erupted in an explosion of froth as the tide sizzled to its death along the shoreline.

Claire Gatenby exited her kitchen and stepped out onto the second story deck. She set her second cup of coffee on the end table by her favorite chair, wrapped herself in the wool Cowboys blanket, and curled up in the rocker as she did nearly every morning since she and her husband, Richard, had relocated from their home in Dallas. The ocean was a tantalizing addiction experienced by every sense; its brine filing her lungs, its surf a calming mantra, its saline a bitter taste on her lips, its presence occupying her eyes for as far as she could see.

Only this morning she needed to see farther.

Reaching behind her neck, she dragged the binoculars up from beneath her robe and searched the horizon.

Like every resident from Santa Cruz south to Carmel, Claire had been tracking the *Kiku* ever since its crew had reported the Megalodon—a sixty-foot, forty-ton prehistoric cousin of the Great White shark had been seen in Northern California's coastal waters. For weeks the seaside communities had been on pins and needles as the research vessel searched in vain for the albino creature—its presence affecting businesses up and down the coast. For hotels and bed and breakfasts the Meg was a boon; for fishing boats and whale watching charters like the *Monterey Duchess*, her husband's double-mortgaged 150 passenger ship, it was a bust as all marine craft smaller than a yacht were ordered to stay in port by the Coast Guard.

Finances were already tight in the Gatenby household with their son, Michael in Med School and Laura a freshman in college. And then, as their frustration approached desperation came yesterday's surprise announcement that the Meg had been drugged and captured and was en route to its new lake-size pen at the Tanaka Institute in Monterey.

The proclamation turned the nearby facility and its neighboring communities into Mecca, enticing every shark fanatic, adrenaline junky and social media maven with access to a boat or aerial drone to converge upon their shoreline. The Coast Guard announced it was lifting its boating restriction—with one exception—no craft of any size would be allowed within a half mile of the netted creature.

For business owners like the Gatenbys the announcement was manna from heaven; the event turning his charter into an all-day Megalodon excursion, with prices starting at \$599 a ticket. By late afternoon the waters outside the lagoon's open canal doors were clogged with thousands of water craft, from luxury yachts to 12-foot motorized rafts. All that was needed was the star of the show. As day turned to night word spread that the *Kiku's* engines had been damaged, delaying their arrival until dawn.

Pressing the binoculars to her eyes, Claire scanned the flotilla situated just outside the concrete

canal which led into Masao Tanaka's whale lagoon. She located her husband's charter in the middle of the pack—the number of boats having nearly doubled overnight.

"Laura, come and look—there must be two thousand boats anchored outside the canal."

"Mom, you can't drop anchor in 6,000 feet of water," the marine biology major called out from the kitchen. "The Monterey Submarine Canyon practically reaches the Institute's—"

The thunder of helicopter rotors drowned out her daughter's reply as two News Choppers passed overhead. Following their trajectory with her binoculars, Claire attempted to locate the *Kiku*—to no avail.

I need something more powerful ... Her eyes searched the sundeck. "Laura, where's your father's telescope?"

"In the den."

"Can you bring it out?"

Laura appeared a minute later, carrying the Orion Grandview 16-48 x 65mm scope and tripod.

"Do you know how to use it?"

"Yes."

"Aim it at those helicopters, then pan down to the water and see if you can spot the *Kiku*."

"You do realize I have class in a hour."

"Well, you may need to ride your bike, last night every street was bumper to bumper in gridlock. Can you see anything?"

"Yeah. No. Wait ... the *Kiku*'s an old frigate; this looks like a yacht."

"Let me see." Claire peered through the eyepiece. "It is a yacht ... whoa!"

"What?"

"I saw an explosion."

"From the *Kiku* or the yacht?"

"I don't know."

"Let me see!"

"Hang on ... something's definitely happening."

Laura grabbed her mother's binoculars and traced the horizon back to shore. "Hey, the boats are heading out."

"They can't do that, the Coast Guard set clear restrictions. Call your father."

Laura reached into her pants pocket for her cell phone, speed dialing the number. "Dad, what's happening out there?"

Richard "Dickie" Gatenby couldn't hear his cell phone ring over the noise of his irate passengers, but he felt its vibration in his back pants pocket.

"Hello? Laura, you'll have to speak louder ... yeah, we saw it. We think it may have come from Bud Harris's yacht ... I know, but the rich play by their own set of rules. Stand-by."

At six feet and three hundred pounds, Dickie's first mate, John Eckley was not a man to be trifled with, but the military vet looked worried as he entered the bridge. "The passengers think that explosion may have killed the Meg. They want us to get closer before it sinks. Otherwise, they're demanding their money back."

“The hell with that. Get ‘em seated, John, we’re heading out.”

Dickie started the boat’s twin engines, the loud grumbling sound eliciting a cheer from his overwrought, exhausted guests, the majority having been aboard since yesterday’s noon departure.

Measuring 102 feet from bow to stern, the *Monterey Duchess* was the largest whale watching vessel in the area, its heated indoor cabin seating eighty comfortably, its outdoor upper deck and 360-degree forward walk-around deck adding to a legal capacity of one hundred and fifty passengers. General admission for adults was normally \$50; Dickie had bumped his fare to \$160. When he learned he was still below the competition, he sold another twenty-two spots at \$250 apiece, hoping for a short excursion.

That had obviously not happened, and the galley was not stocked with food. Thankfully, the local eateries were making a small fortune catering to the flotilla otherwise his passengers would have gone hungry. But the night had dropped temperatures below fifty degrees, forcing everyone inside—

—and tempers were flaring.

The creature’s death gave him an out; he’d circle the carcass a few times, head in and call it a day.

Blasting the neighboring craft with his horn, he slowly nudged his way free of the pack into open water—

—followed by another two dozen boats, and a pair of cigarette racers that rumbled past him, taking the lead. His passengers exhorted him to go faster. Pushing down on his twin throttle, he opened her up and then stole a quick look ahead with his night glasses.

He saw the *Kiku*. The research vessel was listing to port with barely three feet of freeboard. News choppers were maneuvering for position overhead, their spotlights slicing through the gray skies—revealing the yacht. *That’s Bud Harris’s boat. You bastard, what did you—*

A blurry pale object suddenly rose out of the sea behind the *Kiku*, its entire upper torso exposed, its jaws snapping at the helicopters which were just out of its reach. As it fell back into the water a fireball bloomed in the sky as several helicopters collided.

“Oh Jesus ... hold on!” Blasting his horn, Gatenby turned hard to port—

—cutting off three smaller fishing craft in his wake and the two cigarette speed boats that were racing back to shore in excess of 70 knots.

James Ticknor’s heart had nearly burst from the big man’s barrel chest when the Meg had suddenly shot straight out of the sea, its rising torso blocking the path of his 38-foot, Top Gun speed boat. The other cigarette had been on his starboard side, so he turned hard to port, the propeller of his starboard engine bending as it caught the monster’s pectoral fin, the collision spinning the ass-end of his boat sideways and forcing him to veer back to the right so that the starboard side of his racer was hugging the monster’s massive belly.

Ticknor, his wife, Christina, their two kids and his niece looked straight up at the four-story-high tower of terror just as the creature’s snout collided with one of the helicopter’s landing skids. A split-second later gravity took over and the upright beast began toppling—

--on top of them!

“James!”

“Dad!”

Feeling like a lumberjack trying to get out of the way of a collapsing Redwood, Tiknor jammed the throttles down with one thick paw and steered blindly with the other, his gaze fixed overhead, his family’s life dependent upon his ability to determine a rapidly fluctuating escape route.

Cutting back to port, he soared ahead, registering the heat of a fireball igniting overhead as the 40 ton shark slammed sideways back into the sea directly to starboard, the impact dousing the Tiknor family with water.

“Woo-hoo! What a rush. Anyone get some photos? Don’t tell me I have to do that again?”

He turned to his wife Christina who was strapped into the co-pilot’s seat on his left. She was yelling something but he couldn’t hear her over the wind. She pointed ahead at the two story, hundred-foot-long vessel turning into their path.

“Shit!” Ticknor pulled back on the throttles as he wrenched the wheel hard to starboard—
—cutting off the second cigarette racer.

There was no time for Heather Swint to react; she could only hold on as her husband’s speed boat ran up and over the transom and open cockpit of the other cigarette—the wind shear catching the bow and suddenly the newlyweds were airborne, flipping backwards three-hundred and sixty degrees, bow over stern over bow before landing upside-down in the water.

In the first cigarette, James Ticknor’s entire existence had been squeezed into three blinks of the eye: The whale watching boat blocking his way, the second speedboat’s fiberglass hull pressing down on top of his helmet a split second before the gray sky magically flicked it away, followed by the sudden impact of his speedboat’s bow skidding along the starboard flank of the *Monterey Duchess*.

Frank Heller held on for dear life as the motorized raft bounced along the surface. Seated by the outboard, Richard Danielson looked back at the Zodiac’s wake. To his horror he saw the ivory dorsal fin slicing through the sea five boat lengths behind the outboard engine.

Changing course, he headed east, heading for the congestion of boats up ahead.

“You’re leading it to them?”

“Can’t outrun it; maybe we can lose it in the crowd!”

Heather Swint opened her eyes. Her head was pounding, the Ohio native completely disoriented in the darkness. “Elbie?”

Her words sounded muffled, as if she were in a cave.

“I’m here.”

She turned to her husband’s voice as a red emergency light flickered on by her feet. “We’re upside-down?”

He was about to reply when he heard the high-pitched whine of an approaching outboard engine zoom by overhead—

—a silent gray mass passing five feet below their heads—and suddenly the boat was rolling beneath them, sound reappearing with the dawn ... the cigarette racer momentarily finding equilibrium on its starboard side before continuing its 180 degree roll—

—their boat splashing down right-side up as the Meg’s triangular head surfaced beneath the

Zodiac, flipping the raft and tossing its two passengers through the air.

Richard Danielson surfaced. He looked around and then spotted Heller swimming toward a pileup of boats—a twenty-three-foot cabin cruiser completely out of the water, its hull resting atop a Boston Whaler.

It was the closest accessible island of refuge around—a mere length of his military academy’s Olympic-size pool away, but for the retired naval officer it might as well have been a mile. Fear had turned his blood into liquid lead, his pounding heart and heaving lungs no doubt serving as dinner bells to the monster lurking somewhere below. He was about to give up when the words of his childhood friend Wade Snuggerud reached out to him from his youth, the teen mocking Mr. Miyagi, the martial arts instructor from the movie, *The Karate Kid*.

“Remember Danielson, in order to stay on the swim team, you don’t have to be the fastest swimmer, just don’t be the slowest.”

Thanks, Snuggs! Ducking his head in the water to be more streamlined, Richard Danielson power-stroked for the finish as his swim team coach had taught him, his legs kicking furiously. He quickly halved the distance and then passed Frank Heller.

Four more strokes and he lifted his head to approximate the distance.

Fifty feet ... ten more strokes! Nine ... eight—

He could hear the passengers yelling, exhorting him on.

Five ... four ... three—

“Ahh!”

He cried out, his upper torso igniting with the sensation of a hundred surgeons’ scalpels slicing his gut into ribbons. The blood drained from his face and neck so quickly his soul fled his body before the horrendous agony of being bitten in half ever had a chance to register as a last fleeting thought.

The Megalodon swallowed the morsel without a bite, its prey far too lean to support the 40-ton shark’s increased energy needs. There were more of them—the predator could feel their vibrations through the fiberglass hull of their boats. Locking onto the chaos, it was about to surface when it heard the approaching pings ...

Jonas opened his eyes. He was lying on his back in the Lexan pod, looking out into darkness. *Oh, God, my escape—it was all a dream. I’m still in the creature’s belly!*

He turned to his left as the upper torso of a man suddenly appeared.

Danielson?

He squeezed his eyes shut and screamed—

“Mr. Taylor?”

“Huh?” It was a man’s voice, metallic—coming over his sub’s radio.

“Sir, are you all right?”

He opened his eyes to find a dark-haired man wearing blue scrubs standing on the other side of the pod.

“Who are you? What am I doing in here?”

The man pointed to an i.d. badge clipped to his shirt pocket:

**NICHOLAS ZWALD: TECHNICIAN
PACIFIC GROVE HYPERBARIC CHAMBER**

“Hyperbaric chamber?”

“You were diving and surfaced too quickly. We had to decompress you in order to get the nitrogen gas out of your system.”

“Get me out of here.”

“I’ve already started bringing you up. It’ll be a few minutes.”

“No. Get me out of here now.”

“I can’t do that, sir. The pressure—”

“Now!” Jonas smashed the ball of his fist against the curved walls of the chamber.

Nick Zwald left the treatment area and exited to the waiting room. “He’s freaking out, can you come back?”

He was bathed in sweat, struggling to breathe, the pod crackling and creaking all around him, read to burst. Bracing his bare feet against the curved glass above his head, he took several slow deep breaths, preparing himself.

“Hey, you—”

Jonas looked up, shocked to see Terry Tanaka hovering over him outside the pod.

“Are you okay?”

“I don’t know. Are you real? Or am I imagining all this?”

“It’s real, baby. Hey Nick, how much longer?”

“Forty seconds.”

“Forty seconds, Jonas. Can you hang in there another forty seconds? I’ll make it worth the wait.” She glanced back at the attendant to make sure he wasn’t looking; then she lifted her tee-shirt, pressing her naked breasts to the glass.

The effect was profound. Jonas stopped struggling, the anxiety leaving his body, chased off by a sudden surge of testosterone.

Terry pulled her shirt back down and blew him a kiss as the tech began loosening the wheel outside the hatch behind Jonas’s head. The pressure differential hissed in his ears as a cool gust of air entered the pod.

“Watch your arms, Mr. Taylor, I’m going to slide you out of there.”

He laid his hands on his chest as the padded tray beneath him was wheeled out.

“Take it slow, Mr. Taylor. You’ve been in there three hours.”

He sat up, registering his full bladder. “I need to use the bathroom.”

“Exit out that door, it’s on your left.”

“Whose clothes am I wearing?”

“They belong to the facility; you’re not allowed any metal inside the chamber.”

Terry rubbed his back. “You’re all sweaty.” She handed him a small gym bag. “I brought you a change of clothing. Come on, let’s get out of here, there’s lots to talk about.”

Jonas Taylor stepped outside into the brisk late morning Northern California air unsure of who or what he was. For most of his adult life he had been a deep sea submersible pilot, but that was definitely over. For the last seven years he had been a student of paleo-biology, earning his doctorate degree in a subject he had no interest in teaching, the path chosen more by fate as he attempted to prove to the world that the Navy shrinks were wrong; that he had not panicked on a deep dive into the Mariana Trench—that Megalodon was not an aberration of the deep, but was in fact still alive.

Extant was the correct term; imposter was another.

Jonas was far from an academic but the Ed.D. at the end of his name helped legitimize his theories and perhaps sell a few more books. Still, it took a return trip to that hell hole to clear his name, but the journey had unleashed the devil and now there was more blood on his hands—and the two scientists left under his care were still dead.

So was the Meg for that matter.

And so was Maggie.

His wife had cheated on him and that was on her, but seven years ago he had left the brash, confident, cocky naval officer she had fallen in love with back in the trench and that was on him. Ousted from the Navy, he could have earned a decent living selling insurance or real estate, but his wounded pride would not allow him to walk away—not with a dishonorable discharge attached to his name. That was on Richard Danielson, his former C.O. covering his own tracks after having ordered Jonas to make that last dive into the Challenger Deep when his own medical officer knew he was physically exhausted. Now he too was dead, Jonas had seen the partially digested remains himself.

Christ, how long will that nightmare haunt me?

“Jonas, this way.”

He followed Terry Tanaka to her car—*what the hell was he doing with her?* He was thirty-seven; she was what ... twenty-five—twenty-six at the most? She was a petulant child who had worshipped him in his glory days. Seven years after the disaster Masao Tanaka—a true academic—had sent his oldest child to recruit Jonas to escort his youngest to a place where no human should have ventured. He of all people knew better, but his ego demanded he take one last shot at redemption and now Masao had his own son’s blood on his hands as well as Maggie’s—

—and now you’re going to date his daughter?

He could hear his friend Mac groaning in his mind’s eye.

“JT, you have no career; no job, no money... nothing good can possibly come of this.”

“The pup survived.”

“Pup? What pup?” *Did she have a dog?*

“The albino Great White we netted, it’s a Megalodon pup.”

“How do you know that?”

“I pulled one of its teeth, it has a telltale chevron. Do you want to see it?”

“The tooth?”

“The Meg!”

“No thanks.”

“Seriously? You don’t want to see it?”

“Terry, four hours ago I was in its mother’s stomach. If it’s alright with you I just want to go home.”

“Fine.”

He climbed in the front seat of the Honda Civic, registering her anger in the silent treatment that followed.

A petulant child. Granted, she did have nice breasts, but still ...

I need to talk to Mac.

MEG: Angel of Death 1.1

SURVIVAL

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