

CHAPTER

ONE

I peered into the deep-sea canyon, hoping to spot a toppled skyscraper. Maybe even the Statue of Liberty. But there was no sign of the old East Coast, just a sheer drop into darkness.

A ball of light shot past me—a vampire squid, trailing neon blue. The glowing cloud swirled around my helmet. Careful not to break it up, I drifted onto my knees, mesmerized. But my trance was cut short by a series of green sparks bursting out of the gorge. I fell back, every muscle in my body tense. Only one fish glittered like an emerald and traveled in a pack: the green lantern shark. Twelve inches long and deadly as piranhas, they could rip apart something twenty times their size. Forget what they could do to a human.

I should have seen them coming, even this deep. I should have known the squid had squirted its radiant goo to divert a predator. And now my helmet's crown lights served as an even brighter beacon. With a jab to my wrist screen, I snapped them off, but it was too late—I couldn't unring that dinner bell.

I pried a flare gun from my belt and fired into the midst of the electric green frenzy. Two heartbeats later, light exploded over the canyon, shocking the sharks into stillness, eyes and teeth glittering. Quickly, I scooped the anchor of my mantaboard out of the muck and hauled myself onto it. Lying on my stomach with my legs dangling, I twisted the handgrips and took off, making serious wake. If my lungs hadn't been filled with Liquigen, I would've whooped aloud.

Not that I was in the clear. As soon as the flare died, the sharks would be on me like suckerfish on a whale. I thought about burying myself in the thick ooze of the seafloor. Bedding down with the boulder-sized clams had worked before. I chanced a look over my shoulder. Sure enough, the darkness twinkled with stars—vicious little stars, shooting my way.

Tilting the manta into a nosedive, I flicked on the head beams, only to have the light reflect off metal. A sub! I crashed into it and toppled, boots over helmet. The manta's handgrips tore from my fingers as I slammed onto my back. Sliding down the sloped hull, I grappled for a hold without luck until my feet hit the bumper and I stopped short. My guts took longer to settle.

Without a rider, the manta would shut off automatically; I'd have to find it later. Right now, I needed to take cover. But why was this little rig sitting on the seafloor without a light on to announce its presence? Was it a

wreck? If so, it hadn't sunk that long ago. The polished metal hull was barnacle free.

I scuttled along the bumper until I found the circular door to the air lock. The panel cover dangled from one hinge with pry marks scoring its edge. I hesitated, wondering about those marks, when suddenly the hull gleamed with emerald light.

I slammed the entry button. Like a dilating eye, the hatch opened and seawater filled the small chamber. Plunging into the air lock, I whirled to see sharks streaking toward me from all sides. I hit the interior button whole-handed. As the hatch clinched shut, the sharks plowed into it like mini torpedoes. From inside, they sounded like Death pounding at the door. I slumped against the chamber wall and grinned. Nothing put a buzz in my blood like escaping predators.

How many rules had I just broken? Visiting Coldsleep Canyon alone: forbidden. On nothing but a mantaboard: absolutely forbidden. Exploring a derelict sub: off the sonar screen. But now I had to take cover until the sharks left. It was the smart thing to do. The safe thing. Not that my parents would ever hear about the sub or the sharks. With a gang of outlaws roaming the territory, they had enough to worry about.

When the last drop of seawater disappeared through the grated floor, I tipped back my helmet and inhaled. The air was rank but did its job: The oxygen-infused