

# Chapter 19

## Sharkface and the Underwater Volcano



**I**t was not Sharkface's palate that was disappointed by his most recent meal. Although it was very tasty, his jellyfish feast had left him feeling empty and his stomach growling. He had built up a thick enough layer of fat for a long trip, so he continued on his journey. He was confident something good to eat would come his way as he swam south.

The seas were warm and calm and his diving was very regular. He had covered over a thousand miles since leaving the Azores. He spent most of his time underwater sleeping and was fit and well rested.

One day he had another of his diving dreams. Once again he was high above his home on Guadalupe Island, only this time he

was flying in the clouds. He flew lower to see his beach, but the clouds were still thick. Suddenly he broke through the overcast. The water off the beach was red rather than its usual blue-green color and he could see human figures walking around. There were fires with long strings of thick black smoke and men standing around large black kettles. There were many shapes that looked like elephant seals but none of them were moving. Sharkface awoke with a start before the bottom of his dive. He could not sleep as he headed back to the surface. He was confused and upset by the scene he had witnessed in his dream.

He continued to swim southward, and to sleep during his dives but he did not dream again. He traveled for several weeks without incident, but the memory of the scene with the men and the smoke and the black pots still disturbed him. Then one day as he was descending, he hit the bottom while still asleep. "What happened? I thought the water was deeper," he said as he shook himself fully awake. He did not sleep for his next few dives to prevent this embarrassing accident from happening again.

As he traveled south towards the equator, the water at the surface was getting warmer. The water deep in the ocean, however, had always been the same temperature; it was always cold. But now on every dive it was getting warmer and warmer until it was hotter on the bottom than at the surface and Sharkface could not figure out why.

"This certainly is a strange place. There are these hills all over the ocean floor and the water's hot on the bottom. It's not like

anyplace I have ever been before,” he was thinking to himself when suddenly out of the corner of his one good eye he saw something moving across the muddy bottom. He swam over to take a closer look and saw a long line of crabs marching in his direction. It was almost like they were all advancing steadily to his dinner table. And they were delicious. He had eaten crabs in the cold water of Alaska and they were very tasty but these warm water crabs was much more savory. He spent the rest of the day feasting on the seemingly never-ending spider crab parade in the deep, warm water.

Eventually the parade ended and Sharkface continued southward, diving cautiously over the uneven bottom. It was getting hotter and hotter on the bottom and he was beginning to get uncomfortable. He began to linger at the surface just to cool off. Then one time at the bottom he saw something that made him tremble. In the distance, there were columns of black smoke rising from the ocean floor. It looked just like the smoke from the kettles that he had seen in his diving dream, but what could it be? He was almost reluctant to go any closer; he was scared of what he might see. He swam back to the surface, but eventually his curiosity got the better of him and he once again dove in the direction of the black underwater smoke.

As Sharkface swam closer he began to see smoke coming out of a tall sort of chimney on the ocean floor and all around was a forest of white and red. As he approached, the forest turned

all white, but when he backed off, creatures with red, feather-like bodies emerged from their tubes. “What a beautiful sight,” he thought. “I wonder if they are good to eat?”

On his next dive he decided to give the tube-dwelling worms a taste. He dodged the black smoke and nipped off the red tip of a worm just as it was retreating into its tube. It was unbearably hot near the black smoke and Sharkface retreated to cooler water a few yards away to eat his treat, but it was anything but a treat.

The tubeworms tasted very bitter and after he had only eaten a couple of them he vowed that he would never eat another. They were one of the worst things he had ever tasted; they were almost as bad as starfish. He swam away from this hot world of black smoke and repulsive cuisine and went to look for cooler water.

The smoking black chimneys were located on the sides of a ridge that ran down the middle of the ocean and Sharkface decided to continue diving to the south in the cooler water to its right. He passed other columns of black smoke as he dove in the foothills of the underwater mountain range.

Later on, when he awoke at the bottom of one of his dives, it was hotter than ever. Plumes of boiling seawater were rushing up at him and they were very painful. He looked down and saw the same red glow that he had seen on George’s Aleutian Island volcano, only this volcano was at the bottom of the sea and it was erupting right underneath him. He dodged the scalding water and eventually got to a place where it was cool enough for him

to watch. The molten rock was not flowing like the red rivers on George's volcano but oozing from a crack in the bottom of the sea floor. The flows were mostly black and moved across the bottom like large worms. When a crack appeared he could see the red molten rock inside its dark crust. Once the flows stopped they looked like gigantic elephant seal snotters littering the sea floor. Sharkface did not linger because even the cooler water was way too hot for him. He surfaced and turned away from the underwater volcano.

He was beginning to think that this was indeed a very curious part of the ocean what with migrating crabs, underwater smoke and volcanoes erupting from the bottom of the sea when a tiny glint of light caught his eye. It flashed like metal and there was a bright light coming from one end of its unusual shape. It didn't look like any animal he had ever seen but more like a strange kind of ship, but this one was sailing underwater.

"What's next?" he thought as he approached the underwater boat.

*Alvin* is a two-man submarine that explores deep under the sea. There are glass windows so her crew can look out and bright lights so they can see in the darkness. She also has mechanical arms so she can pick up specimens to bring back to the lab. She is always accompanied by a surface vessel and the men inside her strong steel ball constantly talk to their fellows in the ship above. *Alvin's* crew was searching the ocean bottom for evidence of un-

derwater volcanoes but they were looking in the wrong place.

Sharkface had never seen anything like *Alvin* before. From the front it looked like a giant metal crab with lights for eyes. In the middle of the crab's forehead there was the face of a man. Sharkface wasn't afraid of this strange machine creature because it couldn't move very fast. He swam right up to *Alvin* and looked the man in the eye.

"My God, Peter, look at this!" the man inside *Alvin* exclaimed. "What do you make of it?" "It looks like an elephant seal to me. I knew they could dive this deep, but what is one doing down here. He is way out of his territory." Charlie picked up the microphone and called to his fellow scientists in *Alvin's* support ship. "Hello *Atlantis*, hello *Atlantis*, this is *Alvin*." He spoke excitedly. "Hello *Alvin* this is *Atlantis*. What's up Charlie, you seem excited." "You will not believe what we're seeing down here. There's an elephant seal staring at me through the port. He's just staring at me right in the eye. He looks pretty torn up; he has scars all over his face and body and he only has one good eye. He's a mess. I can see spiral scars around his body. What do you make of that?" Charlie was nearly out of breath from talking so fast. "Charlie, that is fabulous. Do you have the video running? Be sure to get some stills too." At this point, Peter spoke up. "This is really amazing. He is just staring."

Sharkface could hear everything they were saying inside *Alvin* as well as the communications from *Atlantis*. This was the first time he had heard human speech since he learned to understand it

from Topsy and the first time he had heard it spoken by humans, but he found that he could understand it quite well. He thought he might try talking with these humans.

“My name is Sharkface and I am an elephant seal. I swam here from my home on Guadalupe Island through the frozen sea far up to the north.” Sharkface talked very slowly and tried to speak his words very carefully. “Who are you folks and where do you come from?” Peter nearly fell off his seat. He and Charlie were holding their breath. This was just too strange to be true. “What is going on here?” Charlie thought. They were hearing an elephant seal talking to them in their language far at the bottom of the sea. Finally Charlie spoke, “Peter, aren’t you going to answer him?” After a pause Peter finally spoke, “Hello...uh...Sharkface. My...uh... name is...uh...Peter. I am...uh...very glad to meet you.” There was once again a pause while Peter thought of what to say next. “We are...uh... scientists from...uh... Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute in...uh...Massachusetts and we are...uh... diving here in a submarine named...uh...uh...uh.” Peter quickly turned to Charlie and said, “I forgot the name of our submarine!” Charlie answered, “*Alvin*, Peter, we are in *Alvin*!”

Peter continued talking with Sharkface through the thick glass port. His eyes were just about as wide open as it was possible for them to be. “We are...uh... looking for underwater...uh...volcanoes.” Just then *Atlantis* called. “What’s going on down there? We haven’t heard from you in a while. Are you all OK?” Charlie answered, “We are fine. I can’t talk right now. I will call back in a few minutes.”

Peter and Charlie and Sharkface talked for about half an hour. Sharkface told them stories about his travels and the interesting creatures he had met and they told him about the dives they had made in *Alvin*. Most of all Charlie was interested in hearing about the black smoke and the underwater volcano and Sharkface told them where they could go to see the eruption. He also told them about the crabs and about the tube-dwelling worms.

“I must say that those tubeworms were the worst thing I have ever tasted. They are far worse than the disgusting clams that that angry walrus fed me. They are almost as bad as starfish, which are the worst of all!” Sharkface tended to get very emotional when he was talking about food.

If it weren't for the videos and sound recordings, the scientists on *Atlantis* would never have believed Peter and Charlie, but there it was on the screen right before them. An elephant seal had told them about his adventures all over the world and how he felt about eating tubeworms. He had even directed them to the underwater eruption and the black smokers along the Atlantic Ridge.

Later in *Alvin's* voyage, Peter and Charlie took the first pictures of an actual underwater volcanic eruption and gathered the first samples of tubeworms from the black smokers and they owed it all to Sharkface. Despite all the evidence, the scientists on *Atlantis* still could not completely believe that Peter and Charlie had actually had a long discussion with a talking elephant seal and they decided to keep Sharkface a secret.

Sharkface felt proud that he had helped out the men in *Alvin* and that he had discovered the underwater volcano, but mostly

he was pleased that he had been able to talk so easily to humans.

