

## ***'A World Below Us' by Rory Tobin***

The ocean is blue, the ocean is black, the ocean is vast. It is more vast than at first we could ever imagine. It chokes every continent, constantly attacking their borders in a truly endless war. Two-thirds of our tiny globe it covers; churning, swishing, splashing. The ocean is so deep, so dark, so vast. At its deepest point, the ocean is undiscovered. Astronomers study the unknown when looking up to space but the same mystery can be found at home, down in the deep, dark blue. Years of development. New machinery. New tools. Yet, we are still to fully understand this vast world below.

What we do know is that it is dark, nightmare dark, the kind of dark that swallows light as fast as a basking shark does plankton. It took years to route and thousands died before we could finally conquer the green monster, the unconquerable. Our vast sea has many personalities. Green and murky with salt that stings your eyes, the green of a warm Mediterranean holiday, crystal clear with a beautiful exotic glint that would make the Grinch smile at Christmas. And best of all, the crisp raging whip of the Irish sea in the forty foot on any given Christmas morning. An icy touch that reminds one's nerves how to send warning signs to the brain.

The sea is alive; its beating heart pumps constantly at a rapid tempo. Hidden underneath the sun reflecting surface hides life, an abundance of life. There is no life on land when one examines the sea. Over four times as many species flicker or thrash through the sea's depths. In coral reefs, rainbows float this way and that. Every now and then a cloud of dust is whipped up as a camouflaged predator strikes, stealing a colour from what seems like an endless number of fish. There is large, there is small, there are some who think they are large. But, much like ourselves, one day they will learn there's always a bigger fish in the ocean. As we float through this endless blue we see penguins, rapid and agile. Their invisible black and illuminating white wings are not designed to fly, but to torpedo them through the icy Antarctic waters at breath-taking speed. Above the surface, there are white mounds of power. This beautiful beast perches on the ice, waiting for a seal to make one bad decision. They are not round, but skinny in comparison to their ancestors. Their ribs poke out through thick white fur, a reminder of the damage their fellow land-livers are doing.

The sea is beautiful. It makes a perfect family beach trip special. The sea is also a monster. Its dark, coal-black depths are unforgiving to intruders. The sea is designed for gills and tails, not arms and legs. And, if in the wrong mood, the sea is known for attacking four limbed intruders. The blue will smash you with waves till fatigue begins to take its toll. Its dark, towering waves leave no room for calmness, no room for clear thinking. Instead, panic, thrashing the fight against heavy clothes. And the cold, oh the cold. Shock leads to waves of fear. The sea will make you splutter. Like a net, the harder you fight it, the sea will but tighten its angry, cold palms around your neck. The sea kills many; the ones that fall victim usually do so as a result of lacking respect.

The sea is entertainment; it is fun. Surfers ride with joy. The hairs on their trembling skin stand up in anticipation as a rolling mass of blue appears on the horizon. the sea is bliss. A man floats on his back, his hairy arms rested under his head, only to expose more hair in his arm pits. There is no one there to see; he is at sea, he is free. The salt's magical attributes keep him afloat as he stares up into the glaring sunlight. The divers, diving deep, float aimlessly into the murky depths of the ocean. An oxygen tank on their backs keeps them at arm's length from the sea's grasp. It is blue, it is black, it is vast.