

## Chapter 1

The man shivered, not because of the coolness of the ocean water bathing his bare skin, but because of a sudden, strong feeling that he was being watched.

That was odd, Simon Andrews thought, as he blew his snorkel clear and took his first look in months at the underwater world. Diving conditions were perfect, with no wind or current to speak of and water visibility of over fifty feet. Convincing himself that he was probably imagining things, Andrews kicked away from his boat, stopped after swimming only a few yards, and raised his head out of the water to take in the scene before him. His sloop, *Time Out*, hung slack on her anchor line against a backdrop of San Clemente Island's chaparral-covered hills. Andrews lifted his new underwater camera up to his faceplate and snapped a shot.

Two days of sailing and motoring had brought Andrews to this magical place. He had spent the night at Catalina, rounded the west end of San Clemente Island by noon today, and finally stopped when he came within sight of the partially submerged destroyer wreck. From the *Time Out's* bow he had clearly seen his anchor hit the bottom twenty-five feet below, and he had grabbed his fins, mask, and snorkel, and had tumbled over the side into the blue Pacific.

This was the life, Andrews told himself, taking in the underwater scene before him. Selling Porsches in Newport Beach was lucrative but stressful. A week by himself on the backside of San Clemente Island was just what the doctor ordered.

Twitch.

Andrews' eyes darted in the direction of a fleeting movement on the bottom. Goose bumps scampered across his skin as again the feeling of being watched swept over him. He scanned the ocean bottom for a possible cause of the feeling. Ribbons of feather boa kelp, ten-feet long and lined with

fringe, swayed like grass skirts in the gentle surge. Various fish, though fewer in number than what Andrews expected to see, swam in and out of the kelp's protective curtain and seemed to be going about their normal fish business.

It was just as he suspected. He badly needed some time to unwind.

Andrews was ready for his first dive. He hyperventilated by taking ten long breaths. He held the tenth one, jackknifed his body, and sliced downward through the water, reaching the bottom with a few strong kicks of his swim fins.

That wasn't bad, he thought, considering that he hadn't been in the water for two months. He felt comfortable, and he figured he could stay down for at least half a minute before he had to surface for air. He knelt on the sandy bottom and began framing imaginary pictures with his new camera.

Twitch.

Another fleeting movement caught the corner of Andrews' eye, but this time he mentally chronicled the movement's location. Whatever it was, it was behind him and only a few feet distant. He placed a finger on the camera's shutter release and eased his body around in hopes of not scaring away a good picture. He saw nothing but the swaying bushes of feather boa and the noticeable lack of fish. Puzzled, he continued to look through the camera's large viewfinder, sensing that some photogenic, undersea creature was probably right in front of him but hiding in plain sight.

Too late, Andrews spotted the source of the movement. As the ocean floor opened up and engulfed him, his underwater scream was captured and carried upward in a swirling cloud of bubbles that broke silently on the surface.

Debris and sand that had been stirred up soon began to settle back to the bottom. A calico bass peeked out from its hiding place in the feather boa. A fresh afternoon breeze rippled the ocean surface, and the *Time Out*, secure at anchor, swung her stern another degree towards shore.