

Dark Life: Book 1 Study Guide

Dark Life: Book 1 by Kat Falls

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Contents

Dark Life: Book 1 Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1-3.....	5
Chapters 4-6.....	8
Chapters 7-9.....	12
Chapters 10-12.....	14
Chapters 13-15.....	17
Chapters 16-18.....	20
Chapters 19-21.....	23
Chapters 22-24.....	25
Chapters 25-27.....	28
Chapters 28, 29 and Epilogue.....	31
Characters.....	34
Objects/Places.....	42
Themes.....	47
Style.....	52
Quotes.....	56
Topics for Discussion.....	58



Plot Summary

Dark Life is the story of Ty, a teenage boy living under the sea. He meets Gemma, a teenage girl from the land, who has gone under the water searching for her brother. When an outlaw group called the Seablite Gang attacks a homestead, Ty and Gemma get more involved than they would like with the attempt to capture the bandits. They find out that Shade is actually Gemma's brother, who can change his appearance thanks to his 'Dark Gift.' Ty also has a Dark Gift that he has been keeping secret, which he decides to reveal to the other settlers in order to save Shade's life. When the settlers are caught in the Trade Station as it floods, Ty uses his Dark Gift to call to a pod of dolphins to save them all.

Ty is the first child to be born under the ocean. He is a member of the Benthic Settlement, the first pioneers to move subsea after rising sea levels swallowed up half the world. Children who grow up under the sea have Dark Gifts, special abilities caused by the water's pressure on their developing brains. Ty's power is biosonar; he can use sonar to 'see' underwater and to communicate with animals such as dolphins and whales. When he was little he was taken to Topside doctors and experimented on, and had to pretend that his ability had gone away before they would let him go. Now he hides his ability from everyone else and encourages the other children to do the same.

Ty meets Gemma, a Topsider girl looking for her brother, on a derelict submarine. They run away from the Seablite Gang and Ty brings her home. When Ty's neighbor's house is attacked by the outlaws, Ty and Gemma help them out. Ty gets a good look at Shade, the albino leader of the gang. Later, when helping Gemma to locate her brother, Ty sees Shade in the saloon on the Trade Station. Shade's skin color is now different, and Ty knows he needs to tell the other settlers this information, despite Shade's threats to him.

On their way home, Gemma and Ty are attacked by the outlaws, but they manage to escape. They find the prison that the Seablite Gang escaped from, but discover that it is not actually a prison at all. It was a reformatory where children were abused by the government and forced to pan for black pearls. However, any sympathy they might have had for the gang is ended when they find out that Gemma's brother is dead, murdered by the Seablite outlaws.

That night the Seablite Gang attack Ty's homestead and Shade tries to take Gemma. Ty's little sister Zoe uses her Dark Gift to electrocute him, and Shade is captured. However, when Ty and Gemma go to identify him, Shade changes his appearance in front of Ranger Grimes. He then grabs Gemma and threatens her. Ty is forced to get the key and let him out. Ty then realizes that Gemma is missing, and finds her in the saloon talking to Shade. Shade reveals that he is actually Gemma's brother, and that he has a Dark Gift that lets him change his appearance. Just then, a posse of settlers comes in and tries to hang Shade for his crimes, but Ty manages to stop them. He reveals that Dark Gifts are real, and asks the other settlers not to be afraid of them. Shade tells them that Doc Kunze is not their friend, and that he wants to experiment on their children. Doc tries to kill Shade but misses, and then swims away.



Shade leaves with his gang. He tells Gemma that she cannot come with him, but he signs her emancipation form, meaning that she is no longer under government control. However, Doc's missed shot actually pierced the wall, and now the sea starts flooding in. The settlers are trapped, but Ty manages to save them by using his Dark Gift to call to a pod of dolphins. The dolphins carry them to safety, but Gemma is nearly killed when Doc tries to grab her dolphin. On deck, Zoe uses her Dark Gift to restart Gemma's heart. The settlers realize that Dark Gifts can be a good thing after all. They are shocked about what the government did to the Seablite Gang, and what Doc was intending to do to their children. They decide that Benthic Territory would be better off if it was independent from the Commonwealth.



Chapters 1-3

Chapters 1-3 Summary

'Dark Life' is a story about Ty, a teenage boy living in a subsea settlement under the ocean. The settlement has been tasked with capturing the dangerous outlaws, the Seablite Gang, who prey on government supply ships. Ty also has his own problems in the form of Gemma, a Topsider girl who lives on land, who has come subsea looking for her older brother. Ty and Gemma get dangerously involved with the Seablite Gang, and eventually discover what happened to Gemma's brother. Ty is forced to reveal that he has a 'dark gift,' a special ability triggered by growing up under water, something that he had been desperate to keep secret. In the end the outlaws are not captured but promise never to harm another settler. The settlement decides to break away from Commonwealth control in order to become independent.

Ty is exploring the deep-sea Coldsleep Canyon when a lantern-shark attacks him. He powers his mantaboard, a one-person high-speed propelling device, and shoots away from it, but then runs into a submarine. He goes in through the airlock just in time to escape the predators chasing him. Inside there is a lot of blood, which Ty hopes comes from fish. He hears movement and finds a girl in the sub. She is a Topsider, meaning that she lives on land rather than under the sea like Ty. She tells him that she has come down looking for her brother. As they are talking, a grappling device is lowered onto the sub and Ty sees that the Specter is above them. He explains that the Specter is the ship belonging to a very dangerous group of outlaws called the Seablite Gang. He worries that they will attack him and Gemma, or dump the sub into the canyon. He persuades Gemma to leave the sub, but as they get to the airlock there is an outlaw coming in. Ty manages to trap the outlaw's arm in the closing airlock door and he and Gemma escape. They drop to the ocean floor, where Ty quickly locates Gemma's minisub.

Gemma is surprised that Ty could find the vehicle in the dark ocean and accuses him of having a 'dark gift.' These are special abilities that some people believe develop in children who grow up under the sea. Ty tells her that Dark Gifts are a myth but she is not really convinced. They head to the Trade Station, which is a huge station built in the ocean for people to meet and trade. Ty steers the boat up to the surface, where ships are moored at the Surface Deck. There he sees his neighbor Jibby, who moved subsea a couple of years ago. Jibby suggests they go below deck to the settlers' meeting, as that's where all the pioneers will be. If anyone has seen Gemma's brother, it will be them.

As Ty is about to take Gemma below deck, he is spotted by two Topsider women who immediately come over to gawk at him.



Chapters 1-3 Analysis

In this story, the ocean is portrayed as a place that is dangerous but beautiful, wild, and free. It is a place where a person can get away from the pressures of society in order to forge a new home and identity. Unlike the land settlements, the subsea settlements are not massively overcrowded. Under the sea a person can create a place for themselves and achieve something, and not feel like they are lost in a crowd of other people who are all exactly like them. Ty exemplifies the subsea dream; he longs to stake a claim on his own land and build up a home and livelihood for himself. He has big plans and is prepared to work hard to fulfill them. This subsea life mimics the idea behind the fist settlements in the American Wild West. In the 19th century, pioneers moved to the Wild West, lured by the vast tracts of land available to them, new freedoms, a chance to start afresh, and, of course, the promise of gold. Gold was present in many of the mountains and rivers in the Wild West, and prospectors would mine and pan the rivers in the hope of finding some. Just a small find could make a man very rich. Even without gold, a man could claim large amounts of land, raise livestock and make a living for himself, if he was prepared to work hard. The benefits included plenty of space to call his own and to start a family, freedoms from the normal constraints of society and from the masses of people in the cities, and the beauty of the wild country around him. The setting is very different but the ideas are exactly the same. The ocean is the equivalent of the Wild West, and its pioneers and settlers are searching for the same things. The ocean even has its own prospectors, but they hunt 'black pearls' rather than gold.

The similarities between the sea and the Wild West in this story are deliberate. The feel of the story immediately captures the spirit of the Old West, with Ty exploring new places and enjoying the untamed 'wildness' of the things around him. Dangerous predators chase him, but he is used to dealing with them and knows how to get away safely. He accepts the risks of his way of life and would not trade his freedoms for safety. This is the attitude of the typical Western 'cowboy' hero. The story also quickly introduces one of the staples of the Western genre: outlaws. One of the dangers that comes with extra freedoms and isolation from the rest of society is people looking to take advantage of others. Just as most Western stories have gangs of outlaws who rob unwary travelers and make life difficult for the settlers, so this story has the Seablite Gang. So far, the Seablite Gang has only preyed on government ships, but it seems that they are now turning their attention to the settlers. In Western stories, a cowboy hero is usually introduced to fight the outlaws and save the settlers. This might be the local sheriff or his deputy, or more often a lone stranger out for justice. It remains to be seen in this story who the hero will be, but the reader suspects that Ty and Gemma might find themselves more embroiled with the Seablite Gang than they would like.

Another common theme of Western stories is the clash of two very different cultures. The settlers of the Wild West are seen by the rest of civilization as rather strange. They are considered wild and coarse, like the land they have moved to. The settlers of the Wild West consider the city folk as a little stuck-up and weak; they cannot take care of themselves and are too concerned with frivolous things. These attitudes are also present in this story. Ty thinks of Gemma as a weak Topsider who has come down to



the ocean without realizing how dangerous it can be. He thinks she is foolish and that she has strange ideas. She finds Ty fascinating, as he is so different from anyone she has met before. He seems wild and dangerous, and she seems obsessed with the idea that he has a 'dark gift' that makes him mysterious and special. Neither of them really understands the other. Gemma has come from a place that is overcrowded and busy. She has never felt special because she is just another person in the throng, like everybody else. For her, to be called different or special is a compliment. For Ty, being different is not necessarily a good thing. He hates attention and does not want people to stare at him or treat him like a freak. He is very sensitive about what the Topsiders think, as he knows that they all disapprove of the kinds of people who live under the ocean. This is why he dreads going to the Trade Station, as he knows he will be gawked at and inspected as though he is an interesting specimen rather than a person. Unlike Gemma, Ty would much rather just fit in and blend into the crowd. As such, Gemma and Ty do not really understand how the other thinks, and what is a compliment or an insult to them. They will have to learn to understand each other before they can really be friends.

These first three chapters give the reader a first impression of the characters of Ty and Gemma. Ty is brave and fiercely independent. He is calm in a crisis and thinks things through with a cool, level head. He is very determined about the things he wants, and does not like people to tell him what to do. He is inquisitive, loves to explore, and takes delight in the ocean and its creatures. Gemma is much more hot-headed, rash and quick to show emotions. She is more likely to panic in a dangerous situation, though she hates to admit when she needs help. She is very proud, and just as determined in her own way as Ty is. She is anxious to prove herself, and does not want to be thought of as a 'weak girl.' She does not understand that Ty thinks she needs protection because she is a Topsider, not because she is a girl. She is very willful, and will not take 'no' as an answer. Like Ty, she is very curious about things, and interested in the world around her. She does not love the ocean in the same way, but this is just because she is not used to it and is a little frightened by it. At the moment she seems to be caught between fascination and horror. She is very interested in Ty and Ty reciprocates this interest. He shows how much he already likes her when he is jealous of Jibby for talking to her. He wants to be the one to show her things and to help her, and does not appreciate another man muscling in on this. There is clearly something developing between Ty and Gemma, but at the moment the differences between them are still too great for them to be comfortable with each other.



Chapters 4-6

Chapters 4-6 Summary

Ty takes Gemma below the surface decks to the room where his settlement has called a meeting. They are discussing the outlaws. Benson Tupper, the Commonwealth's representative for Benthic Territory, explains to them that they have been tasked with capturing the bandits themselves, dead or alive. Until the outlaws are caught, the Commonwealth will be halting all supply ships, forcing Dr. Kunze to return to the surface, and stopping the subsidizing of new homesteads. The latter particularly upsets Ty.

Ty does not want to mention the outlaws right now and risk making matters worse, so he pretends that he has come to ask for the family sub. He explains that Gemma wants to see their homestead. Gemma is happy to play along with this. They travel to Ty's home, where a charged barrier of bubbles keeps predators out and the family's stock of fish in. The house itself is shaped like a jellyfish and made of malleable material that bends with the moving water. They enter the house by the moon pool, which is a pool of water that allows access to the sea from the house.

They have not been inside the house long when a large sea serpent is suddenly thrown into the room, making them jump. It is followed by Zoe, Ty's little sister, who scatters more dead fish into the room. Ty introduces Gemma, but then the fish begin to twitch. He realizes that they are not dead after all. The huge sea serpent, an oarfish, starts flailing around and Gemma has to jump about to keep out of the way. Ty runs for a shockprod, but Zoe clings on to him and wails at him not to hurt it, as the fish is hers. Eventually the oarfish wriggles to the moon pool and swims away.

Ty notices the jade knife Gemma is holding. She explains that her brother sent it to her, and that it is ancient Mayan. Ty shows her his own collection of ancient artifacts found underneath the sea.

Gemma explains why she is searching for her brother. She is a ward of the Commonwealth because her parents are both dead. All children are sent by their parents to boarding homes to live and learn. Some parents can afford nice ones, but Gemma has to move around state funded ones. She does not want to do this anymore, and wants to be independent instead. She needs her older brother to sign her emancipation form, but all she knows is that he lives subsea. This is why she is searching for him.

As she finishes explaining this to them, the window is suddenly hit by a submarine. Ty sees that it is Hewitt, their neighbor, and knows that nothing good could have caused him to ram into the house like that.



Chapters 4-6 Analysis

The Western feel is continued in these chapters as the settlement is explored further. The Trade Station is a centre for the settlers to come interact with each other and to buy and sell. In this way it is very similar to a town in the Wild West. It is here that the prospectors come to berth and drink, just as they would have done in an old Western town. Just like a Western, there is a saloon for gambling and drinking, as well as a boarding house. The Trade Station, like a town, is used by more than just the settlers. It is here that traders stop by, as well as people who live on house-boats, who are a kind of intermediate stage between the city folk and the subsea settlers. Some brave tourists also come here to see what life in the ocean is like, and to gawk at the ocean dwellers. Just as in a Western story, there is a place for some city-folk in the town, but not in the actual 'wild' homesteads. The town also has a large market, which seems very crowded and bustling to Ty, though it is nothing compared to what Gemma has experienced in the overcrowded cities. The Trade Station has its own undersea areas where the settlers can meet and discuss issues that affect them all. This is similar to a town hall. There is also a doctor, an infirmary, jail cells and a ranger - the equivalent of a sheriff in a Western story - on the Trade Station.

In these chapters, the settlers meet to discuss the outlaw problem. They are informed by the government representative that they are effectively on their own, and must catch the outlaws themselves. They will have the help of Ranger Grimes, who is quickly established to be rather useless. Even their doctor is a somewhat broken, discredited man who cannot even perform surgery anymore. There is a backwards, washed up feel to the place, which captures the atmosphere of most Westerns. The fact that the settlers are expected to look after themselves and deal with the Seablite Gang on their own, while at the same time paying taxes to the government, also sums up many storylines in Westerns, as well as the feeling of having been abandoned and let down by the government. These people are on their own in a lawless area of the world. If they want civilization and laws, they will have to make and enforce them themselves.

Ty takes Gemma to see his homestead in these chapters, and the reader is given their first glimpse of how the settlers live. The houses under the sea reflect the sea itself. They are designed to look like sea creatures and are inspired by sea life. Ty's father had a large role in designing the buildings, and chose to create something that would fit in with the environment around them. Under the sea, a rigid, heavy building such as those built on land would not work. Instead, the houses here are flexible and rounded, like a jellyfish. They are harmonious with their surroundings, moving with the flow of the sea rather than fighting against it. This shows a break from normal human attitudes. Instead of trying to stamp human shapes and ideas on things, the people here have studied sea life and worked out how best to live among it. They have imitated what already works under the ocean. This shows a willingness to be adaptable, which is something that early settlers understood, but is an attitude that has been largely lost in modern times. In this story, humanity faced disaster because of rising sea levels, caused by global warming. This, of course, is a real problem and is directly brought about by human pollution damaging the environment. It is people's unwillingness to change that makes



this problem continually worse. Here, people have been forced to change. There is not enough land left for everyone, so pioneers are venturing under the sea. These pioneers are showing a more sensible and sustainable way of life, and a much better attitude than the Topsiders, who continue to cling to old habits.

Gemma is now starting to show an appreciation for life under the sea. At first she was frightened and intimidated by the things she saw, but now that she has Ty to guide her, she feels safer and can begin to enjoy herself. She begins to see the beauty around her, and is fascinated by everything. Odd things still shock and scare her, but Ty notes that she recovers quickly and seems to take everything in her stride. She tells him about life Topside, and compares it to his life. On land there is not much space, and people are crowded too close together. It is impossible to stand out or to feel like anybody special. Children are sent away at a young age to live and learn in special boarding houses. Under the sea life is very different. Families stay together and appreciate family life more. There is plenty of room for everyone, and Gemma is amazed at how much space Ty's family have. Gemma also reflects that life on land can be very dark, as the poorer citizens live constantly in the shade of tall buildings, train tubes and platforms. Life under the sea, the so-called 'Dark Life,' is actually much lighter, more spacious and pleasant. Ironically, it is the Topsiders who are more like the 'Dark Life.' Here, Gemma shows not only how much she is warming to subsea life, but also how open she is to considering different ways of life and adapting to different situations. She is brave enough to give a chance to something that initially seems quite daunting and scary.

The idea of the 'gem o' the ocean' allows the author to explore different concepts of beauty. Ty thinks the name Gemma sounds like 'gem o' the ocean' and explains that this phrase refers to unexpected beautiful things found in the sea. Later, Gemma points out a glowing shrimp and calls it a gem o' the ocean, showing how even small, unimportant things can be amazing and beautiful if appreciated in the right way. She thinks the shrimp is a gem because it is fascinating. She has never seen anything like it before. Other people might be disgusted or even frightened by such an odd looking creature. Zoe clearly finds her own gems in the fish that she collects. She is obsessed with sea-life, and loves anything she catches, the rarer the better. She thinks the oarfish is special because it is rare, although Ty and Gemma think it is a monster and are scared of it. Zoe likes even the dangerous and disturbing sea creatures simply because they are so different, and because they all come from the ocean.

Ty's gems come in the form of the strange artifacts he finds. He takes pleasure in collecting them, as if they are the sea's gifts to him. Ty also considers Gemma to be a gem, though he does not tell her this, or even admit it to himself. He notes how rare she is, as teenage girls are not at all common under the sea. This links to the Western theme, as young girls and women are also very uncommon in a Western story. Women were less inclined to face the hardships of pioneer life unless moving there with their husband. This meant that unmarried women were scarce and were paid a lot of attention by men if they did come to town. Here, Gemma receives a lot of attention straight away from Jibby, and Ty is also anxious to keep her with him. She is precious because she is different and uncommon. Gemma cannot see this herself, because she is so used to thinking of herself as ordinary. She cannot believe that Ty did not think the



women on the Station were pretty, and is confused as to why he did not want them touching him. To him, the women were too different, looking alien in their zinc paste and goggles. He does not have the same ideas of beauty as a Topsider would, and much prefers Gemma's natural charm. He thinks Gemma is pretty, but also admires her spirit and her bravery, which make her even more charming in his eyes. She is more the kind of girl who is suited to a subsea settler, as she would appreciate the ocean's beauty rather than finding it freakish. She is not like other Topsiders, who Ty considers to have odd ideas of beauty. They prefer skyscrapers to coral reefs, which is something he could never understand. These differences of opinion show how subjective beauty is and how something that might seem ordinary to one person can be a gem to another.



Chapters 7-9

Chapters 7-9 Summary

Hewitt, Ty's twelve-year-old neighbor, arrives and tells them that the Seablite Gang have attacked his homestead. They injured his father and his mother is helping him right now. The power was switched off to their house and it will deflate soon. Ty tells Zoe to call Doc and get him to come to their homestead. He decides to go over to Hewitt's homestead alone to help Hewitt's mother, Shurl. He knows his own father will not get back in time to help. Gemma insists on coming with him.

As they approach Hewitt's house, Gemma spots the Specter, the Seablite Gang's sub, above them. Ty quickly cuts their lights and the outlaws' sub passes over without seeing them. They continue and soon arrive at the house. They help Shurl to get the animals into the sub before the house deflates. Shurl's husband, Lars, is already slumped unconscious in the sub. When they have finished loading the animals, Ty tells Gemma to take the sub home while he sees what damage has been done to the generator.

As Ty is heading to the generator, the kelp in front of him moves and suddenly Shade, the leader of the Seablite Gang, is in front of him. He quickly guns his mantaboard and speeds away, and Shade does not follow. However, Ty is angry, and suddenly thinks that if he follows Shade he might find the gang's hideout. He turns the mantaboard back and drives it out past the continental shelf into the dangerous open ocean.

Ty follows Shade, but after a while Shade turns and sees him. He fires his harpoon gun at Ty, and it lodges in the mantaboard. Ty is forced to abandon the board and swim for his life. Shade is too big and heavy to catch up and Ty manages to get away.

Chapters 7-9 Analysis

Both Gemma and Ty prove their bravery and concern for others in these chapters. Gemma is determined to help and to come along with Ty, despite the danger. She is not concerned for herself and claims that she is not afraid. This partly seems like bravado, as she is trying to prove herself to Ty. She does not want to be thought of as a weak or useless Topsider, but as someone who can actually help and can get along as well as any subsea settler. However, she also genuinely seems to want to help, and runs about saving the chickens and the goats without complaint, despite the fact that these animals are very strange to her. When Ty goes to investigate the generator, Gemma shows that she can take control in a difficult situation and manages to steer the sub to safety. Although Ty wants to protect Gemma, he also will not tell her what she can and cannot do. She is determined to come with him, so he lets her. As far as he is concerned it is her choice. This is a very different attitude to those displayed by Topsiders, who would consider Gemma weak and try to prevent her from doing things. She likes to be more independent, and so she likes Ty's attitude towards her. It is this need to be more



independent that has spurred her to come subsea in the first place, to find her brother so he can sign her emancipation form. She wants to be free, and life under the ocean is all about freedom. This is why this way of life is resonating so strongly with her so quickly, despite how different and daunting it all seems to her. Life under the sea is exactly what she needs.

Ty also shows extreme bravery in these chapters, racing to help Shurl even though he knows how dangerous the situation is. In some ways he is much braver than Gemma, because he is aware of all the things that can go wrong and hurt him. He also decides to follow Shade in order to find the outlaws' base. This is extremely dangerous and rash behavior. He seems to have been influenced a little too much by Gemma here, as if her hot-headedness has infected him. It is her idea to follow the outlaws, but Ty is very foolish for doing so alone and with no real means of escape. Now he is left in a very dangerous situation. He is in the open ocean with no mantaboard and no lights, with no way to know which direction his home is in.

Ty has gotten himself into this situation because he wants to help capture the outlaws. This is partly for his own benefit, as he cannot claim land of his own if the government stops sponsoring new homesteads, which they will do until the outlaws are caught. However, it is mainly because of Ty's anger towards the Seablite Gang that he follows Shade. He is annoyed that they have hurt his neighbors and friends, and wants to bring them to justice. He is angry because the outlaws have undone so much hard work and are making an already hard life much more difficult for the settlers. The settlers have to work very hard for the money they earn, as they are expected to pay so much food in taxes to the government. It is a difficult life but can have its rewards in the land they are given and the living they can build for themselves. Not only do the Seablite Gang destroy this living, they are also making it impossible for settlers to claim new land. They are ruining the beautiful dream of ocean life. Ty sees them as lazy and cruel, and thinks they need to be stopped. He does not want anyone else to have to suffer, and he has a strong sense of what is fair and right. This is another example of ideas from Western stories emerging in this novel. Westerns often stress the value of honest, hard work, of good community and kindness to neighbors. In both Westerns and this story, outlaws threaten these values. They will destroy everything that is important to the settlers' communities. This is why outlaws are common villains in these stories and why the heroes fight so hard to stop them.



Chapters 10-12

Chapters 10-12 Summary

Ty swims all the way back to his home. His mother is extremely angry with him for risking himself, and he doesn't dare make it worse by telling her that he tried to follow Shade and lost his mantaboard. Doc wants to give Ty a quick medical test to check his vitals, but Ty refuses to let him.

Ty's dad returns and tells them he has managed to get the power back on at the Peavey house. Lars is not hurt too badly and the outlaws did not steal too much. Shurl makes a large dinner to celebrate. Gemma tells them that she plans on renting a berth at the Trade Station and Ty's mother offers for her to stay with them instead, until she finds her brother.

The next day Gemma and Ty help to re-inflate and clean up the Peavey's house. Zoe runs around trying to save the sea creatures inside, putting a red octopus into a pot and handing it to Gemma to hold. The octopus wraps a tentacle around Gemma's wrist and she shrieks, flailing her arm around to try to dislodge it. She manages to knock it loose and it flies across the room and hits the wall. Zoe is angry and yells at Gemma. Ty and Hewitt both jump in front of Gemma to protect her. Gemma says she is tough, but Ty tells her that Zoe never fights fair.

Later they are talking about the Seablite Gang and Doc overhears them. He explains that the Seablite Gang are actually escaped convicts who broke out of Seablite Prison. It is a maximum security prison, built under the sea as an experiment. It is hidden in a building marked as a structurally unsound science lab, as the government did not want the settlers to know they built a prison so close to them. He explains that when the prisoners broke out, all the power just shut off for no reason. The guards were all unconscious without a mark on them, and the security cameras recorded static until the escape was over. Gemma suggests that the prisoners may have developed Dark Gifts, and Doc agrees that it is a possibility. He jokingly asks if Zoe has any special gifts, and Zoe looks at Ty, as if for permission. Ty tells them that Zoe can pick her nose with her tongue and everybody laughs. Later that evening, the same derelict sub that Ty and Gemma found earlier in the story floats near to the Peavey's house. It seems that the outlaws have dragged it here and left it.

That night Gemma comes to the boys' room to talk. She discusses an article she read about a boy called Akai who supposedly had a Dark Gift. He could use sonar to 'see' in the dark and to talk to dolphins. Ty explains that there was no boy called Akai and that the doctor who wrote the article based it on old case notes.

Gemma asks to talk privately. They go to the greenhouse, and Gemma tells Ty about her brother. She explains that when they were younger, her brother helped her to stay strong by breaking into 'quality time rooms' where parents go to visit their children. This



helped her to feel like she was still part of a family. He was caught and sent to a reformatory. When he returned he wasn't the same, and soon left. Now Gemma asks Ty to help her get into the saloon, as she is anxious to find her brother.

Chapters 10-12 Analysis

These chapters explore the idea of Dark Gifts further. So far there have been several hints that both Ty and Zoe possess Dark Gifts. These Dark Gifts are special abilities that children develop from living under the sea. A Topsider doctor once wrote an article about these Dark Gifts, identifying a boy called Akai as having one. The doctor claimed that Akai could use sonar to talk to dolphins, and to 'see' in the dark by throwing out sonar and noting how long it took the echoes to return. Many undersea creatures use sonar in this way to navigate in the dark water around them. This is also what submarines use to navigate. This article sparked a lot of interest among Topsiders, and obviously adds to the mystery and the excitement they associate with the subsea settlements. Gemma is clearly enchanted by the idea, and is determined to find out more about it. Ty claims that it is not true, and that the doctor who wrote the article did no research under the sea himself, using old case notes instead. Gemma does not quite believe him, perhaps because she wants to believe in almost magical abilities that make people like Akai special. Gemma loves the idea of being different and special, but Ty thinks being 'special' is just another way of saying being 'freakish.' He thinks the Dark Gift myth discourages people from moving subsea, and so threatens the future of their communities. He does not like people to think he or his people are weird, and just wants to be normal. He does not understand that other Topsiders like Gemma might actually find the idea of Dark Gifts appealing.

Although Ty constantly denies the existence of Dark Gifts, it is clear that he is hiding something. He has already acted very strangely with Gemma, trying to deflect her questions and worrying that he might have given away too much. His constant denials seem suspicious, as he would probably not get so worked up about the subject if he were not trying to hide something. He has also demonstrated several times that he has an unnatural ability to 'see' in the dark. He managed to find Gemma's sub in the pitch black water, something that she found odd and questioned him about. Now he has also made his way back from the open ocean with no lights and no way to find his home. It had seemed that he was in a very dangerous situation, but in the next chapter he had made it home easily. It is very unlikely that Ty simply picked a direction and got lucky. It seems that he has ways to navigate in the dark ocean that others do not. This, combined with Gemma's mention of Akai's supposed abilities, makes the reader wonder if Ty also has some kind of sonar powers. Certainly he is hiding something, and it seems likely that he has a Dark Gift.

Zoe also seems to have a Dark Gift, though it is not obvious yet what this is. When Zoe was first introduced into the story, she had caught a large collection of fish, including a large oarfish. At first, Ty and Gemma thought the fish were dead, but then they began wriggling around. In fact, the fish had been shocked somehow. Gemma questions how Zoe managed to do this, and Ty mentions something vague about her setting traps. He



is thankful that Gemma is distracted from further questioning, and once again it is clear that he is hiding something. In these chapters, Gemma upsets Zoe by insulting the red octopus and hitting it against a wall. Zoe gets angry, and immediately Ty and Hewitt step in front of Gemma to block her from Zoe. This suggests that Zoe is dangerous, and that a girl much older than her could actually be in danger from her. Gemma insists that she is tough, but Ty tells her that his sister does not fight fair. This could simply mean that his sister likes to bite and scratch when she fights, but this seems unlikely, as Ty and Hewitt seem genuinely scared of what Zoe could do. Combined with Zoe's mysterious ability to stun fish, this points to the fact that she also has a Dark Gift. Later, Doc jokingly asks Zoe if she has a special ability. Zoe looks to Ty as if asking for permission. Ty immediately worries that Zoe may have given the game away, but he manages to cover by pretending that her 'gift' is to be able to pick her nose with her own tongue. This eases the tension and everyone laughs, but it proves that Ty and Zoe are sharing a secret that is something to do with Dark Gifts. Although everyone else is convinced by Ty's cover story, Doc seems less sure. It is clear that he is already suspicious of Ty because he does not like medical examinations. Now Doc has reason to be suspicious of Zoe as well. If Ty wants to continue to keep their abilities secret, he will have to be more careful around the doctor.

Doc explains more about the history of the Seablite Gang in these chapters, and reveals that they are actually escaped convicts. Not only has the government unfairly tasked the settlers with capturing the outlaws, it seems they have also been hiding a subsea maximum security prison. Now they are pitting untrained settlers against escaped criminals. Ty is shocked, but reflects that he should not be surprised, given how badly the government treats them. This immediately heightens the danger that Ty and his friends and family are in. The Seablite Gang are more dangerous than they had originally thought, and will likely stop at nothing to get what they want. To make matters worse, Doc speculates that the prisoners may even have Dark Gifts themselves. They broke out of the prison in very mysterious circumstances, which suggests that they can do things that normal people cannot. The others dismiss this idea, as they do not believe in Dark Gifts. However, the reader suspects that Ty is hiding his own Dark Gift, so it is very possible that the prisoners may be too. If the outlaws are fighting 'unfairly' as Zoe does, then will Ty have to use his own abilities in order to combat them? Will he have to reveal his own Dark Gift in order to convince his people of the danger they are in? Ty points out that the prisoners cannot have developed gifts unless they grew up under the sea as children. However, Doc insists that they may have developed abilities due to the water pressure. Although Ty does not know it yet, he has actually come close to unraveling the secret behind Seablite and the doctor's involvement with it. The Seablite Gang actually have grown up under the sea, as they were sent to Seablite as children. Ty's comments here foreshadow the revelations to come.



Chapters 13-15

Chapters 13-15 Summary

Gemma and Ty go to the Trade Station. Gemma manages to pickpocket a miner to get an ID card for the saloon. Ty insists that she try to dress like a boy, and gives her clothes from lost and found. He then goes to the infirmary to get a bandage to wrap round her chest and flatten her breasts. In Doc's office he sees the same article Gemma had been talking about, concerning Dark Gifts and the boy Akai. Doc comes out and tells Ty that he is analyzing the blood found on the abandoned sub. It is definitely human, and there is a lot of it. It looks as though the Seablite Gang did kill a prospector. Doc also tells Ty that he has received a missing child post from the government. The picture is of Gemma. It says she ran away, and that she stole money from her boarding home.

Gemma explains to Ty that the money was hers, sent by her brother, but that the head of the boarding house would not let her have it. This is why she stole it and ran away. Together they go to the saloon, which is arranged on three levels with berths around the walls. These are small cubicles with a bed and a small window. Gemma and Ty are forced to hide in one together as Jibby and Raj walk past, so that they are not recognized.

They go down onto the main saloon floor and Gemma approaches a dangerous looking man with long, straight white hair. She shows him the photo, and there is a glimmer of recognition in his eyes before he shakes his head and tells her he doesn't recognize the boy in the photo. Ty is looking around the room when he suddenly sees a man he recognizes. The man has black skin rather than albino, but he knows by the shape of his skull that it is Shade.

Ty sends Gemma to get Ranger Grimes while he stays and keeps an eye on Shade. Ty decides to distract Shade by showing him the photo of Gemma's brother, but he is knocked by a drunk as he walks over to him. When he gets back up, Shade has disappeared. Two other members of Shade's gang introduce themselves as Pretty and Eel, and ask him if he is looking for someone. He shows them the photo of Gemma's brother. Eel seems to recognize it and asks how Ty knows him. Ty claims that a Topsider girl posted the photo online. Eel and Pretty become threatening, but the bartender walks up and intervenes, allowing Ty to get away.

Ty goes to the ranger and tries to explain about Shade, but Grimes does not believe him. Ty and Gemma leave, and Gemma goes to get her things from the lounge. Ty goes down in the elevator, but realizes too late that Shade is in there with him.



Chapters 13-15 Analysis

Gemma and Ty's situations could not be more different. Gemma has no family, and feels completely alone in the world. Both her parents are dead, her brother was taken from her for most of her childhood, and now he has disappeared. Ty has parents, a sister, friends, neighbors and a large community who all look out for each other. Gemma tells him how nice it is that everybody in the settlement cares about each other so much. Ty finds it annoying to be constantly watched over and told what to do, but Gemma points out that having people looking out for him is actually a good thing. The settlement is like one large, extended family. Gemma comes from a world where everyone lives very close together, where there are constantly people around, and yet where everyone feels alone. People in her world are so concerned with their own space that they do not care about each other or look out for each other. Ironically, there are so many people living together, and yet they are not at all connected. All her life Gemma has only had one family member, her brother. He stood by her when she was upset and lonely, and helped to keep her strong. He made sure she felt loved, and felt like she was part of a family after all. He was taken away because he was trying to care for her, and she feels guilty about this. When he came back he seemed changed, and then after six months he left. She has never seen him since. Now she is completely alone, and the only connection she has in the whole world is missing. This is why it is so important for her to find her brother. She is desperate to be part of a family again. Ty cannot refuse to help her now that he understands this. She shows him how lucky he really is. Despite any hardships he faces, he always has people to support him. Now he needs to help Gemma find the same.

It is also vital that Gemma find her brother because she ran away from the boarding house and has been accused of stealing money. The money was actually hers, sent by her brother, but the head of the boarding house refused to let her have it until she is independent. She cannot be independent without her brother's signature on the emancipation form, and she could not find him without the money. She was in a desperate situation and so responded with desperate actions. Now she is once again in a desperate situation. If she goes back to the boarding house she will most likely be sent to a reformatory like her brother. If she finds her brother, she can have her freedom and her family again. Her happiness rests on being able to find her brother. Everything is on the line for her, and Ty cannot abandon her now. He realizes how much she needs him, and how desperate she really is. Time is running out for her, as she needs to find her brother before someone hands her in to the authorities. Despite the risks for Ty, he likes Gemma far too much to let her down when she really needs him.

In the saloon, Ty encounters Shade and the Seablite Gang again. Shade seems to recognize Ty just as he recognizes Shade, and now it is clear that Ty is in serious danger. Ranger Grimes does not believe Ty, and Shade has proven that he can change his looks in order to disguise himself. Ty thinks that he must put zinc paste on himself to make himself seem like an albino. This means that many of the settlers could be putting themselves in danger by drinking with Shade and never realizing that it is him. It also means that they are unlikely to ever catch him as they are looking for an albino. Ty will



either have to do something about this himself, or admit to the settlers that he went into the saloon against the rules. Right now, however, Ty has to worry about himself. Shade has cornered him in an elevator and he knows that Ty is aware of his identity. This creates a lot of tension and suspense at the end of the chapter as the reader knows how much danger Ty is in.

These chapters also open up some interesting questions about the Seablite Gang. Why do members of the gang recognize Gemma's brother? Why are they interested in Gemma? Why do they have shins if they have not been in the sea long enough to develop them? Why are some of them so young, if they supposedly escaped from prison a few years ago? How does Shade seem to disappear in a crowd so easily, despite being a very distinctive looking man? All these questions show that things are not quite as they seem. These questions are not answered yet, but they are setting up a greater mystery surrounding who the Seablite Gang actually are, and what their intentions are. These questions also begin to point to Gemma's brother being involved with the gang somehow. The Seablite Gang are clearly not all that they seem and Doc's story about them may not be the whole truth.



Chapters 16-18

Chapters 16-18 Summary

Shade asks Ty what he told the ranger about him. Ty tells him that he informed the ranger that Shade has black skin, but that Grimes didn't believe him. Shade asks Ty how he is still alive after being stranded in the open ocean, and suggests that Ty might have a Dark Gift. Ty denies this. He tells Shade that he was born subsea. Shade finds this impressive and decides to give Ty another chance. He lets him live, but warns him not to talk about him again.

On the docking ring, Ty sees Gemma kicking off her disguise. He calls to her, but sees a dark shadow of a man moving towards her. She spots Ty and comes over to him, and the shadow halts. It watches Gemma leave with burning red eyes.

As they are piloting their sub home, the Specter catches up with them and throws a net over their ship. Ty tells Gemma that they need to abandon the ship and swim home, but she is afraid they won't be able to find their way. Ty has to admit to having a Dark Gift. He can use biosonar, and is in fact Akai. 'Akai' means sea-born and is the name the doctors attached to his file.

They drop out of the minisub and the outlaws are unaware that Ty and Gemma have escaped. Ty shows her all the amazing sea life around them as they trudge back to the settlement across the ocean floor. Then they come across the building that was once the Seablite Prison, and Ty decides to look inside.

The building is in disrepair and half filled with sea water. They find chains, and Ty realizes that the prisoners were made to work at panning for black pearls, which he says is horrible, back-breaking work. They explore further and find bunk beds with comic book posters and other juvenile things taped to the walls. There is a picture of a young girl, which Ty realizes is Gemma. Seablite Prison was not a prison at all, but a reformatory for misbehaving Topsider children. This is where Gemma's brother was sent.

Chapters 16-18 Analysis

Gemma tells Ty that he is distinctive looking in a way that her brother is not. She is trying to tell him that he is good looking, but he does not understand her intent and takes it as an insult. He does not want to be distinctive looking because he does not want to be different. He would rather look and be normal, in order to fit in with everyone else. This is exactly what Gemma does not want for herself, so calling him special is meant as a compliment. This is a reminder of the very different worlds they come from, and how their upbringing has affected them. However, Gemma is beginning to learn the way in which Ty thinks. She sees his confusion and discomfort, and she smiles, finding his denial of her compliment amusing. She realizes that he has no idea she is trying to



tell him he is good-looking. She is secretly pleased, as it means he will not notice attention from other girls either. He thought the women on the Trade Station wanted to touch him because he is a freak, but she thinks it is because he is attractive. She is happy for him to make this mistake, as it means he will continue to ignore other girls' advances, and she can have him all to herself. Gemma's reaction here shows how much she has come to like Ty. It is ironic that both Ty and Gemma quite obviously like each other, but that neither can quite find the correct words to express this to the other.

In these chapters, Ty finally admits to Gemma that he has a Dark Gift. It is this secret that makes him so worried about being considered a freak. He does not want to seem different because he does not want to draw unwanted attention to himself. He is afraid that someone might realize he has this special power. This revelation reveals a lot about Ty's discomfort and paranoia in social situations, particularly when he is Topside. When his parents realized he had this ability, they took him to see Topside doctors who experimented on him. This made him fearful and anxious, and he remembers this time as one of pain and suffering. The doctors tried to keep him and his parents were forced to fight for custody of their own son. In the end, Ty had to pretend that his ability had gone away. Only then did the doctors allow him to leave. No wonder Ty hates Topside and is suspicious of Topsiders. No wonder he hides his ability, even from his own parents, and fears doctors. Ty does not want a repeat of what happened to him when he was younger. He is afraid that if people find out about his ability, he will be locked away, experimented on, and separated from his family. All he wants is to be left alone like any other normal child. This explains why he is so anxious to be thought of as normal, and hates it when anyone tells him he is different or special. To him, his Dark Gift is not a gift at all, but something to be feared and hidden. Ty's story is also important for another reason; although the reader does not know this yet, it will have some strong parallels with Shade's own story, and the history of the Seablite Gang.

The fact that Ty is willing to trust Gemma with this information also shows how much he has come to trust her. He is willing to risk anything, even his worst fears, to help her. He knows that the only way to save her from the outlaws is to tell her about his ability, so he does so without hesitation. He shows that he will put his own life above hers. Their relationship has definitely blossomed from friendship into the beginnings of something deeper. Ty will never be able to fully be with another person until he learns to accept himself and trust others with who he really is. He has made the first step now with Gemma, but he still has a long way to go in order to be happy with himself and his gift. It is a shame that Ty has been made to feel that his true self is something to be ashamed of, but if anyone can help him to come to terms with his own uniqueness and make him appreciate himself as he truly is, it is Gemma.

Ironically, it is also through their friendship that Gemma is beginning to understand that she is someone special after all. Gemma longs for freedom, and the chance to really be someone. She feels unimportant because she is just one among a crowd when she is Topside, but under the sea she begins to realize that she can be a unique individual after all. Gemma is really beginning to appreciate subsea life now, as she sees that it offers her everything she so desperately wants: autonomy to govern her own life, space, family and friends, the chance to feel special, and a wild beauty that she cannot find on



land. She is even beginning to enjoy and marvel at the beauty of the ocean and its life. She is still frightened and awed by things, but now she truly appreciates how wonderful the underwater world can be. She may have been born a Topsider, but it seems that Gemma was meant for the ocean. This makes her perfect for Ty, as he loves his subsea life and would never consider leaving it. He needs to be with someone who is just as passionate about it. He can help Gemma to discover more about the sea, and he can show her that she really is someone special and has been all along, like a gem 'o the ocean. In return, she can help him to understand that being special is a good thing after all, and that he should love and be proud of who he is. In these ways, Gemma and Ty are very good for each other.

The outlaws exhibit some very odd behavior in these chapters. Shade lets Ty go, but not out of pity. It seems more like a form of grudging respect, which appears to be because he was born under the sea and so is true 'Dark Life.' Shade seems to feel an affinity with him for this, which is odd because Shade is too old to have grown up under the ocean. Shade tells him to be proud of who he is and not listen to Topsider arrogance and insults. This seems like a strange pep talk from a criminal. In fact, Shade does not seem that bad at all. However, after giving Ty a chance, the outlaws follow them and try to capture them anyway. Why would they do this? Did Shade simply change his mind, or did it have something to do with the dark figure who was watching Gemma? The outlaws obviously recognized the picture of Gemma's brother, so perhaps they have some kind of connection to Gemma too. The Seablite Gang only seem to get more and more mysterious.

When Ty and Gemma explore the undersea prison, some of this mystery is unraveled. The prison was actually not a prison at all, but a reformatory for misbehaving children. There are clear indications that the inmates were not adults, and yet they were chained and forced to pan for black pearls, which Ty describes as back-breaking work. This seems like a very harsh and abusive way to treat children. Ty realizes that Doc lied to him, which he finds disconcerting. Even more worrying is that Richard Straid, Gemma's brother, was also locked up down here. Gemma's picture is on the wall, a clear sign that her brother was sent to this reformatory. These revelations explain why the Seablite Gang are so young, and why they have shined despite not being subsea long enough to develop them. In fact, they have been subsea long enough, as they have lived here since they were children. This also explains how they might have developed Dark Gifts. These revelations also change how the reader sees the Seablite Gang. They can no longer be seen as escaped convicts and dangerous criminals, but as people who escaped exploitation and child-cruelty. Suddenly, the Seablite Gang are to be pitied rather than hated. Are they still bad because they have turned to crime, or can their lifestyle be excused by their past? As Ty notes, if he had suffered what they had, he would also want to attack government ships. Attacking settlers, however, is much less forgivable, and the Seablite Gang still represent a force to be feared. Ty is forced to sympathize with them, but that does not mean he will change his mind about them completely. They still have to be stopped. Now, however, both Ty and Gemma have to face the horrible possibility that Gemma's brother may be one of the outlaws.



Chapters 19-21

Chapters 19-21 Summary

Ty wanders off to give Gemma some space. He hears a whale's song, which comforts him, but then Gemma screams. He swims back to her quickly. She is terrified of the noise, thinking it is a ghost. She is embarrassed when she realizes that it is a whale. They go outside and Ty calls to the whale with his sonar. He attaches his ripcord to the whale's tail, then he and Gemma hold on as it pulls them home.

When they reach the Peavey's homestead, the other settlers from Benthic Territory are there, helping to restock the Peavey's farm with fish. Everyone has brought food, and Ty and Gemma help to unload it for a large buffet.

Ty leaves the food to go talk to Doc. The adults are all discussing the Seablite Gang and Ty tells them that Shade is not an albino after all. He then tells them everything that has happened to him. Raj and Lars immediately leave for the saloon to try to hunt down Shade. Ty's parents look very worried and disappointed. The adults disperse, and Doc pulls Ty to one side to talk to him on his own. Ty confronts Doc about his lie, but Doc says he tried to speak out about the reformatory which is why he was discredited by the government. He then tells Ty that the prospector who was killed on the derelict sub is Richard Straid, Gemma's brother. Gemma overhears this.

The whole family and Gemma go back to Ty's house. The viewphone rings and Ms. Spinner, the head of Gemma's boarding house, appears on the screen. She tells Ty's parents that Gemma is a runaway. She yells at Gemma for making her lose her place on the waiting list for a better apartment, and tells Gemma that her brother does not want her. Ty's parents offer for Gemma to come live with them, but Ms. Spinner rudely declines this offer. She wants to send Gemma to a reformatory instead.

Chapters 19-21 Analysis

Gemma finally begins to accept that she actually is rare and special. At the party at the Peavey's house, she is paid a lot of attention by everyone, and Jibby even asks her to marry him. She declines the offer, but shows interest in visiting him when he offers to let her have the whole house to herself. This makes Ty flustered and jealous, and he tells her that she can stay with him anytime she likes. Jibby and Ty's squabbling over her shows Gemma that she is a prize worth fighting over. This makes her feel happy and wanted, something that she has never experienced living Topside. She teases Ty by pretending to consider Jibby's offer, as she likes to see Ty acting jealously. It proves to her that he does really like her. When Ty leaves to talk to Doc, she runs after him and thrusts the plate of food back in Jibby's face. She is clearly only interested in Ty.

The story takes on elements of a Western again in these chapters, as the settlers decide how to deal with the Seablite Gang. The harsher and more practical members of



the community, such as Raj and Lars, want to find and kill the outlaws. They do not believe that they will receive any help from the government and are afraid that the gang could be a problem in the future even if they are caught. They insist that it would be better to deal with the issue themselves and kill the gang without trial. Others, such as Ty's parents, are shocked at this attitude. Ty's father points out that if they save the community by doing this, then is their community really worth saving? This is a question that often faces communities of settlers in Western stories. Do they take the law into their own hands, or fight to uphold it? Do they want to kill the outlaws without a trial, and so become rough and wild like their land? They would be throwing away an important mark of civilization just because things are getting difficult. This should be when they fight the hardest to remember who they are and to make sure their way of life survives. After all, if they kill the outlaws without trial, are they then any better than the outlaws? This course of action might save them, but it might also destroy them in the process by changing their way of life and their community forever.

By the end of chapter twenty-one, everything has come crashing down for Gemma. Her brother is dead, killed by the Seablite Gang, and Ms. Spinner has found her. She will be sent to a reformatory for delinquent girls. All her worst fears are coming true. She has no family left at all, and soon will have no friends on her side either. She will be sent to a difficult place where she will be treated harshly and locked up. She will go from finding freedom and autonomy to being constantly watched and told what to do. Her hopes for the future are all dashed because her brother is dead and so will never come to claim her. Ty's parents try to help by offering to adopt Gemma, but Ms. Spinner rudely refuses to allow this. She calls them unsuitable foster parents. Gemma's last avenue of hope has been closed off. This is also devastating for Ty, as he will lose Gemma just as she has become so important to him. His parents have tried to fight for her but have been refused, showing that there is nothing they can do. To make matters worse, Ty's parents seem to have decided that they need to move Topside to keep their family safe. All Ty's dreams and hopes for the future have also come crashing down. Things are now looking very bad for both Ty and Gemma. This is all the Seablite Gang's fault. Suddenly they are not looking so sympathetic anymore. Despite the bad things they have been forced to suffer, there is no excuse for killing Gemma's brother. Clearly the Seablite Gang have to be stopped, but even if they are, Gemma and Ty's futures still seem doomed.



Chapters 22-24

Chapters 22-24 Summary

Ty wakes up in the middle of the night and hears a splash downstairs. He goes down to find Gemma sneaking out. She intends to borrow their sub and run away again. He gives her food and directions, and she asks him to come with her. Just then, the lights outside all go out, and a dark shape moves above the house. It is the Specter.

Ty calls his father on the intercom and tells him what is happening. He tells Gemma to go upstairs and wake Zoe, and lock them both in Zoe's room. Ty's parents come downstairs and put their diveskins on. They decide to go out to protect their livestock and equipment, and instruct Ty to protect the house. Ty runs upstairs to check on the girls and manages to convince Zoe to remain in her room. He goes back to the moon pool, where the minisub is now resting. Shade is inside the house.

Ty uses sonar to try to locate Shade while he creeps towards the weapon rack. He picks up a large harpoon gun. His sonar shows him exactly where Shade is, but Shade cannot see him in the dark. Ty shoots and hits Shade in the arm, pinning him to the wall. He turns on an emergency lantern. Shade's skin is all bright red and so are his eyes. This shocks Ty so much, he doesn't notice Shade pulling the harpoon out until it is too late. Shade knocks him to the floor and begins to break his ribs. He asks Ty where the girl from the docking ring is.

Zoe comes running down the stairs and yells at Shade. Gemma gives herself up and begs Shade not to hurt the other two. Ty realizes there is only one way to stop Shade taking Gemma, and shouts for Zoe to use her power. Zoe touches the water pooling around Shade and Ty, and sends an electric current through it, knocking Ty and Shade out.

Ty wakes up in the infirmary. Doc tries to scan his vitals, but Ty runs out of the room. Doc is annoyed that his parents will not force him to get checked out, and calls them negligent. Ty tells them that Zoe put the shockprod in the puddle of water, which is how she electrocuted him and Shade. Ty's parents tell him that Shade is locked up and that they are reconsidering their move Topside.

Ranger Grimes comes to get Ty so that he can ID Shade, and Gemma asks to come too. They go to the storage bay, where Shade is locked in a shark cage. Ty identifies him, but then Shade changes his appearance. Grimes is horrified and runs away. Shade tells Ty not to hide his gift. Ty yells at him for being an outlaw, and Shade tries to excuse himself by saying he robs government ships and that the government owes the Seablite boys for their years of panning for pearls. Gemma confronts him for killing her brother, and Shade grabs her arm. He holds her by the throat and tells Ty to get the key off Grimes.



Chapters 22-24 Analysis

Finally Shade has been captured, and it looks like things will be safe again for the settlers. The Seablite Gang will probably disperse and leave Benthic Territory now that their leader has gone. However, Dark Gifts are almost out in the open, and Ty is desperately clinging to keep them hidden. He claims that Zoe used the shockprod to stun Shade and him, but Doc is clearly suspicious. Once again Ty will not let Doc examine him, which seems to anger the doctor. Doc acts a little strangely, trying to force Ty to have a medical examination and calling his parents negligent for not coercing him into it. Doc seems to have more than Ty's health in mind here. Doc has been very interested in the idea of Dark Gifts all along, and it seems that he has guessed Ty's secret. How much longer will the doctor allow him to keep it hidden? At the end of chapter twenty-four, Ty's hold on his secret loosens even further as Shade gives away his own power. Now everyone will know that Dark Gifts are real after all, and it will be even harder to convince people that he does not possess one himself.

Dark Gifts have proved very useful throughout the story and both Ty's ability and Zoe's have saved their lives several times. However, Ty is still determined to keep their gifts secret, and continues to fear what will happen if others find out. Gemma tries to convince him not to hide them, as it is important for people to know. For one thing, Shade and the other outlaws seem to have abilities too, and the settlers need to know what they might face. Gemma points out that by hiding his gift, he is also sending a bad message to Zoe and other children with Dark Gifts. He is teaching them to be afraid and ashamed of themselves. She argues that they should not be ashamed, but proud of what they can do and who they really are. This would be a much better message to teach the other children. Strangely, Gemma's admonitions are repeated by Shade. Shade also thinks Dark Gifts are something to be proud of, and is very scathing of Topsiders. He tells Ty that he should not hide who he is, and should make the others accept him by demonstrating how special he is. Although Shade is not the best role model, his message carries a lot of sense. Like Gemma, he sees that things will never change unless Ty makes it happen. People will never accept Dark Gifts until those who have them are honest about them and what they can do. They can never expect others to accept Dark Gifts unless those who have them accept them and are proud of who they are. Ty needs to be the poster boy for this message, as Shade points out.

Shade is very bitter towards the government, and tries to justify his actions by saying that the government deserves it. The Seablite Gang attack government ships because they were treated so badly as children. They were forced to work, panning for black pearls, and Shade figures that they are owed a lot for all that time and hard work. However, when Ty challenges him about attacking settlers too, Shade seems very unapologetic. Just when he might have been a sympathetic character, he shows his cruel and uncaring side. He is a very ambiguous character. It seems that the Seablite Gang may have mixed up their hatred of the government with hatred of all people. He talks about needing to keep away from civilization, as they do not fit in around normal people anymore. It is likely that what the Seablite Gang experienced as children changed them forever, and now they cannot get by in normal society. This is why they



attack it, and do not realize that they are misdirecting their anger. Again, this idea is similar to those found in many Westerns, in which outlaws have turned to crime because of a feeling of isolation or segregation from society. This does not forgive their actions, but it does make them pitiable and a little more sympathetic.

At the end of chapter twenty-four, Ty is forced to choose between letting Shade go, and losing everything to save Gemma, or ignoring Shade and letting Gemma die. If Shade escapes, then the Seablite Gang will reform and begin to prey on settlers again. His family and friends could be hurt. His parents will decide it is unsafe to remain here, and will relocate Topside. There is a lot at stake here for Ty, but he never wavers in his decision. He chooses Gemma, and rushes off to try to save her. He has come to care for Gemma a great deal, and he will do everything he can to protect her. Now Gemma is in a lot of danger, and suspense is built at the end of the chapter. What will Shade do to Gemma, and can Ty persuade the terrified Grimes to give him the key in time?



Chapters 25-27

Chapters 25-27 Summary

Ty convinces Grimes to give him the key, and he hurries back to Shade. He gives Shade the key, but Shade flings him into the cage as he unlocks it and jumps out. He locks Ty in, then tells Gemma to call out to Grimes that she is coming out alone. Shade disguises himself so that Grimes will not see him. A few moments later, Gemma comes running back with the key and lets Ty out.

They find Grimes knocked out outside. Ty calls Doc on the viewphone and tells him what happened. Grimes wakes up and Ty follows him to the moon pool. Ty tries to get the ranger to stay, but he is not interested in trying to catch Shade, and leaves instead. Ty returns to the dining hall where he is questioned by the other settlers. Gemma is not there, however, and Ty is worried. He goes to search for her, and sees an elevator going to the Recreation Deck. He calls the elevator and sees Ranger Grimes' ID Card in it. Gemma must have pick-pocketed it while he was unconscious.

Ty goes down to the Recreation Deck, where he sees Gemma with Shade. Shade changes his appearance again, and Ty realizes that he is Gemma's brother. Ty accuses Gemma of lying to him, but she swears that she did not know who Shade really was until she was alone with him when Ty ran to get the key to the cage. Ty realizes that Shade must have frozen bags of his own blood in order to put it in the derelict sub and fake his own death. Shade tells Gemma to use the money he sent for school, but she says she wants to live with him. He tells her that will not be possible.

Just then, voices shout out, and Raj, Lars, Jibby and Doc enter the room. They begin a fight with Shade, who is winning until Doc shoots tranquillizer darts into him. Doc reveals that he knew Shade was Richard Straid all along, and that he knew Gemma would lead them to him. Raj, Jibby and Lars tie Shade's hands behind his back and they prepare to hang him.

Ty shouts at them to stop, but they do not listen. Jibby grabs Gemma and flings her over his shoulder, taking her out of the room. She throws Ty her knife and begs him to try to stop them. Ty puts himself between Raj and Shade. As the elevator above them opens, Ty uses the distraction to cut Shade free. Gemma steps out of the elevator with Ty's parents and the other settlers. Doc takes aim and is about to shoot Shade when Ty admits in front of everyone that he also has a Dark Gift.

Shade jumps down to the floor. The settlers crowd around Ty and he tells them that his gift is not a bad thing. Shade claps and backs him up, explaining that children who grow up under the sea develop better immune systems. He tells them to ask Doc to confirm that, but Doc has moved towards the elevator and is about to escape. Gemma tries to stop him, but he grabs her and pulls her in with him. The others race to the elevator to



chase them, but Ty and Shade go through the service ducts to get to the upper deck faster.

On the Access Deck, Doc is about to get away in the last minibus. He explains that he experimented on the children at Seablite, but that the government buried his research and discredited him. Now he has been trying to prove himself using Ty. He was planning on claiming Ty's parents unfit and then taking control of Ty himself. As Doc is explaining this, Gemma manages to sink the minibus. Doc falls in the water. He refuses Ty's help and swims away instead. The other settlers arrive in the room. They are not sure if Doc can make it to the surface without much Liquigen in his lungs.

As they are discussing Doc, the Specter surfaces in the moon pool.

Chapters 25-27 Analysis

There are several revelations in these chapters. Ty and the reader find out that Shade is actually Gemma's brother. He disguised himself by changing his appearance, and faked his own death by storing his own blood and then pouring it all over the derelict sub. He never actually meant to hurt Ty or Gemma at all. When he came after them, it was to help Gemma, and when he attacked Ty's homestead, it was only to find his sister. He never murdered a settler as the blood in the sub actually is his. The things that made Ty and the reader hate Shade have suddenly all evaporated, and his actions throughout the story have taken on a new meaning. Suddenly, Shade is a very sympathetic character again. Although he is still a criminal, he is not the monster that they thought he was. However, Lars, Raj and Jibby are blinded by their hatred and fear, especially when they see Shade's Dark Gift. They want to kill him without a trial. This proves the worth of trials, as it shows that a man could so easily be executed for crimes he did not commit. Raj, Lars, and Jibby think they have incontrovertible proof that Shade is a monster and a murderer, but they are mistaken. A trial would establish that he has never killed anyone, and that he had good reason to target government ships and to invade Ty's homestead. Without this trial, the men simply assume he is evil and decide to kill him. This demonstrates that abandoning proper law and justice, even when it seems necessary, can lead to the executors becoming bad people too. They have allowed themselves to be manipulated by Doc because of anger and fear, and nearly lost their own sense of civilization and humanity in the process.

Another major revelation in these chapters is just how manipulative and cruel Doc is. He is proved to have been the 'bad guy' all along. He does not care about anyone except himself, and is willing to hurt others to help himself. He is desperate to prove himself, and feels betrayed by the government. He answers this by using and betraying others, which is similar to Shade's own reaction, using violence to answer violence. This can never lead to anything good. Doc shows a willingness to harm anyone to get what he wants, and he was ready to completely ruin Ty's life. He is completely unapologetic about this, though he does show some guilt in his eyes when Ty confronts him, showing that he knows what he was doing was wrong but just did not care. He has successfully manipulated everyone, fooling all the settlers into thinking he was their friend. He is also



very cowardly, threatening Gemma, trying to kill Shade, and swimming away rather than accepting Ty's help and facing the settlers he betrayed.

Once the doctor's true intentions have been revealed, it is obvious that he has been the real threat all along. He is far more dangerous to the settlers' happiness than the Seablite Gang were. However, the settlers will not condemn him without a fair trial. They have learned their lesson now, and will not make the same mistake twice. They try to help him instead, and would have saved him if they could. They want him to answer for what he has done, but do not want him to die. Shade is very scathing of this attitude, despite the fact that he nearly received similar treatment. He was nearly executed without trial, which would have been a big mistake. Now he is happy to see the same happen to Doc. This is quite hypocritical, and reminds the reader that he is still a tough, dangerous outlaw. He may be more sympathetic now, but he is not necessarily an entirely good character. He is still very ambiguous.

Ty has to make a difficult choice in these chapters. He is forced to choose between his beloved subsea life and doing the right thing. He chooses the right thing. He risks his dreams, his home and his future in order to make sure the settlers do not make a terrible mistake and execute a man for crimes he did not commit. It would be easier for Ty to let them hang Shade, but he is not concerned with simply doing the easiest thing. Ty is a good person and a brave person, and he will not stand by and let injustice be carried out. He is also not willing to see Gemma suffer. He admits to everyone that he has a Dark Gift, and so puts himself on the same level as Shade. Suddenly everyone stops looking at Shade as if he is monster, which allows them to cool down and see things from a new perspective. They realize that Doc is actually the threat they should be worried about, since it is he who more directly threatens their children.

Finally, Ty is able to embrace his gift and be proud of who he is. He speaks up for himself and his gift, telling the settlers that it is a good thing and that it should not make them sad or afraid. Their children are special, and have been born with great abilities. Ty finally shows that he can accept who he is, and stick up for the life he loves. Now everything could change for him, but at least the truth is out and people can begin to accept Dark Gifts. Now, whatever life holds for Ty, at least it will be an honest one. He is no longer caged by having to hide his secret. Just as Gemma predicted, Ty's behavior influences the younger generations and both Zoe and Hewitt come forward about their own gifts. This is a good sign, as it shows that they are all willing to accept who they are and stand up for it in front of the other settlers. Now Ty can be pleased that he is teaching children to love themselves rather than to be ashamed of what makes them special.



Chapters 28, 29 and Epilogue

Chapters 28, 29 and Epilogue Summary

The outlaws step out of the Specter to meet Shade. Eel, who can create an electromagnetic pulse with his hand, destroys the viewphone and the elevator controls. Gemma asks again if she can come with Shade but he tells her no. He is deliberately harsh with her to make her want to stay behind. Ty asks him for a favor for saving his life, and tells him not to attack any more settlers or homesteads. Shade agrees. Shade also signs Gemma's emancipation form, and Ty tells her that she can live with his family. The outlaws get back in the Specter and prepare to leave. Gemma is upset about her brother's attitude to her, so Ty tries to comfort her. He kisses her. As the Specter leaves, Shade presses his fist to his heart to show Gemma that he does still care about her.

There is a loud crack, and the settlers notice a harpoon sticking out of the inside wall. It must have been the shot that Doc fired at Shade and missed. Now the crack breaks through the exterior wall and the sea comes pouring in. The access panels seal off, and the elevator is not working. There are no packs of liquigen, minisubs or mantaboards. The settlers will not be able to swim to the surface on one breath. It seems like they are all doomed.

Ty jumps into the moon pool and swims into the ocean. He sends out sonar, mimicking a dolphin's distress call. Seconds later, a group of dolphins emerge in the moon pool. Ty tells the settlers to grab one each and let the dolphin take them quickly to the surface. Ty and Gemma are last out.

As their dolphins carry them up, Ty sees a figure clinging to the elevator cable. It is Doc. He launches himself at them and makes a grab for Gemma. She slips off her dolphin but manages to grab its tail. However, Doc is now clinging to her ankle and slowing the dolphin down. Ty's dolphin shoots away from them quickly. Suddenly, Gemma's dolphin goes past them without a rider. Ty lets go of his dolphin and swims down, seeing Gemma falling with Doc still holding her. Ty's dolphin passes him, swimming downwards, and then comes back up pushing Gemma's limp body. Ty grabs Gemma and the dolphin, and the dolphin takes them to the surface.

The settlers haul them out onto the deck, but Gemma is unconscious and not breathing. They try CPR (mouth to mouth resuscitation), but she is not responding. Ty takes over and keeps trying, refusing to give up. He then has an idea and asks Zoe to electrocute Gemma on her chest over her heart. She tries several times, and finally manages to restart Gemma's heart. They wrap blankets around her and Ty breathes into her mouth again. Gemma wakes up.



The settlers discuss their situation, noting that they never actually caught the outlaws. Ty says they need to be self-governing, and to reject the Commonwealth's authority over them. The settlers agree.

The story ends some time later, after the settlers of Benthic Territory have petitioned for statehood. Ty is helping Gemma learn to swim and get used to the ocean. Together they admire all the beautiful sea life that the ocean has to offer.

Chapters 28, 29 and Epilogue Analysis

In these final chapters, Ty and the other children manage to prove that Dark Gifts are a good thing after all. They are not something to be feared and hated, and parents should be pleased that their children have these special abilities, rather than trying to get rid of them. At first, the settlers are very unsure about the idea of Dark Gifts, and Ty's parents looked shocked and dismayed. They need a demonstration of how Dark Gifts can be useful. When the sea begins to flood the Access Deck, Ty has the opportunity to give them this demonstration. There is no means of escape for the settlers, and it seems like everyone will die. However, Ty uses his sonar ability to call to a pod of dolphins. The dolphins carry the settlers to safety. Ty's Dark Gift has saved all their lives. This is aided by Hewitt's Dark Gift, as he uses it to give Ty exact information about how much time they have left before the station sinks. Finally, when everyone has made it to safety, Zoe uses her Dark Gift to shock Gemma, restarting her heart after she nearly drowned. All the children's abilities have been instrumental in saving lives. The settlers could not ask for more proof that Dark Gifts are a good thing. Just because something is different, it does not mean that it has to be frightening, and in many cases it can even be better. This is the lesson that the settlers learn in these chapters, and they are finally able to accept Dark Gifts for what they are.

Once all the settlers are safe, they discuss the issue of the Seablite Gang and the government. The government tasked them with capturing the outlaws, which they have failed to do. This means that they will no longer receive government help and will have to relocate Topside. Ty refuses to accept this, and tells them that they should be self-governing instead. His parents agree, explaining that if they are independent from the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth will have to pay full price for the crops and food they produce, instead of taking it in taxes. The settlers will no longer receive government supplies and grants, but they will not need them anymore. With the extra money they make from selling their food at a fair price, they will be able to buy their own supplies and set up their own homesteads. They do not have to rely on the government at all, and the government will not be able to stand against them as they are too reliant on their crops. In this way, the settlers can actually put themselves in a position of power over the Commonwealth rather than the other way around. They can barter for their freedom and independence. This will lead to a better and more secure future for their settlement.

Ironically, this happy ending is only made possible by the example of the Seablite Gang, which showed the settlers that they can and should stand up to the government. Shade



unmasked Doc's intentions, and showed the settlers how the Commonwealth is willing to abuse and manipulate people. Shade proves to them that they are better off alone. If they had never had to deal with the Seablite Gang, the settlers would still be under government control today and would be no wiser about Dark Gifts and Doc's intentions to harm their children. It is ironic that at the beginning of the book Shade and the Seablite Gang seemed like the biggest threat to settler safety, and to the future of their community, but now has been instrumental in helping to save it.

It is not just Benthic Territory that has decided to become self-governing and independent. In suggesting this to his parents, Ty is also asking for his own independence. He has proved that he is strong, brave and capable of looking after himself. He wants more trust from his parents, and more freedom to decide his own actions. His father recognizes this and agrees with Ty. In the epilogue, the reader sees that Ty's parents have gone through with this and trusted him with more freedom. He has proved himself and is now being treated as an independent adult. This 'coming of age' is found in many stories about the Wild West, in which a young boy proves himself to be a man through his bravery and his adventures. This reminds the reader once again of the Western theme.

Like Ty and Benthic Territory, Gemma has also gained her independence in these chapters. Her brother signs her emancipation form, meaning that she is free from government control. She will not have to return Topside. Instead, she stays below the ocean to live with Ty and his family. She has finally gained everything she wanted: freedom, family and friends, space, and a home. She has also found someone very special in Ty, and they finally begin their relationship properly. The future is very hopeful for both of them.



Characters

Ty, Akai

Ty is the main character of the book. He is a fifteen-year-old boy who lives under the ocean with his parents and his little sister Zoe. He loves his subsea life and enjoys exploring the ocean. He collects artifacts that he finds on the seafloor, which come from ancient civilizations. He possesses the pioneering spirit that many of the subsea settlers have. He is brave and determined, and values his independence. He understands the dangers of the ocean, but is sensible about them and can look after himself. He looks forward to being able to claim land of his own and has already measured out the area he wants to build his home on. He loves the settler lifestyle and as long as his future involves staying under the sea, he is happy. He values space and freedom, and is terrified of the idea of moving Topside because he would lose all this if he did.

Ty has a 'Dark Gift' or a special ability developed from growing up under the sea. Doc Kunze theorizes that such abilities may have been caused by water pressure on the brain. Adults do not get these abilities because their brains are fully developed already. Ty is afraid to tell anyone about his Dark Gift because he does not want to lose his lifestyle and his future. When his parents became aware of his ability, they took him to Topsider doctors who experimented on him. The memories of this still haunt Ty, and he has been frightened of medical areas and doctors ever since. The Topsider doctors tried to separate him from his parents, and he was only allowed to leave when he pretended that his ability had gone away. Now he lies to everyone, including his parents, because he could not bear for this to happen again. He does not want to move Topside because he loves his life under the ocean, and because all his dreams for the future rest on living subsea. By having to keep his ability secret all the time, Ty has developed a paranoia about being different. He wants to be normal and longs to fit in with everyone else. He does not like attention and hates it when people stare at him or point out his differences. He does not even like people looking at his shine, a luminescence his skin has developed from eating glowing fish. All people living subsea have this shine, and it marks them out as different from the Topsiders. This unwanted attention makes Ty uncomfortable, as he thinks the Topsiders consider him a freak, or a specimen of underwater life. He does not realize it, but he has allowed their bad attitude to rub off on him, and he acts as though he is ashamed of who he is. It is only with Gemma's help that he is able to see this, and to accept himself properly again. He learns to love who he is, and he helps the younger generations to accept themselves too.

Ty's Dark Gift comes in the form of biosonar. He can emit clicks that humans cannot hear, and by evaluating the echoes he can tell where things are. This allows him to 'see' underwater. This is the same way that other underwater creatures, including dolphins and whales, navigate in the pitch black ocean. This ability comes in handy at several points in the story. Ty uses it to find Gemma's minisub when he first meets her, and later to navigate his way home when he is lost in the open ocean. At the end of the story he uses his sonar to call to a pod of dolphins to come rescue him and the other settlers.



Ty's ability is the same as that belonging to a boy called 'Akai,' who was the subject of an article written about Dark Gifts. The doctor who wrote it used old case notes and never actually met Akai himself. Later, the reader finds out that Ty is actually Akai. This was the name used for him by the doctors who first examined him.

Ty soon makes friends with a Topsider girl called Gemma, who he meets on an abandoned sub. He admires Gemma because of her bravery and determination, and he finds her appealing because she is so different from anyone he has met before. Later, he also finds her attractive and begins to really warm to her personality. He quickly realizes that he has feelings for her, and shows jealousy when she teasingly takes interest in Jibby. At first Ty does not have the confidence to pursue a relationship with Gemma, but by the end of the book he is sure enough of himself and of their feelings for each other, so he kisses her. Gemma helps Ty to come to terms with who he is and to be proud of himself and his ability. He helps her to realize that she is someone special and important after all. They are very good for each other, and it is clear that Gemma was always meant for subsea life. She shows excitement and awe at the sea life around her, and Ty enjoys showing off his world to her. Gemma's own fierce determination and toughness, as well as her good heart, match Ty's, and it is obvious that they make a perfect couple.

Ty shows himself willing to risk his own hopes and dreams and even his life, in order to do what is right. He risks himself when he decides to tell the settlers that Shade is not an albino, as Shade swore he would kill Ty if he told anyone. Ty puts the good of the community above himself. On several occasions he shows himself willing to face danger to help Gemma, and he will not put his own needs above hers. Later, he sacrifices his own dreams to help capture Shade, confessing everything that he has done to his parents. He knows they will disapprove of the danger he has put himself in, but he is willing to risk their anger, and even a move Topside, in order to do the right thing. At the end of the book, he is forced to choose between justice, and his dreams for the future. If he allows the settlers to kill Shade, the government will subsidize new homesteads again and the community will be safe once more. Ty's dream of claiming his own land and building a new home will be back on track. However, Shade did not commit the crimes he is being punished for, and Ty chooses to do the right thing rather than the easiest thing. He even tells the settlers about his Dark Gift, risking himself in order to prove to them that their prejudice against Shade is unfair. Ty is a very brave and kind-hearted boy, and one who is willing to do whatever it takes to do what is right. He is a very likeable character.

Gemma Straid

Gemma is a fifteen-year-old Topsider girl who has run away from her boarding house in order to find her older brother, Richard. She is a ward of the Commonwealth, as both her parents are dead. The government therefore controls her life and tells her what to do. She is very unhappy, and longs to have freedom and independence. She can only get this if her brother signs her emancipation form, so she has run away in order to try to accomplish this. Gemma and her brother had been living in a government boarding



home, where hundreds of children were packed into very crowded rooms. Their parents are dead, so Richard used to try to cheer up Gemma by breaking into family rooms to spend time with her. This helped her to feel strong, as it reminded her that she still has one person on her side. Richard was caught, however, and sent to a reformatory. Now Gemma is anxious to find him again as he is all that she has left. He helped her to be strong, and now she needs him again. She longs for a family and for support, something she never found except with Richard.

Gemma is a very confident, willful and determined girl. She will not let others boss her around, and makes it quickly apparent to Ty that she will go where she likes and do what she wants. He soon realizes that he cannot stop her, and figures that if she is willing to risk danger then that is her choice. This is exactly the attitude Gemma wants, and she is very grateful to Ty for treating her this way. Under the sea, Gemma gets a lot more respect and freedom than she ever experienced on land, and she quickly comes to realize that this is the life she wants. She also sees that family and friends are more important under the sea than on land. Here, everyone looks out for everyone else, something that people do not care enough to do Topside. She longs for this sense of family and community, and would love to live with Ty permanently. She may have been born a Topsider, but she was meant to live under the ocean. At the end of the story Richard signs her emancipation form and Ty offers for her to live with him and his family. Gemma finally gets the life she longed for.

Gemma is confident and willful, but she is also quite unsure of herself in some ways. She does not feel like she is anyone special or important, and longs to feel different so that she can stand out from the crowd. On land, she was just one among millions and nobody ever paid her any attention. At first, when people under the sea tell her that she is rare, she thinks they are playing a cruel joke on her. Later, she comes to realize that she is actually considered special down here. There are not many teenagers around at all, never mind young women. Not only does subsea life offer Gemma a chance for space, freedom and family, it also offers her the chance to be special, something she has always wanted. With Ty's help, throughout the story she learns that she is important after all, and that she does not need a Dark Gift or a glow to make her special. She has been special all along. Like Ty, she learns to accept herself and be happy with who she is.

Gemma takes a strong interest in Ty because he is unique, but she quickly also comes to like him for who he is. She develops a strong friendship with him, and helps him to accept himself better. She loves the fact that he does not have a Dark Gift, and never considers him a freak. She convinces him that he needs to be a good role model for the other children with gifts, and that he should not teach them to be ashamed of themselves. Gemma shows herself to be a very caring and perceptive girl here. By the end of the story she has grown to like Ty as more than a friend, but it is not until he gains more confidence in himself that he can accept that she wants a relationship with him. Eventually they share a kiss. Although Gemma has not managed to gain the life with her brother that she hoped to find, she has found a new person to rely on and to help her be strong.



Zoe

Zoe is Ty's nine-year-old sister. She is a very pretty girl with beautiful ringlets and wide eyes. Gemma comments that she looks like an angel, and Ty tells her that this reaction is common. However, Zoe does not act very angelic. She is a strong, loud and determined child, and can be a force to be reckoned with. She is forceful about her opinions, and, like most of the settlers, she will not let herself be bossed around easily. She loves sea life and has a collection of rare fish in her room. When others threaten these fish she can become quite violent and upset. Like Ty, she has developed a Dark Gift from growing up under the ocean. She can create electricity, which she uses to stun fish. Later, she uses this ability to stun Shade and to restart Gemma's heart after she drowns. Zoe looks to Ty for advice on dealing with her gift and keeps it hidden until Ty reveals his.

Hewitt Peavey

Hewitt Peavey is a twelve-year-old boy living subsea with his parents. He is Ty's neighbor and like him, also has a Dark Gift. Hewitt can sense information about the ocean such as pressure and temperature, and intuitively calculates things based on this. For example, he knows exactly how long it will take for the Access Deck to disengage from the main station, based on the weight of the water inside. Like Zoe, he keeps this a secret until Ty comes forward about his own Dark Gift.

Hewitt is quite a sulky young boy and longs to move Topside so that he does not have to do chores. He wants an easy life, which he thinks the Topside offers. He also wants to socialize with more children his age, and resents how few people there are in the settlement. He does not really know what Topside life is like and it is obvious that he has idealized it greatly. Despite his moodiness, he seems like a friendly, loyal boy.

Jibby

Jibby is one of the settlers living in Benthic Territory. He is desperate for a wife, but he cannot convince young women to move subsea as they are afraid of the hardships and the dangers. Jibby even bought a bride and arranged for her to come down to his home, but sent her back when she arrived and turned out to be an old lady. When Gemma arrives, Jibby takes an immediate interest in her and later asks her to marry him. She rejects him, but he clings on to the hope that she might change her mind. Later, he joins Raj and Lars to hunt down Shade and execute him. Whereas the others are blinded by their anger, Jibby seems more conflicted about what they are doing. He takes Gemma out of the room, but comes back in with the other settlers and seems to regret trying to take the law into his own hands.



Raj

Raj is one of the settlers living in Benthic Territory. He is an older man than Jibby and is raising his daughter alone. This means that he is often quite severe and will watch out for other settlers' children as he hopes they look out for his girl. He is a good friend and neighbor, but quite a hard man. He is very forceful about the need to go after the outlaws and kill them, and is not swayed by those who want to make sure justice is carried out instead. Raj puts the safety of the community over doing things the right way. He, Lars and Jibby try to hang Shade at the end of the novel, but they are stopped by Ty.

Ranger Grimes

Ranger Grimes is the only security officer assigned to Benthic Territory, and is widely considered to be useless. He gets seasick under the water, and he clearly hates subsea life. He spends all his time on the Trade Station above the water, and refuses to come below the ocean to help the settlers with their problems. When Shade escapes his cage, Ranger Grimes shows that he only cares about himself and runs away, leaving the settlers to deal with the problem.

Benson Tupper

Benson Tupper is the Commonwealth representative for Benthic Territory. He clearly does not think much of subsea life and is completely unwilling to help them. He gives them the news that they are to deal with the outlaws themselves, and then promptly abandons them.

Doctor Theo Kunze, Doc

Doctor Kunze is the only doctor for Benthic Territory. He is an old man who often seems quite angry and pessimistic. He has been discredited by the government and sent subsea as a punishment. An injury to his hands means that he cannot even perform surgery anymore. When the settlers are told they will have to catch the outlaws themselves, Doc is told he will have to leave Benthic Territory and return Topside. He is extremely angry about this. He seems to be on the settlers' side, and often gives advice or help to Ty. He manages to convince all the settlers that he is their friend.

However, later in the story, Doc is proved to be a liar and a manipulative and cruel man. He lies about the Seablite Gang being escaped convicts in order to turn the settlers against them even more. He lies about Richard's blood, letting Gemma believe that her brother is dead when he knows that Richard is actually Shade. Ty finds out that Doc actually experimented on the members of the Seablite Gang when they were children, leaving them with lasting scars and nightmares. Doc wanted to prove his research about Dark Gifts, but was discredited by the government who wanted to hush this information



up. It was actually Doc Kunze who wrote the article about Akai. Now Doc is trying to prove himself again, and is hoping to experiment on Ty. He is pretending to be the settlers' friends in order to get to their children. He actually means them harm. He shows that he is willing to hurt anyone to get what he wants, and is happy to ruin Ty's life to prove his theory. He even tried to manipulate the settlers into killing Shade in order to cover up his dirty secrets. He is actually more of a threat to the settlers than the Seablite Gang is.

At the end of the story, Doc falls into the moon pool and refuses Ty's offer of help. He is not willing to be caught and tried by the people he has wronged, but wants to escape instead. He cannot make it to the surface on his own, so tries to grab Gemma's dolphin. He nearly kills Gemma in the process, and it is clear that he would not care as long as he saved his own life. His attempt does not work, however, and he is drowned.

Ty's Parents

Ty's parents were the first settlers to move subsea. They are both very intelligent and resourceful people who contributed a lot to Benthic Territory. It is they who designed the subsea houses and buildings. They are both very brave and independent people who care about their way of life a great deal. They also care about their children, and their judgment can be a little clouded by this. They think that Ty's gift is something to be feared, and they worry that it might have somehow damaged him. They also worry that subsea life is too dangerous for him. They do not realize that Ty is a capable boy who needs more trust and independence. By the end of the story, Ty manages to prove to them that his ability is a good thing, and that he can take care of himself. They decide to remain subsea and to trust him with more freedom. They also show how caring they are by offering to give Gemma a place in their home and family.

Lars Peavey

Lars is Hewitt's father and Ty's neighbor. He is attacked in the Seablite Gang's raid on their homestead and is injured in the fight. He seems to have taken this badly, as he forms part of the posse that decides to hang Shade without a fair trial. Despite this, he does not seem like a bad man, but just a person who is trying to get by. He is a friendly and pleasant neighbor.

Shurl Peavey

Shurl is Hewitt's mother and Lars' wife. She is a very headstrong woman who seems very capable of looking after herself and her homestead. She seems like a practical woman. She loves her subsea life and seems to be extremely attached to her animals. Even though she was scared by the Seablite raid on her home, she will not let this frighten her back Topside. At first she is shocked and dismayed by Hewitt's ability, but later she sees that it is a good thing after all.



Shade, Richard Straid

Shade is the leader of the Seablite Gang, and so seems to be the main antagonist throughout most of the book. It is only at the end of the book that the reader finds out that Shade is actually Richard Straid, Gemma's brother. He is not the monster everyone thinks he is, and even gives good advice to Ty.

Richard was sent to a subsea reformatory as a young boy, and like the other inmates was forced to pan for black pearls. He resents the government for this treatment. He organized a breakout and formed the Seablite Gang, and now they raid government supply ships. He took on the name Shade. Shade, like the other Seablite members, developed a Dark Gift from growing up under the sea. He can change his appearance, and does so in order to fool people into thinking Shade is actually an albino.

Shade is a very bitter and angry young man. He hates the government and Doc Kunze for what they did to him and his friends, and is determined to have revenge. He has good reason to raid government ships, but he also attacks Lars' homestead. He does not seem to care too much about this, and shows that although he is not as bad as initially thought, he is still a dangerous criminal. Ty finds him very intimidating. Shade wants revenge on Doc, so he is happy to watch him die. He seems to forget that he was in the same position, facing vigilante 'justice,' only minutes earlier. This is quite hypocritical. Shade is proved not to be the monster everyone thought he was, but he is still a very ambiguous character.

Shade believes in being proud of who he is, and thinks Ty should be too. He tells him that being 'Dark Life' makes him special, and that he should never listen to Topsider insults. He should be open about his gift and embrace it, and help to teach others to be more accepting too. This is very good advice, and shows that Shade is not the simple criminal he might seem. He is also a deep and reflective man.

Shade is gentle with Gemma but when he realizes she wants to live with him, he instantly turns mean. He is harsh with her, deliberately pushing her away. At first she is upset, but Ty points out that Shade is only trying to protect her by doing this. He thinks she will have a better life without him, so he is trying to sway her to not want to be with him. Ty's instincts here are proved correct, as Shade puts his fist to his heart, giving Gemma their secret message to stay strong.

Pretty

Pretty is one of the members of the Seablite Gang. He has long, straight white hair. He might be pleasant to look at, but he is very intimidating and comes across as a dangerous man. It is Pretty who first seems to recognize the photo of Richard Straid, which leads Ty to try to question him further.

Eel

Eel is one of the Seablite Gang. He is obviously very young, with dimples and dark hair. He seems friendlier than the other gang members and less inclined to intimidate or hurt others. He has a Dark Gift that enables him to short-circuit equipment by emitting an electromagnetic pulse. He seems more interested in Gemma than the other gang members and it seems that Richard may have confided in him more about his past than he has done with other members of his group.



Objects/Places

Benthic Settlement

Benthic Settlement is the underwater territory that the first subsea pioneers settled in. This is where Ty and all the other settlers in the story live. The story is set in the future, where global warming has caused rising sea levels, and half the world has been swallowed by the sea. There is not much room left on land, and those who live there are crowded into tall skyscrapers. This is why people are beginning to try life under the ocean. The settlers live in homesteads with large houses, outbuildings, and farms of kelp and fish. The settlement is under the control of the Commonwealth and expected to pay taxes in the form of food to the government. In return, the government sends supplies needed for living under the sea, such as liquigen packs that allow people to breathe underwater. However, the government does very little to help the settlers, and keeps them dependent by forcing them to give food instead of money as taxes. This stops them from being able to sell their food for much higher prices on the market. At the end of the story the Benthic settlers think they will be better off alone and decide to declare independence from the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth of States

The Commonwealth of States is the government that controls all the areas of human civilization found in the story. It is not clear whether the Commonwealth is in charge of the whole world or just one area of it. The Commonwealth is also in charge of Benthic Territory, though it does little to help the settlers there. Gemma is a ward of the Commonwealth because both her parents are dead. She resents this control and is trying to find her brother so that he can sign her emancipation form. By the end of the story, both Gemma and Benthic Territory have found their independence from the Commonwealth.

Emergency Law

Ever since the land started being swallowed by the sea, the government has claimed an official crisis and state of emergency. This means that emergency law is in place. This allows the Commonwealth to have a huge amount of power as certain rights are suspended. The Commonwealth is anxious to keep things this way, which is why they discredit scientists who claim that the sea has stopped rising.

Diveskins

A diveskin is a special kind of wet suit that people wear when they are underwater. It monitors the person's vitals, keeping them at the right temperature and protecting them to a certain extent from the water pressure.



Liquigen

Liquigen is a special oxygen-filled fluid that people can fill their lungs with in order to breathe underwater. It comes in the form of packs that the settlers attach to their diveskins. Liquigen is vital to the settlers in their subsea life, and they are reliant on the government to provide it. However, when they decide to become independent, they realize that with the added money they receive from selling their crops, they will be able to buy all the liquigen they need anyway.

Mantaboard

A mantaboard is a board that a person can attach themselves to and then propel themselves at high speed through the water. It is like a cross between a surfboard and a jet ski. If submarines are like the cars of the underwater world, then the mantaboard is like a motorbike. Ty uses his mantaboard to get around when he is exploring the ocean.

Sub

'Sub' is short for submarine. These are boats that can travel underwater, with air-filled rooms inside. They have airlocks that allow a person to access the sub while under the water. Subs come in all different sizes, from minisubs that only hold a few people like a car, to large subs that can carry whole groups of people and even fit smaller subs inside. An example of the latter is the Specter, which holds the entire Seablite Gang.

Seablite Gang

The Seablite Gang is a group of outlaws that plagues the sea. They mainly prey on government supply ships, but also attack the Peavey's homestead in the novel. They are feared by the settlers and represent a strong danger to them. The Benthic settlers are tasked with hunting and capturing the outlaws themselves, as the government refuses to help them with this problem. Doc tells the settlers that the Seablite Gang escaped from Seablite Prison, which is how they got their name. Later, this is proved to be a lie. The Seablite Gang were actually all children sent to a reformatory under the sea. They grew up there, and were forced to pan for black pearls as well as being experimented on by Doc. This is why they hate the government so much.

Black Pearls

Black pearls are valuable manganese nodules found under the sea. Prospectors come subsea in order to pan for them, in much the same way that prospectors went to the Wild West to pan for gold. The Seablite Gang were forced to collect these pearls during their time in Seablite Reformatory.



Dark Life

'Dark Life' is the term used by Topsiders to refer to people who live subsea, as it is very dark under the ocean. This is ironic, as Gemma points out, because the settlers actually live in plenty of light, warmth and space, whereas the people on land live constantly in the shadow of tall buildings and train stations. 'Dark Life' is also a scientific term for bacteria that do not need light to survive. This is therefore taken by the subsea settlers as an insult, as they do not like to think of themselves as bacteria.

Topsider

'Topsider' is a term, used by those who live subsea, for the people who still live on land. They use the term scathingly, but Gemma has never heard it before, so it is clearly not a huge insult to the Topsiders themselves.

The Specter

The Specter is the Seablite Gang's submarine.

Coldsleep Canyon

Coldsleep Canyon is an underwater canyon which contains the sunken ruins of the east coast of the United States. Ty likes to explore it in the hopes of finding the Statue of Liberty or another landmark.

Trade Station

The Trade Station is the hub of trade and contact between the subsea settlers, prospectors, other people in the ocean such as those who live on houseboats, and anyone from land who has reason to come to the sea. It is built on several levels, two of which are above the sea. This is where the market is located. The ranger's office is in the observation deck above. Under the sea are meeting rooms where the settlers can discuss community issues, the saloon, rented bunks, and an access deck with a moon pool.

Dark Gift

Children who grow up under the ocean develop special abilities, which are known as 'Dark Gifts.' These can come in many different forms, such as Ty's use of biosonar, Zoe's ability to create electricity, and Shade's ability to change his appearance. When Ty first demonstrated his ability, his parents took him to Topsider doctors who experimented on him and tried to keep him there against his will. He pretended that his ability had



gone away, and only then was allowed to leave. Now he keeps his Dark Gift a secret, and encourages the other children to do the same.

Zinc-Paste

Zinc-paste is a white paste that people smear on their skin to protect it from the harmful sun's rays. In this future world, the ozone layer is a lot more eroded than it is now and it is very dangerous to expose skin to the sun.

Gem o' the Ocean

'Gem o' the ocean' is a phrase used by people who live subsea to refer to beautiful or rare things found in the ocean. These are often objects or creatures that would otherwise be considered very ordinary, but take on a special beauty or rarity for the person observing them. In this way, although Gemma does not consider herself anything special, she is a gem o' the ocean to Ty. Other examples of gems o' the ocean are pretty fish, and the ancient objects Ty collects from the seafloor.

Moon Pool

A moon pool is a pool of water in a room that allows access to the sea from the house. The air in the room is pressurized to stop the sea from flooding in.

Ty's House

Like the other settlers' houses in Benthic Territory, Ty's house is shaped like a jellyfish. It has flexible walls and is designed to flow with the movement of the sea. This means that it is less likely to be damaged by changing currents under the water. This is a more suitable form for a house under the water than a rigid stone building would be. Ty's house has artificial light, pressurized air to keep the sea from coming in, heat and electricity. It has all the conveniences that people have become used to in modern life, and the family do not seem to have to go without anything in order to live below the sea. The house itself works a little like an overturned bucket pushed into water - the air trapped inside keeps the water at a certain level so there is always still air to breathe. The house is tethered to the sea floor and Ty is very confident it will not tip or break. However, the simple act of turning the power off can make a house collapse, so the houses are actually more vulnerable than Ty makes them out to be. Ty's homestead also contains outbuildings where chickens and goats are kept for eggs and milk, and a farm of kelp, tuna and other underwater food. Ty's mother keeps pretty fish to liven the place up, in much the same way that people plant flowers in their gardens.



The Slicky

The Slicky is Ty's family's minisub. It fulfills the same role that a family car would on land.

Seablite

Seablite is a building on the ocean floor, built with rigid walls unlike the flexible houses of Benthic Territory. Doc tells Ty that it was a maximum security prison, but in reality it was a reformatory for misbehaving Topsider children. This is where Gemma's brother was sent. The children here grew up under the sea, and so developed Dark Gifts. They were experimented on by Doctor Kunze, and forced by the government to pan for black pearls. It was a place of abuse and misery for the boys. When they escaped, they named their gang after this place to remember what they suffered. Now Seablite is an abandoned building that is half-flooded by the sea. Ty and Gemma explore it when they escape from the outlaws and it is here that they discover the truth about who the members of the Seablite Gang really are.



Themes

Being Proud of Who You Are

There are several characters in the story who either stress the importance of being proud of themselves, or who learn to accept themselves and love who they are. The main character, Ty, is constantly hiding a part of himself from the world. He even lies to his own parents, pretending that he does not have a Dark Gift. Ty is afraid that if others find out about his abilities, he could be separated from his family and made to endure more medical experiments, like those he suffered in the past. More than anything, he does not want to lose his home and his future, which might be taken away if his parents decide to move Topsiders because of his ability. This is why Ty hides his Dark Gift. By keeping this secret, however, it makes him feel constantly afraid of his own ability. He acts like he is ashamed of who he is, and can never be completely himself when he is around others. There is always a part of himself that he is holding back.

The need to keep this secret also makes Ty uncomfortable about receiving too much attention from others, and he longs to be normal. He thinks being 'special' is just another word for being a freak. He hates it when others stare at him or ask him questions about his glow. He imagines that Topsiders are interested in him the way that they would be interested in a strange fish. He does not like this attention because he sees it as negative, and resents the fact that the Topsiders think he is weird and different. This is a bad attitude displayed by the Topsiders, but Ty is making matters worse by giving in to their perceptions of him and allowing them to make him feel ashamed of who he is. He should not try to hide his shine or his differences, as they are what make him who he is. They make him special and unique, which, as Gemma points out, can be a good thing. He needs to be proud of himself and stop feeling ashamed and uncomfortable when others pay him attention.

By the end of the story, with Gemma and Shade's help, Ty comes to accept himself much more. Shade tells him that he is born and bred Dark Life and that this is something to be proud of as it makes him special. Ty is proud of his community and loves his subsea life, so he should be proud of himself too. Shade explains that living with a secret can be like living in a cage, and that Ty needs to set himself free. Gemma constantly reminds Ty that he is special throughout the story, and her own anxiety to be more than 'average,' as well as her difficult life, makes him realize how much he really does have to be grateful for. He finally realizes that he does love his gift, and that he should not be ashamed of it. He tells all the other settlers about it, despite his fears about what might happen. He argues to them that his Dark Gift helps make him who he is, and that it is nothing bad. His adventures and time with Gemma have helped him to see that it is the underwater life he loves so much that has made him this way, and that none of them should be apologetic or ashamed of their community and lifestyle. This is a very good and important lesson to learn.



Gemma does not share Ty's worries about being special. In fact, Gemma would love to be special. Her own identity worries arise from the fact that she has grown up Topside among so many other people, crowded into tiny rooms together. She has always just been one of a crowd, and worries that she is a 'nobody.' She desperately wants to make something of herself and to feel important. This is why she comes subsea, and why she is so fascinated by everything that makes Ty unique. At first she will not accept that she is a rarity under the ocean, but eventually she comes to see that here she actually is considered special. With Ty's help, she begins to accept that she is an important person after all, and that she should not consider herself a nobody. She does not need a Dark Gift or glowing skin to be unique. In this way, she also learns to accept and love who she is.

When Gemma sees Ty lying about other children's abilities as well as his own, she confronts him. She tells him that he is setting a bad example to the others by teaching them to be ashamed of themselves. He thinks he is protecting them, but he is actually only confusing them and making them worried about what they can do. It is clear that Zoe would like to use her ability more, and to tell her parents about it, but she looks to her older brother for advice. She gets very upset when she thinks she has hurt people with her power, and needs support rather than secrets in order to deal with it properly. Later, when Ty confesses about his own ability, Zoe and Hewitt immediately step forward and tell the settlers about theirs too. This shows that Gemma was correct; Ty really does have a lot of influence over them. They were all desperate for a chance to accept themselves for who they are and to be proud of their abilities, but were just waiting for Ty's lead. Now Ty has finally given them a positive message, and proven that he can be a good role model after all.

The Beauty of the Ocean

There are many points in this story when characters admire the beauty of the ocean and the sea life around them. There are also a lot of descriptions of the ocean world, inspiring a sense of awe and wonder in the reader. The ocean is portrayed as a place that is very different and sometimes dangerous, but that possesses a wild, untamed beauty not found anywhere else on earth. This ties in to the Wild West theme running throughout the story, as the frontier lands were also portrayed in this way. Like the frontier lands, the ocean is a treat and a marvel for those brave enough to venture into it.

The incredible beauty of the ocean also serves to remind the reader that there is a lot to be gained from the pioneer's way of life. They are not just setting up a new home, with a lot of hard work and danger. They are creating a life of freedom and space in a beautiful new world. This is reflected in Ty and Zoe's attitudes. Ty loves the ocean and enjoys exploring it, just as Zoe shows a strong passion for sea life. Ty loves showing off his world to others and takes delight in Gemma's awe and excitement. Ty is proud of his home, and is anxious to show Gemma everything that the Topside cannot offer. The undersea world stands in sharp contrast to the austere, overcrowded world above. On land, there is very little room to spare, and Gemma has never really seen wildlife or



animals before. Now she can appreciate nature in all its beauty. This shows the reader why she so desperately wants to stay subsea, and also creates a sense of sadness and loss for the world that the Topsiders have lost.

Much of the ocean's beauty comes from ordinary things that are special to the person observing them. For Gemma, things are beautiful because they are different and unique. She has never seen anything like them before. In this way, even a sea-slug or shrimp can be beautiful. For Zoe, the sea life around her is all precious and beautiful because it comes from the ocean, her home. She is fascinated by it all, and feels a strong connection with the creatures she finds. Like Zoe, Ty collects beautiful things in the ocean, but not sea life. He collects artifacts found on the ocean floor, which have come from ancient societies. These are precious objects left behind by past civilizations, full of wonder and mystery for Ty. These are the treasures that the sea offers to those who explore it. Beauty often comes from unexpected things, but it is all around them every day. This idea is encapsulated in the phrase 'gem o' the ocean' which means the pretty things found in the sea. Each person considers different things to be gems, which shows how subjective the idea of beauty can be. Like the gems, Gemma is also rare and precious in some people's eyes, despite being a normal girl. As her name suggests, she is also a 'gem o' the ocean,' something that it is important for her to accept about herself. In these ways, the ocean proves to people that life is full of beauty, even in the simplest and most natural things. This is a fact that most Topsiders seem to have forgotten.

The Wild West

The themes and events of this story mimic those of Western stories in many ways, and various features of the setting recall the Wild West. This is a deliberate allusion, as the author is trying to create the Wild West feel in a new, unique science fiction setting.

Many Western story staples appear in this novel. There are pioneers or people who are braving a new way of life under the sea, which is very different from how the rest of civilization lives. In this group of people, there are settlers, who set up homesteads and farms in order to make a life for themselves under the ocean, and prospectors, who hunt for their fortune beneath the waves. The Wild West also had pioneers, including settlers who were trying to forge a new way of life in a wild place, and prospectors who panned for gold. In this story, the prospectors pan for black pearls rather than gold, but the idea, and the types of people who are drawn to this kind of treasure hunting, are the same.

In both stories the pioneers are looked on oddly by the rest of the world, who consider them very wild and strange for wanting to live such a hard and different kind of life. In both stories the settlers are drawn to this way of life, despite its hardships and dangers, because it offers the chance to begin a new life with more freedom and opportunity. In the Wild West, a man could claim large tracts of land for himself in order to build a home and farm, and to start a family. He could make something from nothing, and end up with a prosperous life to pass down to his children. This is the same with undersea life. Ty's



parents were the first pioneers to come subsea, and Ty looks forward to being able to claim his own land and start building his home at some point in the future. This life is particularly appealing in the science-fictional setting of this novel, as the rest of the world has very little space and people live cramped up together in large skyscrapers. Undersea life is appealing because of the space and freedom from crowding that it offers. Despite this, for most of the world, the dangers and the fear of the unknown outweigh the risks. This means that the subsea community is very small and contains very few children and teenagers, and even less young women. Again, this mimics the idea of the Wild West, which saw mainly men wanting to brave the wild and the dangers to start a new life. Some men were joined by their wives and children, but young unmarried women were very scarce, and considered a rare find. Any young lady who visited the town would be paid a lot of attention. This is something Gemma experiences in this story, with Jibby even offering to marry her despite barely knowing her.

Other staples of the Western genre found in this story are the outlaws and the reluctant ranger, as well as the lack of government support. Westerns often contain bandits or outlaws who are willing to rob others to get by rather than work for it themselves. This reflects the rough, wild and dangerous feel that the frontier lands had; it was a place where laws were stretched thin and people had more freedom. Naturally, some interpreted this to their own advantage and turned to crime. In Western stories, the government rarely offers any help to the pioneer communities in dealing with these outlaws. Catching and stopping them is usually left up to the community itself, with the aid of their local sheriff. In some stories the sheriff is a hero, but more often than not the heroics are left up to a lone stranger who has nothing to do with the law. In many stories, the community is forced to take the law into its own hands in order to protect itself from the criminals. These themes and attitudes are also found in this book. Benthic Territory gets very little government help other than the odd supply ship. Now the government has decided to withdraw even this support until the community manages to deal with its own outlaw problem. The local ranger is useless, so the settlers are forced to take matters into their own hands. They then have to decide whether they will act as judge, jury and executioner, or whether to give the criminals a proper trial. They have to decide what sort of community and people they want to be, and whether proper law and order will stretch to their new settlement. In the end, Ty and Shade demonstrate the importance of justice, and the settlers decide not to dispense with this important mark of civilization. As Ty's father points out, their community might not be worth saving if they do abandon this.

The community has a very rough and wild feel to it. The ranger is useless and the settlers are more or less left to govern themselves. The government cannot be bothered to stretch their arm this far from the 'civilized' world except to collect taxes. Many of the staples of civilization are not available, and even the doctor is a discredited old man who cannot perform surgery anymore. The settlement does not even have a proper sheriff's office or jail. Despite this, the settlement is bound by deep community ties. The settlers all act like one big family, something that Gemma finds instantly appealing. She points out that although the Topsiders all live so close together, ironically they do not have a feeling of community as the Benthic Settlement does. This is another way in which Benthic Territory is similar to the towns and settlements found in Western stories.



The community might be a little rough and backwards in some ways, but they will stand by each other and offer whatever neighborly support they can.

It is not just the themes and events of the story that capture the idea of the Wild West. The feel and atmosphere of the novel also reflects Western stories. There is a sense of the pioneering spirit, of brave people who want to push the boundaries of their world. Ty exhibits this attitude perfectly. He loves exploring, and takes delight in discovering new things. He is brave, resourceful and good-hearted, and is sensible enough to know the dangers he faces. He proves that he is very capable of looking after himself. He does not mind the risks of being under the ocean, as he loves his home and his way of life so much. He has a strong sense of adventure and independence. These are all traits that a typical Western hero possesses.

Gemma also displays the same awe and excitement at discovering new things, and quickly comes to love the ocean. She is perfectly suited to undersea life, just as heroines in Western stories are often perfectly suited to frontier life. She is brave and determined, and like Ty she has a strong love of adventure and a need to be independent. She is very willful and will not let others boss her around. A meek or shy girl would not get on well in this environment, but Gemma is tough, as she so often reminds Ty and she can take whatever is thrown at her.

Both Ty and Gemma feel that they need to prove something to themselves and each other, an attitude they share with many characters of Westerns. Both of them manage to do so by the end of the book, and earn their freedom and independence. As well as the main characters, the novel in general captures the spirit of the Wild West. The descriptions of the wonderful ocean world, strange sea life, the dangers and the adventure inspire a sense of wonder and excitement in the reader. The author successfully manages to give her story the feeling of a Wild Western drama under the sea.

Style

Point of View

Dark Life is told in the first person from Ty's point of view. Ty is the main character and it is his story that is being told. By telling the story in first person, the author gives the reader a deep insight into all of Ty's thoughts and feelings. This is important because he is a very secretive person who does not like to share his worries with others. He is hiding his Dark Gift, and does not like any kind of attention from other people, particularly Topsiders. This means that he is very reluctant to trust others with what he is really thinking. By allowing the readers to glimpse his thoughts and feelings in first person, the author helps them to understand Ty better, as well as the reasons why he acts as he does. By telling the story in first person from Ty's point of view, the author also puts the reader into Ty's position, making it easier for them to sympathize with him and to feel worried when he or Gemma is in danger. Since the reader knows all of Ty's deep emotions and dreams, it also demonstrates that he is a very good person for being willing to risk all this to do what is right.

Setting

The story is set mainly under the sea in Benthic Territory. This is an underwater settlement populated by pioneer settlers who are the first to try out life under the ocean. This is a reaction to the crisis in which half the world was submerged under the sea due to rising sea levels. Now there is not enough room on land, so people are having to explore other options. The Benthic Settlement is small but close-knit, and all the settlers feel like one big family. They live in houses designed with sea-creatures in mind, with flexible walls so that the house moves with the ocean's currents, avoiding the damage that would be done to rigid stone walls. Ty's house has been modeled after a jellyfish. The houses contain all the modern conveniences people are used to, such as electricity, light and heat. The settlers have a lot more space under the ocean than the Topsiders do, but have to face the unknown and the dangers of the wild in order to get this.

The Topsiders are suspicious and a little afraid of this way of life, considering the pioneers weird for wanting to live under the sea. They use the phrase 'Dark Life' to refer to the settlers. This is an insulting term as it is a scientific name for bacteria that do not need light to survive. As Gemma points out, this is also a highly ironic term, as the pioneers under the ocean actually have plenty of light, not to mention space, a strong community, and freedom. Many of the poorer Topsiders live in the constant shadow of skyscrapers and train stations. It is actually they who are the Dark Life, not the subsea pioneers. All the Topsiders live in extremely crowded conditions, sharing tiny spaces and not ever experiencing much freedom or independence from others. Gemma hates this way of life, and marvels at how much better things are under the ocean. Ty agrees. He loves his lifestyle and never wants to move Topside. He values his freedom too much and would be extremely unhappy cramped into a Topsider apartment. By



comparing the two worlds, the author shows that sometimes braving something new can lead to better things, and that people who look down on other ways of life should not do so without experiencing them first.

The ocean world is also portrayed as extremely beautiful. Topside, there are very few animals left and virtually no wildlife. Gemma has never seen wild animals before, and is awed and amazed by the sea life around her. Ty teaches her about the different things under the sea, and shows her that everything has its own unique beauty, no matter how normal it might seem. Everything is special in its own way. Here, the setting matches one of the main themes of the story. Both Ty and Gemma have to learn to accept themselves and to appreciate that they are special, unique people. They do not have to change who they are and they should not want to. Like the ocean life, they are beautiful and precious. This idea is encapsulated in the phrase 'gem o' the ocean' which is used to describe something pretty found in the sea. Ty uses it to describe even the simplest fish, such as shrimp or sea slugs, because all of them are beautiful and special to him. For Ty, Gemma is also a gem o' the ocean, just as Ty is for her. Through the beauty of the ocean world, they both come to appreciate what is beautiful about their own lives.

The setting of the story also reflects the Wild West theme that runs throughout the book. The ocean world is beautiful and free, but also wild and dangerous. It can offer great happiness and rewards to those who are brave enough to explore it. Ty loves adventuring under the sea, and displays the same kind of pioneering spirit that heroes in Western stories do. The subsea world is shown as a place where a person can start a new life with newfound freedoms, enjoy independence that he might not have had otherwise, and build a future for himself. This is Ty's dream, as he longs to own his own land and start his own homestead. This idea is very similar to the Wild West, in which pioneers started a new life, facing the wild and its hardships in order to enjoy more space and freedom. If they worked hard, they could set up a good life for themselves and their children, just as the Benthic settlers have done. However, in Western stories there are always outlaws looking to take things from others, enjoying the freedom and lack of laws in a place so distant from the rest of civilization. This is also the case in this story.

Just as in Western stories, Benthic Territory has a very rough and ready feel to it. It is isolated, being far from the rest of civilization, and far from the arm of law and the government. The settlers are expected to deal with their own outlaw problem, and they do not even have a proper sheriff or jail. Their ranger is useless, their government representative could not care less about them, and their doctor is a discredited man who cannot even perform surgery anymore. Life is not always easy, but the community pulls together and everyone watches out for each other. This perfectly captures the atmosphere of a story set in the Wild West, giving this novel the feeling of a Western under the sea.



Language and Meaning

The language used in the novel is mainly simple and easy to understand. It is narrated by Ty and told from his perspective, so the language used reflects what an ordinary teenage boy might use. Ty has been brought up in a strange location, but he is still educated and intelligent, and understands the world around him. His normal speech to others is contrasted with his use of some very technical terms for fish, sea life, and ocean technology. This reminds the reader that although he is only a teenager, in his world he is expected to grow up more quickly than a teenager in our time would, and that he has worked with underwater equipment all his life.

Ty really comes to life when he is describing the beauty of the ocean world, whether he is telling the reader about it or explaining something to Gemma. He loves his lifestyle and his world so much, and this is evident to the reader. The beautiful descriptions of strange creatures and wonderful sights inspire a sense of wonder and awe in the reader, too, capturing the adventurous and wondrous spirit of a Western.

Other characters use language that reflects their personality and their situation. Gemma is very easygoing and straightforward. She does not know all the technical terms that Ty does, and is often very blunt when she is explaining something or arguing a point. This reflects the fact that she has had to grow up in a harsh and overcrowded environment in which it is necessary to be bold and blunt to get by. Ty's parents are both educated and highly inventive, and tend to speak calmly and intelligently. Other settlers like Jibby and Raj are more used to manual work and so are more direct and practical than other characters. They will speak very bluntly, saying exactly what they are thinking. Raj and Jibby also use some colloquialisms that bring to mind the Wild West, connecting to the Western theme again. Shade and the other Seablite Gang members are men of few words, preferring action over speech. When they do talk it is obvious that they are very bitter and that they distrust other people.

Structure

The story is told in relatively short chapters, each with at least one important event, revelation, or discussion in them. This helps to keep the story moving quickly, as well as breaking it down into manageable sections. The fast pace keeps a sense of excitement up, which is important in a story that sets out to mimic the feel of a Western. The story has many revelations and twists in it, which are fed to the reader constantly in the second half of the novel. Rather than waiting to reveal all these twists at the end, the author manages to keep suspense and interest up by keeping the reader questioning.

The first revelation is that Ty is actually Akai and possesses a Dark Gift that allows him to emit sonar. Later, the reader finds out that the Seablite Gang are not escaped criminals but were locked up and abused as children. Just as the reader is forced to sympathize with them, Richard's fate is revealed. He was murdered by the Seablite Gang, and the reader immediately hates them again. However, it is not long after this that one of the main twists is revealed. Shade, the leader of the gang, is actually



Richard, and he was not murdered after all. With these revelations, the reader is forced into a spiral of conflicting emotions, leading to confusion about whether Shade is actually a bad man or not. This helps to emphasize the message here, that executing a man, even a horrible criminal, without a fair trial is wrong. Shade is not the monster he seemed, and the settlers would have killed a man for crimes he did not commit. This message would not be so effective if the reader had not experienced so many changing feelings towards Shade and the Seablite Gang. Finally, the last revelation is revealed, that Doctor Kunze is actually the main enemy of the story and that he planned to hurt Ty in order to prove his theories. All these revelations and twists keep the reader hooked until the very end of the book and help to increase the frenzied feel of the last chapters of the novel.



Quotes

"Never mind that it is the ocean dwellers who supply the nation's food and keep watch over the energy sources - the tides and hydrothermal vents. We were still freaks to them" (Chapter 2, p. 22).

"Ever since the Rising became an official catastrophe, we've lived under Emergency Law, which means certain rights get suspended" (Chapter 4, p. 43).

"But lots of pioneers came subsea looking for a fresh start and it was understood that if a person worked hard and contributed to the community, nobody would bring up his past" (Chapter 4, p. 48).

"I'd picked out the land for my own homestead, measuring out the hundred acres of unclaimed terrain more times than I'd admit. The land was perfect, too - beautiful and rich with wildlife" (Chapter 5, p. 53).

"Most people live on the affordable floors below the moving walkways and train tubes, so everything is shadowy." She gazed at the expanse of green. "We're the ones who are the Dark Life" (Chapter 5, p. 56).

"Why would anyone want to look special? It was just a polite way of saying different, which was only slightly better than being called a freak outright" (Chapter 6, p. 67-8).

"As if the settlers weren't already breaking their backs to keep their homesteads running, raising fish and shellfish for Topsider dinner plates and creating crops out of mud - a gang of lazy, no good outlaws had to turn all this hard work into a dead harvest?" (Chapter 8, p. 83).

"It was us against them, simple as that. Settlers against outlaws" (Chapter 9, p. 87).

"If we was supposed to fill up our lungs with liquid, God would have made us fish" (Chapter 15, p. 156).

"If a siphonophore rocked her world, wait till she spent some real time down here. Suddenly I wanted to show her all the amazing places I'd found. And creatures. I wanted to see her face light up like that again" (Chapter 18, p. 174).

"Who wanted to live in squared-off rooms with hard walls? It was unnatural" (Chapter 18, p. 180).

"Well, I got a good look at how you people live - like hagfish, piled on top of one another. No offense, but I'd rather risk brain damage" (Chapter 18, p. 183).

"Glancing around the dismal room, I felt a trickle of sympathy for the boys who'd formed the Seablite Gang. No wonder they kept robbing supply ships. If I'd been locked up in here, I'd be mad at the government, too" (Chapter 18, p. 186).



""If we start ignoring the law," Pa said, "this won't be a community worth saving" (Chapter 20, p. 199).

"They watch you because you're older. And what are you telling them? To be ashamed of themselves" (Chapter 23, p. 230-1).

"I don't want to be a prototype - I want to be normal." (Chapter 23, p. 231).

"And just so you know, it's not normal to want to be normal. People who are normal want to be special" (Chapter 23, p. 231).

"But just so you know, the opposite of normal isn't special. It's abnormal. And I'm not admitting that to anyone" (Chapter 23, p. 231).

""Not all cages have bars. A reputation can cage you." He was nothing but a rumbling voice now. "So can a secret"" (Chapter 24 p. 238).

"Shade's Dark Gift made him a monster, and I couldn't help but wonder if one day they'd look at me that way" (Chapter 26, p. 256).



Topics for Discussion

What is a "gem o' the ocean?" What different things in this story could be considered a gem o' the ocean and why? In what ways is Gemma like a gem o' the ocean? Why is this idea significant?

Discuss the theme of identity in this story. Who is having an identity crisis and why? Is anyone ashamed of themselves, or having a hard time accepting who they are? What do characters learn about themselves in this story?

How is the setting of this story similar to the Wild West? Why is this significant to the story being told? In what ways are the themes and ideas found in it similar to those of a Western? What atmosphere does this create? What does it say about Benthic Territory and its people?

Discuss the representation of law and order in this story. What is justice and what happens when it is carried out? What happens when communities take justice into their own hands? Do all criminals deserve a fair trial?

What are the main differences between subsea life and Topsider life in this story? What do the different groups of people think of each other? Are they right? Whose way of life is better?

What does the author have to say about people's duty to care for their environment? In your answer, think about the setting of the book, whether characters appreciate nature and their surroundings, settler lifestyle compared to Topsider lifestyle, and the crisis that caused the sea levels to rise in the first place.

Gemma claims that everybody who is normal really wants to be special. Ty claims that being special is another way of saying that he is a freak. Why do these two characters look at life so differently? Why does Gemma long to be special and Ty long to be normal? Who do you agree with and why?

Do you think the Seablite Gang are sympathetic characters or not? Give reasons for your answer with examples from the story. How does the revelation about their past inform their characters? What about the revelation that Shade is actually Richard Straid? Can their behavior be excused, or are they still criminals who need to be stopped?

Discuss the character of Ty. Is he a likeable character? Do you think he is the hero of this story? Does he do anything wrong or foolish? Give reasons for your answers.

Discuss the character of Doc Kunze. What makes him a villain, and what behavior does he exhibit that makes the reader dislike him? Is he a bigger threat to the settlers than Shade? Why? Do you think he gets what he deserves in the end?