



THE **Battle** OF **Riptide**

Shark Wars #2: The Battle of Riptide

RAZORBILL

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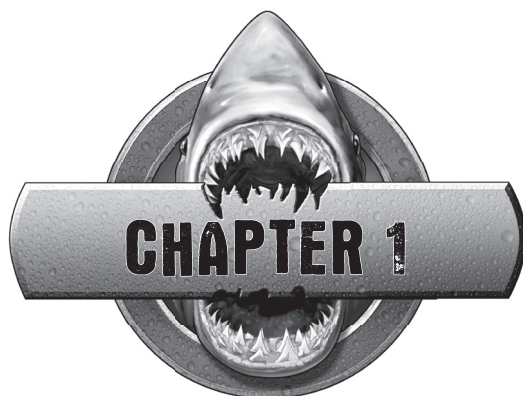
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THE GATHERING STORM



IT FELT LIKE A STORM WAS COMING. THE CURRENT had gotten colder and faster in the last hour, the way it did in the Big Blue when a squall gathered in the skies above the chop-chop. With all the silt and sand churned from the seabed, it was difficult to see or smell anything from a distance. Gray crept along the side of a massive clump of brain coral and surveyed the area as the others hovered behind him.

“I don’t see anything,” he said in a low voice, nervously gnashing his dagger teeth.

“I told Snork not to go patrolling by himself,” hissed Barkley. The dogfish had been Gray’s best friend since he was a pup and had become a trusted voice in Rogue Shiver.

The other members of the Rogue Line present—Striiker, the great white; Mari, the thresher; and Shell, the bull shark—waited uncertainly. Everyone was worried

about Snork, who had gone missing. It wasn't like the sawfish to leave without telling the rest of the group. No one had seen him for hours.

Fish and other dwellers had cleared the area as the storm neared, leaving it eerily empty. The only sound was the cold water whisking through the foreboding canyons of rock.

"Maybe he just got lost!" Striker said, a little too loudly.

Mari cut her long thrasher tail through the water to quiet him. "Keep your voice down."

"Yeah," Shell added, watching the water above them. "Goblin may not run many patrols through here, but Razor does."

They were in an area off to the side of both the Goblin and Razor Shivers' homewaters. The hunting wasn't especially inviting in these sharp and craggy rock formations, not when there were much better feeding territories in each shiver's own homewaters. Mainly, Goblin and Razor both claimed the territory so the other wouldn't have it.

Since the Tuna Run though, the two warring shivers did share one goal: to *eat* Gray and every member of Rogue Shiver alive. Goblin wanted revenge on them for spoiling his plans against Razor. Fortunately, Goblin didn't have time to search for Gray or anyone else because Razor, the leader of Razor Shiver, was thirsting for Goblin's blood. Razor barely escaped with his life

when he was attacked at the Tuna Run. Now the bull shark leader struck at Goblin Shiver every chance he got. But given that both Goblin and Razor wanted Gray and the rest of Rogue Shiver dead, it made swimming here foolish . . . and awfully dangerous.

"Why would Snork even come here?" Gray muttered to himself.

Barkley fidgeted. "I *may* have said it was a good area to practice stalking."

"You and your big mouth," Striker said.

The great white and Barkley didn't get along well but pulled together when it was important. Gray didn't want to listen to them argue back and forth for five minutes before agreeing *this* was important. He bumped the dog-fish to stop his snotty reply before it happened.

"Here's what we're going to do," Gray told everyone. He was the leader of Rogue Shiver, so it was up to him to decide the course of action. "Striker and Mari go to the left side and start searching inward. Shell and Barkley, you go to the right side and do the same. I'll head to the middle and hunt outward in a circle pattern."

"What if there's trouble?" demanded Striker. "What's the plan then?" The great white was first in the Rogue Line, so it was his right to ask. Most of the time, Striker was a good first: strong and dependable. But he could wear your teeth down with his attitude.

"Signal everyone, then swim and hide. Fight only if you have no other option," Gray answered.

“Let’s not waste any more time with dumb questions,” Mari said, swimming off to the left.

Striker grumbled but followed. Mari was Gray’s second in Line: smart, capable, and levelheaded. Barkley gave Gray a nod before leaving with Shell, who was third in Line.

The Five in the Line was an ancient sharkkind invention. Basically, whoever was chosen to lead a shiver of sharks would pick five others to take over if he or she was injured or killed. It was dangerous in the open waters of the Big Blue. Even a fifth could become leader overnight to hundreds of sharkkind in a shiver’s general membership. Rogue Shiver was unusual in that there were only six of them total, Gray as leader and the Five in the Line. They were a bunch of castoffs and castaways, which was why they had named themselves Rogue Shiver.

Gray caught a descending current into a field of ropy green-greenie so he could swim somewhat unseen toward the center area of the maze of rock and coral formations. While the green-greenie would easily hide Barkley, Snork, or even a thresher like Mari, the disturbance Gray made plowing through the field negated most of the stealth benefit. If someone from Razor or Goblin Shiver were looking, Gray knew he would definitely be noticed. Since Tuna Run, he had grown even more, becoming longer and wider than Goblin himself, the former biggest fin around.

“Because you’re a freak,” whispered a voice inside Gray’s head.

He shook his snout, clearing away the negative thought. In a way, Gray was an oddity: the only megalodon swimming the Big Blue in a million years. The members of Rogue Shiver knew he was a meg but still swam with him, flank to flank. Everyone said it made him *special*. Gray chuckled to himself. He used to dream about being the baddest shark in the ocean. Now, when he thought about being *so* different from everyone else, it sent a chill down his spine.

Today Gray would give *anything* to be just another shark in the Big Blue. But he wasn't and never would be.

Gray moved from coral spire to spire. Being in front of a tower of light green coral didn't seem especially smart, so he swam behind a dark blue one. That was more his color. "Should have been called Blue," he muttered as he began searching the area in the middle of the other two teams.

Nothing stirred except the greenie, bent at an angle by the increasing current. There must be one heck of a storm above, Gray thought.

But otherwise it was quiet. Too quiet.

Gray strained to hear anything out of the ordinary and was rewarded when he detected the muted thrashing of a larger fin nearby. Gray swam in low and fast before gliding to a stop.

It was Snork! The sawfish was trapped underneath a fallen piece of coral, caught by his long serrated nose, which he used to dig for shellheads and other smaller dwellers. "Snork, are you all right?"

"I can't get my bill free!"

"Don't worry," Gray told the frightened sawfish. "I'll have you out in a fin flick!"

"LOOK OUT!" cried Striker as he hurtled out of nowhere and speared a streaking bull shark in the flank, butting it away from biting Gray.

Razor Shiver!

Barkley took on another bull as Shell rammed a third. It was a melee!

Gray was about to accelerate into an attacking sprint when Shell shouted, "Free Snork! We'll hold them off!"

"Mari, cover my topside!" Gray yelled. The thresher did so, and it was a good thing. She deflected an attack at his dorsal fin with some help from Striker, who was all flashing teeth and spitting anger.

"Come on, you flippers!" the great white shouted. "Who wants a piece of me?"

Gray got into position to move the large chunk of coral that was pinning Snork. He churned against it with all his might. The coral moved, but not enough for the sawfish to get free. Instead, he yelped in pain.

"Sorry, Snork!"

"It's okay," the sawfish replied, crying a little. "Just get me out of here!"

Gray heard Mari's tail strokes suddenly falter above him. "You've got to hurry!" she told him.

"I am!"

"I mean it!" she urged. "I see twenty more bulls coming!"

Twenty more! Gray and his friends would be torn to pieces!

"Fins up! We've got to move, move, move!" bellowed Striker as the three attacking bulls were finally scattered. He, too, had seen the other bull sharks coming.

Gray did a lightning quick circle and sped into an attacking sprint. This is going to hurt, he thought, just before ramming the coral that was trapping Snork. Gray could taste his own blood, but the coral snapped into three smaller pieces.

Snork swam off the seabed as Barkley motioned with a fin. "This way!" No one knew the area better than the dogfish, so Gray signaled for everyone to follow.

The group darted into a crack in the ocean floor, probably caused by a seaquake years ago. It was wide enough to swim in, but not by much. Thankfully, it was sufficiently deep that the Razor Shiver sharks couldn't see them for a crucial few seconds.

Everything blurred as they sped through the tight turns inside the crevice, zigging and zagging in silence while putting distance between themselves and the dangerous bulls. After a few minutes, they were in the clear.

"Wow, they don't get much closer than that," commented Shell when they were safely away from the area.

Striker flicked his fins in annoyance. "We shouldn't

have even been in that situation! Snork, if you do something that chowderheaded again, I'll bite you myself!"

The sawfish dipped his long nose. "I'm sorry. I just wanted to help you spy on Goblin and Razor's patrols."

"It's okay, Snork," Gray said. "But next time, go with Barkley. He's an excellent teacher. And very sneaky."

"I'll help, too," added Mari with a toothy smile. "But let's hope that's the last we see of Goblin or Razor Shivers."

The gang headed into the hidden greenie path leading to the landshark wreck they used as their home and hideout. Gray paused before he joined his friends inside. Night had fallen, and the storm overhead arrived with a vengeance. Gray could feel the vibrations of thunder above the chop-chop. He could see bursts of bright lightning, which caused his skin to tingle each time it struck the water. It was the fiercest type of storm; one they called a flashnboomer.

Gray hoped that Mari was right. He hoped that he and his friends wouldn't see either Goblin or Razor ever again. But Gray couldn't shake the feeling that, like the storm above, the one in their watery world was just getting started.