



Extract 3

The cold was ferocious, a hammer blow that nearly forced the air out of his lungs. The water pounded at his head, swirling round his nose and eyes. His fingers were instantly numb. His whole system felt the shock, but the dry suit was holding, sealing in at least some of his body warmth. Clinging to the rope, he kicked forward. He had committed himself. There could be no going back.

Pull, kick. Pull, kick. Alex had been underwater for less than a minute but already his lungs were feeling the strain. The roof of the tunnel was scraping his shoulders and he was afraid that it would tear through the dry suit and gouge his skin as well. But he didn't dare slow down. The freezing cold was sucking the strength out of him. Pull and kick. Pull and kick. How long had he been under? Ninety seconds? A hundred? His eyes were tight shut, but if he opened them there would be no difference. He was in a black, swirling, freezing version of hell. And his breath was running out.

He pulled himself forward along the rope, burning the skin off the palms of his hands. He must have been swimming for almost two minutes. It felt closer to ten. He *had* to open his mouth and breathe, even if it was water that would rush into his throat... A silent scream exploded inside him. Pull, kick. Pull, kick. And then the rope tilted upwards and he felt his shoulders come clear, and his mouth was wrenched open in a great gasp as he breathed air and knew that he had made it, perhaps with only seconds to spare.

But made it to where?

Alex couldn't see anything. He was floating in utter darkness, unable to see even where the water ended.

