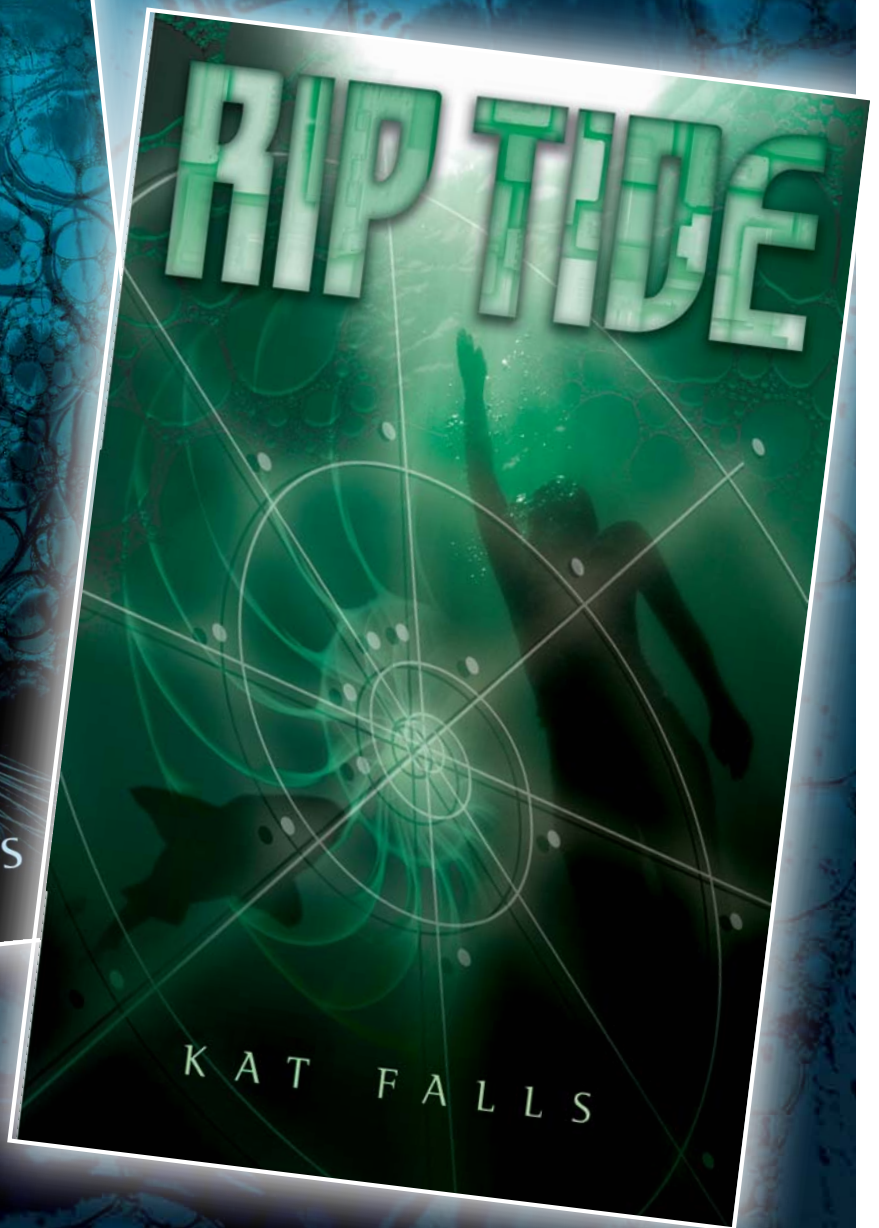
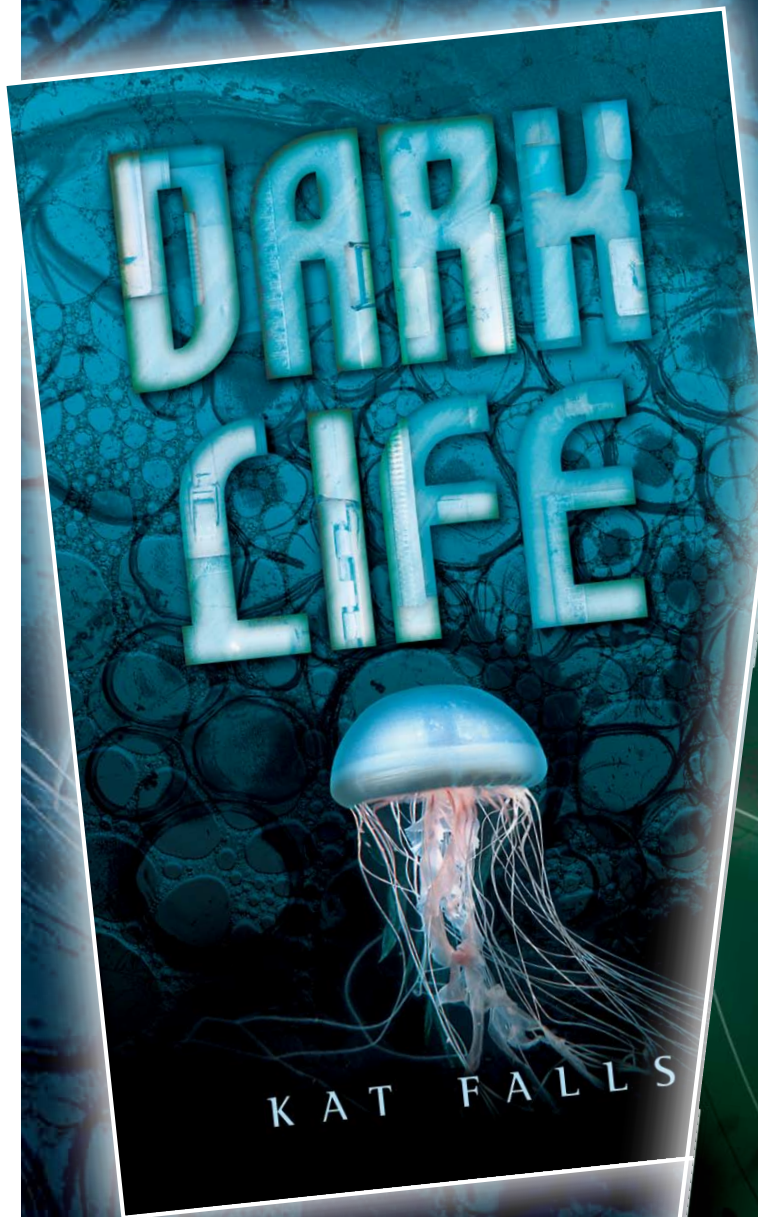


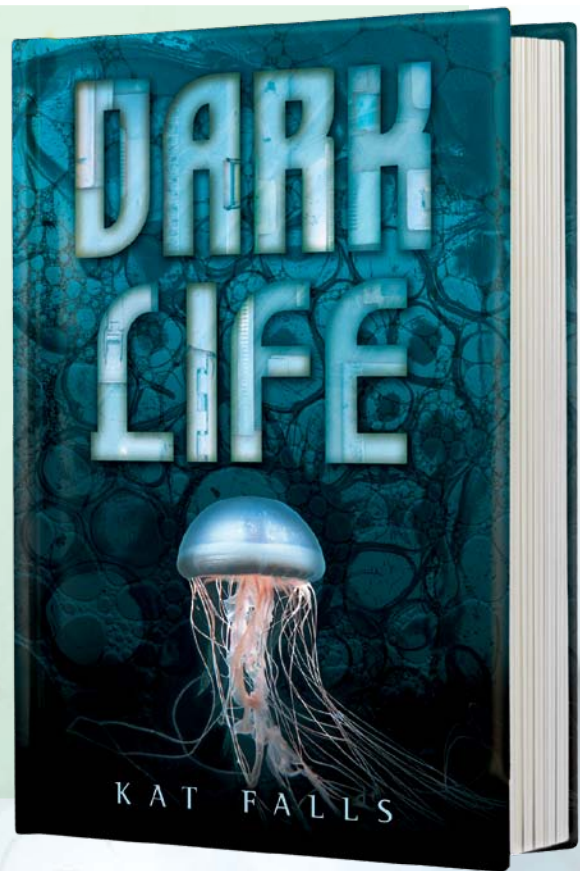
# DISCUSSION GUIDE



by KAT FALLS

## ABOUT THE BOOK

In an apocalyptic future where climate change has made oceans rise and swallow up entire regions, people live on the remaining land on top of one another, packed like sardines. In the ocean, underwater pioneers have carved out a life for themselves in the harsh deep-sea environment, farming the sea floor. *Dark Life* tells the story of Ty, who has lived his whole life on his family's under-water homestead and dreams of claiming his own stake when he turns eighteen. When outlaws attack government supply ships and settlements and threaten to destroy the underwater territory, Ty finds himself in a fight to stop the outlaws and save the only home he has ever known. Joined by Gemma, a Topsider who has come subsea in search of her prospector brother, Ty ventures into the frontier's rough underworld and begins to discover dark secrets and government conspiracies. As Ty gets closer to the truth, he discovers that the outlaws may not be the bloodthirsty criminals the government has portrayed them to be. He realizes that the government abandoning the territory may be the best thing for everyone, especially for someone like him.



## PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Many sea creatures are mentioned throughout the novel that will be unfamiliar to most readers. Depending on the number of readers, ask individuals or pairs to research a few using reference books or online resources. Ask them to pull together general information about each creature, find pictures of each, and then compile all of the findings into "A Guide to Sea Creatures in Dark Life" to which everyone can refer.

Animals to identify: amberjack, barnacle, barracuda, blowfish, dolphin, dragonfish, flounder, grenadier, gulper eel, hagfish, humpback whale, jellyfish, lamprey eel, lantern shark, loosejaw, mackerel, marlin, monkfish, oarfish, piranha, red-speckled octopus, sea cucumber, sea snake, snaggletooth, suckerfish, sunfish, swordfish, tuna, vampire squid, and viperfish.

The undersea settlers refer to where they live as the "Benthic Territory." Ask readers to research the term "benthic zone" using reference books or online resource and then share their findings.

## PRE-READING AND POST-READING ACTIVITY

Throughout the novel, characters use unique expressions that are reflective of their environments. For example, Gemma uses the phrase "Hot tar!" as an exclamation, and Ty uses phrases that include the word "chum." Ask readers to maintain a list of expressions they find as they read the novel. When you finish the novel, have everyone share and compare what they found. Ask them to think of everyday expressions we have that would fit well in the worlds of either the Topsiders or subsea settlers.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The novel opens with Ty saying: "I peered into the deep sea canyon, hoping to spot a toppled skyscraper. Maybe even the Statue of Liberty. But there was no sign of the old East Coast, just a sheer drop into darkness." Where is Ty? When does this novel take place? What has become of New York City?
2. What does Ty mean when he sees Gemma for the first time and describes her face as "a study in UV exposure"?
3. How does Gemma make Ty feel like a freak? What does Ty say is the cause of his "shine"?
4. How can Ty tell that Gemma is a Topsider?
5. What does Ty like about Gemma's name?
6. Why does Gemma tell Ty he has a "Dark Gift"? What does Ty say about "Dark Gifts"?
7. What is the tension that Ty says has always existed between Topsiders and the undersea pioneers?
8. What does Ty say about Akai, the boy who supposedly lives undersea and has special powers?
9. What makes Ty unique from undersea settlers?
10. What do you think Ty is referring to when he talks about "the cities destroyed by the Rising"?
11. At the settlement meeting, what does Benton Tupper, the representative of the Commonwealth of States government, call upon the pioneers to do?
12. What grievances do the pioneers have against the Commonwealth government?
13. Why are Ty's parents so happy to meet Gemma?
14. Why do the subsea settlers resent being called "Dark Life"?
15. After seeing where Ty lives, why does Gemma say that it is most Topsiders who are the "Dark Life"?
16. What is unusual about Shade, the leader of the Seablite Gang?
17. What do Ty and Gemma learn from Doc about the experimental prison?
18. What does Ty overhear his parents discussing that upsets him?
19. What does Gemma reveal to Ty about where she came from, her parents, and her brother?
20. What information does Doc share with Ty from the report he received on Gemma?
21. Why does Ty finally reveal to Gemma that he is Akai?
22. What are Ty's reasons for keeping his Dark Gift a secret?
23. What do Ty and Gemma discover in Seablite?
24. How is Ms. Spinner's attitude toward the undersea settlers similar to that of many other Topsiders?
25. What Dark Gift does Ty realize Shade has?
26. Why is Ty so opposed to revealing that Dark Gifts are real?
27. What leads Ty to realize that Shade is Gemma's brother?
28. What do you think is the real reason the government wants the Seablite Gang captured?
29. What do you think will happen between Ty and Gemma?



## POST-READING ACTIVITIES

1. *Dark Life* introduces readers to an environment that is mysterious and seldom explored in literature. Encourage students to learn more about the world's oceans by visiting these websites:

Dive and Discover: Expeditions to the Seafloor  
<http://www.divediscover.whoi.edu/>

The Ocean Biome  
[http://windows2universe.org/earth/Water/marine\\_ecology.html](http://windows2universe.org/earth/Water/marine_ecology.html)

Virtual Ocean  
<http://www.virtualocean.org/>

2. The world depicted in *Dark Life* is our world in the future. The “Rising” catastrophe refers to the rising of ocean levels as a result of global climate change. Ask readers to research information on global warming and climate change at the following online resources and then share what they have learned:

Global Warming: Early Warning Signs  
<http://www.climatehotmap.org/>

Union of Concerned Scientists: Global Warming  
[http://www.ucsusa.org/global\\_warming/](http://www.ucsusa.org/global_warming/)

National Geographic: What Is Global Warming?  
<http://environment.nationalgeographic.com/environment/global-warming/gw-overview.html>

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: Climate Change  
<http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/index.html>

3. Early in the novel, Ty talks about how when the Rising was declared an official catastrophe, the government invoked the “Emergency Law” which suspends certain rights of citizens (p. 43). Ask readers to use online resources to research the terms “Martial Law” and “State of Emergency.” How are these measures similar and different? Under what circumstances do governments take these measures? What rights would American citizens lose if the government invoked such measures?

4. Ty’s family calls the deep-sea farming they do “aquaculture.” Ask readers to visit the following web sites to learn about what kind of aquaculture is done in the world today:

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Aquaculture Program  
<http://aquaculture.noaa.gov/>

World Wildlife Federation: Aquaculture  
<http://www.worldwildlife.org/what/globalmarkets/aquaculture/index.html>

5. At one point in the story, Gemma suggests to Ty that they sail away together to the “Colorado Islands.” Ask readers to find a map of Colorado in an atlas and determine what would likely make up these islands. Challenge them to try to calculate how high sea levels would have to rise in order for those islands to form.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

### FICTION

**Klass, David. *The Caretaker Trilogy. Book 1: Firestorm* (2006), *Book 2: Whirlwind* (2008), *Book 3: Timelock* (2009).** Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

In the near future, Earth is dying after centuries of abuse and exploitation. It's up to Jack, a high school football player turned eco-warrior, to reverse the decline in these space and time-bending adventures.

**Lloyd, Saci. *The Carbon Diaries 2015*.**

Holiday House, 2009.

In the year 2015, a time when global warming has begun to ravage the environment, the United Kingdom becomes the first country to mandate carbon rationing, a well-intentioned plan that goes awry with tragic consequences. In short diary entries, Londoner Laura Brown describes her struggle to stay grounded in a world where disaster has become the norm.

**Pfeffer, Susan Beth. *The Last Survivors Trilogy. Life As We Knew It* (2006), *The Dead and the Gone* (2008), *This World We Live In* (2010).** Harcourt.

An asteroid crashes into the Moon and moves it closer to Earth, setting off global environmental catastrophes. Diary entries by two teenage survivors chronicle the daily struggles their families endure to survive.

### NONFICTION

**Evans, Kate. *Weird Weather: Everything You Didn't Want to Know About Climate Change But Probably Should Find Out*.** Groundwood, 2007.

Originally published in Britain, this adaptation for a North American audience presents a humorous but thoroughly researched exploration of climate change as seen through the eyes of an idealistic teenager, a fat-cat businessman, and a mad scientist. It explains the science behind the issue, how global warming is progressing, and what needs to be done.

**Flannery, Tim and Sally M. Walker (adapter). *We Are the Weather Makers: The History of Climate Change*.** Candlewick, 2009.

This adaptation of Flannery's adult publication shows the results of meticulous research of the ways in which humans have changed our weather and the possible outcomes for the planet. Each chapter ends with a "Call to Action" describing how humans can make relatively simple changes in our lifestyle to reduce our impact on the planet.

**Gore, Al. *An Inconvenient Truth: The Crisis of Global Warming*.** Viking, 2007.

A young reader adaptation of Gore's groundbreaking, bestselling book.

**Gore, Al. *Our Choice: How We Can Solve the Climate Crisis (Young Reader Edition)*.** Viking, 2009.

A follow-up to *An Inconvenient Truth*.

**Tanaka, Shelley. *Climate Change*.** Groundwood, 2006.

This *Groundwood Guide* presents background on Earth's climate and about how, primarily through humankind's exploitation and indifference, global warming has escalated to a point of major concern. The book also considers strategies people and nations can take to reverse the destructive trends.

## ABOUT THE BOOK

In this exciting sequel to *Dark Life*, readers return to the subsea frontier for more adventure with Ty and Gemma. The mysteries of the deep are deadlier than ever in this apocalyptic future where climate change has made oceans rise and swallow up entire regions, and people live on the remaining land on top of one another, packed like sardines. Ty and Gemma experience new adventures, from finding an entire township murdered and anchored in a vast trash gyre to a brutal, bare knuckles fight, a jailbreak, and gladiatorial combat with saltwater crocodiles. When Ty's parents are abducted, his desperate search for them leads him and Gemma to the underwater underworld and into an alliance with the outlaws of the notorious Seablite Gang. One mystery soon leads to another. How has an entire township disappeared? Why is the local sealife suddenly so aggressive? Can the Seablite Gang be trusted...or are Ty and Gemma in deeper water than they realize?



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why are Ty and Gemma in the trash vortex?
2. How is the center of the gyre similar to the eye of a hurricane?
3. Why are fishermen in the Atlantic finding marine life that used to only live in the Pacific?
4. What is Ty able to do with his Dark Gift?
5. What do Topside doctors say is the cause of the Dark Gifts subsea kids possess?
6. Why does Ty consider squid more fearsome predators than sharks? What is unique about the "red devil" squid?
7. What accounts for Ty's luminous skin?
8. What is a township? What strange things does Ty discover in the wrecked one he finds?
9. What is "surf" a nickname for?
10. What further discoveries about the township are made when it is towed to the Trade Station?
11. What is the Seaguard? What do you think it would be comparable to in our country?
12. Why did the Assembly deny the Bethnic Territory's bid for statehood?
13. What is the opinion Lars, Raj, and many other settlers have of surfs? What rumor about the surfs does Raj believe?
14. What does Gemma think accounts for the glowing white light around Nomad? What is Ty's explanation for the white glow?
15. What does Jibby offer to Gemma and Ty?
16. Who is Shade and what is the Seablite Gang?
17. What is Rip Tide?
18. What are reasons for Gemma's fears of the subsea?
19. What is Ty's dream? How does finding Nomad bring him closer to realizing it?
20. Who is Hadal and what accounts for his horrible appearance?
21. Why is Zoe unable to control her Dark Gift?
22. Why do Hadal and his surfs abduct Ty's parents?
23. How is Ty able to communicate with other sea creatures?
24. What does Ty's discovery of Nomad make Captain Revas suspect about other missing townships?

25. What does Ty think of a surf's typical diet? How is it different from that of Topsiders and subsea settlers?
26. Why does Ty agree to be Shade's second in the fight?
27. How does Captain Revas foil Ty's plan to get more information about his parents?
28. Shade implies that someone might have forced the Drift surfs to abduct Ty's parents. Whom do you think are likely suspects?
29. What does Ty realize about the surfs he had seen who displayed their scars and missing limbs with pride?
30. Why does Ty tell Eider to keep the money pouch? What do you think this gesture says about Ty's character?
31. What does Hadal reveal to Ty about Mayor Fife? What are Fife's motives for sinking the townships and abducting Ty's parents?
32. How does Ty use his Dark Gift against Ratter? Why does Ty's decision to use it make him uneasy?
33. Why does Ty decide to give his salvage to the surfs?
34. What does Ty mean when he says the surfs should be considered pioneers?
35. What do you think will happen next with Ty and Gemma?

## POST-READING ACTIVITIES

1. Discuss with the class what it means for a person to be heroic. What qualities should a person have to be considered a hero? Make a list of the characteristics students suggest and then discuss whether or not Ty's actions in the story can be considered heroic.
2. Ty's Dark Gift, which he calls "biosonar," is also known as echolocation. Have students use print and electronic resources to research more information about echolocation: what it is, how it works, what animals possess this ability, and what evidence there is that human beings are capable of it. Invite students to share their findings with the rest of the class.
3. The action in *Rip Tide* begins in a place known as the trash vortex. A trash vortex, known as the "Great Pacific Garbage Patch," now exists in the North Pacific. Assign students to work in small groups, each using print and electronic resources to research a different aspect of the Pacific Trash Vortex. Have each group create a presentation to report their findings to the class. Topics groups can explore include location and formation of the vortex, causes for its formation, its impact on the ecosystem, how to clean it up, and what can be done to keep it from growing. Additional groups can prepare presentations about smaller trash vortices that have been discovered in the North Atlantic and Indian Ocean. The websites listed below provide excellent information on this subject.

EcoLife: What is the Plastic Island in the Pacific Ocean?  
<http://www.ecolife.com/recycling/plastic/pacific-plastic-island-garbage-patch.html>

How Stuff Works G Word Video: Pacific Ocean Trash Vortex  
<http://videos.howstuffworks.com/planet-green/33019-g-word-pacific-ocean-trash-vortex-video.htm>

Greenpeace: The Trash Vortex  
<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/campaigns/oceans/pollution/trash-vortex/>

NOAA Marine Debris Program  
<http://marinedebris.noaa.gov/>

Ocean Conservancy: 2011 Marine Debris Report  
[http://act.oceanconservancy.org/pdf/Marine\\_Debris\\_2011\\_Report\\_OC.pdf](http://act.oceanconservancy.org/pdf/Marine_Debris_2011_Report_OC.pdf)

Ocean Conservancy: Report from the North Pacific Gyre  
<http://www.oceanconservancy.org/our-work/marine-debris/ocean-conservancy-international-coastal-cleanup-meets-north-pacific.html>

Ocean Conservancy: Trash Free Seas  
<http://www.oceanconservancy.org/our-work/marine-debris/>

U.S. EPA Marine Debris Prevention Program  
<http://water.epa.gov/type/oceb/marinedebris/index.cfm>

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

### FICTION

**Brindley, John.** *The Rule of Claw.* Carolrhoda, 2009. Ash and her friends do not realize it yet, but they are the only human teenagers left on Earth. They've grown up alone, without adults, in the safety of their camp. When they explore beyond the fence, they find only danger like the savage, hideously clawed Raptors.

**Mulligan, Andy.** *Trash.* Random House/David Fickling, 2010.

In an unnamed third world country in the near future, three "dumpsite boys" make a living picking through the mountains of garbage on the outskirts of a large city.

### NONFICTION

**Burns, Loree Griffin.** *Tracking Trash: Flotsam, Jetsam, and the Science of Ocean Motion.* Houghton Mifflin, 2007.

Aided by beachcombers, oceanographer Dr. Curtis Ebbesmeyer tracks trash, monitoring the fate of human-made cargo that spills into the ocean. The scientific data he collects and analyzes broadens understanding of our oceans.

**Earle, Sylvia A.** *Dive! My Adventures in the Deep Frontier.* National Geographic, 2009.

Marine biologist Earle combines factual information and infectious enthusiasm to encourage a new generation of aquanauts.

**Hohn, Donovan.** *Moby-Duck: The True Story of 28,800 Bath Toys Lost at Sea and of the Beachcombers, Oceanographers, Environmentalists, and Fools, Including the Author, Who Went in Search of Them.* Viking, 2011.

For readers who enjoy reading *Tracking Trash* and want to try a more challenging read, this book published for adults chronicles the journalist's quest to determine what happened to a load of 28,800 Chinese manufactured plastic animals in a container that fell off a ship en route to Seattle in 1992. He learns about the science of ocean currents and drift.

**Turner, Pamela S.** *Prowling the Seas: Exploring the Hidden World of Ocean Predators.* Walker, 2009.

Turner introduces the work of the Tagging of Pacific Predators project, in which scientists use electronic tags to trace the routes of hard-to-observe ocean animals.

Kat Falls lives with her husband and three children in Evanston, Illinois, where she teaches screenwriting at Northwestern University. As a lifelong animal lover, she feels a deep sense of reverence for all of Earth's creatures. She does not own any land on the ocean floor—yet.

#### Dark Life

Hardcover: 978-0-545-17814-3 • \$16.99  
Paperback: 978-0-545-17815-0 • \$6.99  
Audiobook (trade): 978-0-545-20705-8 • \$34.99  
Audiobook (library): 978-0-545-22613-4 • \$64.99

#### Rip Tide

Hardcover: 978-0-545-17843-3 • \$16.99  
Audiobook (trade): 978-0-545-20706-5 • \$34.99  
Audiobook (library): 978-0-545-31552-4 • \$64.99

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Discussion guide by Ed Sullivan

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