

Under Pressure

by M.T. Decker

Sometimes I think the only place I can really breathe easy is five miles underwater. I am speaking metaphorically here—we haven't mutated or anything. There's just a rhythm to life in the undersea colonies that you just can't duplicate topside.

Sure, you get the same kind of people making stupid mistakes—but folks here know that one stupid at the wrong point can kill us all—so we tend to make haste a little more slowly and cross check our backup systems before we proceed.

It's funny, the caution and forethought are exactly the same as those we had to put into space exploration—but the dangers are kind of mirror images of each other: explosive decompression vs. the bends.

Still—if we have to evac, we drop counter ballast and let buoyancy take over. Space on the other hand? Not so much.

Let's just say that if things go sideways in space you're going to be in a world of hurt for about 10 seconds.

Then again, if things go really sideways here... you'll probably last an extra 20 seconds without a bathysphere. That's why the city is built in modules: if one unit is breached, you can seal it off and keep the enviro from bleeding out.

It's not something we dwell on—just a fact of life you learn to accept, or go home. Toplevel has its limits, but people don't really think about them. They're the facts of life we grow up with.

You can always tell a noob by how closely they watch for leaks—but they catch on pretty quick as they learned to feel the pressure changes and translate their meaning.

Of course, by the time they find the holes I've drilled... it'll be too late.