

Tidebreaker Vol 1. - Synopsis

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Act 1

Act 1 introduces the bustling underwater metropolis of Point Nemo City, located in the most remote part of the Pacific Ocean, far from human civilization. Competitive swimming is a sport deeply embedded in Point Nemo culture. Ella, 15, wants to be the fastest athlete in the ocean and dreams of competing in the Neptunian Games (equivalent of the Olympics) one day. She spends all her spare time with her childhood best friends Maren, 15, a naturally gifted swimmer whose athletic talents are hidden behind a broody appearance, and Liko, 14, who isn't an athlete himself but whose inquisitive and grounded nature provides the crucial emotional anchor both girls need.

During tryouts, Ella hits a record time—59 seconds, the fastest of anyone at Point Nemo High for the 100m freestyle—but her victory is short lived. She starts wheezing and collapses.

She wakes up in the hospital disoriented and confused. The doctor informs that her gills are strained and no longer able to breathe underwater. Forced to rely on her lungs, she now has to wear a heavy, bulky and cumbersome oxygen helmet at all times, significantly impeding her mobility. The doctor instructs her to take a break from swimming for the foreseeable future, which she finds devastating.

Ella's other childhood best friend (and middle school ex) Nav, makes a sudden return to Point Nemo City and joins her swim team, nearly unrecognizable due to his growth spurt. Ella, for the first time in her life, becomes very self-conscious about her new appearance, which she finds confusing.

Act 2

Several weeks after her hospital stay, Ella's still not allowed back on the team and becomes a target for bullies calling her a "bubblehead" because in Point Nemo, due to a long and painful history between seapeople and humans, anything remotely associated with the surface-dwellers, including breathing air, is considered taboo. Ella is shunned not just because the helmet looks funny, but because others begin to see her as part human.

Nav and Ella catch up and start training together, in denial of the romantic tension between them. Ella secretly begins testing her gill function by removing her helmet for a

few seconds at a time. Despite improving her lap time, she has to watch the first meet come and go, frustrated, but Coach allows her in the second one of the season.

At the second meet, Ella hits her worst time ever. Maren, for the first time, is faster than her. Ella is jealous and resentful but congratulates her friend on her victory; Maren, however, seems to have little to no reaction, and Ella discovers Maren doesn't actually care about swimming. They have a big argument and Maren's secret surfaces: She's always been the faster one between the two of them, but she's been purposely holding herself back so Ella can win.

That night, Ella swims to the surface and goes to the remote, uninhabited island where her family used to vacation, and removes her helmet. With the weight lifted off her shoulders, she breathes real air for the first time in years, and cries into the empty night, alone.

Act 3

Ella and Maren are still at odds with each other. Ella continues to be stubborn, and pushes herself during training, against medical advice. In the third meet of the season, she performs adequately, but below average. When it's time for the relay, she doesn't want to hold her team back, so she makes the reckless decision of removing her helmet. Ella briefly swims faster but collapses at the finish line, knocking into one of her teammates and injuring them.

She wakes up in the hospital again, and Maren arrives to deliver the news that Ella's been permanently expelled from the swim team, which was her one and only gateway to the Neptunian Games. Her career has officially ended before it even begins.

Ella is forced to find herself outside of swimming. Over time, she reconnects with her loved ones and pursues other hobbies. She spends more time up on the island with her friends, breathing real air alongside them, not worrying about how she's perceived as part human by others in the ocean. She watches the fourth and final meet of the season and cheers her friends on, a stark contrast from the first meet where she was seething with jealousy and frustration.

During summer, her friends encourage her to do a casual race, and Ella matches her old personal best of 59 seconds without realizing it.