

# Parting Shot 1

by David Fleetham



Crown-of-thorns seastars, *Acanthaster planci*, roll across the reef in a destructive path that leaves coral colonies decimated. When this one tried to engulf a cauliflower coral, *Pocillopora meandrina*, it bit off more than it could chew, or ingest in the starfishes case. A female spotted guard crab, *Trapezia tigrina*, with a tail full of eggs defended her coral home as if her life depended on it, and it very well may have. She relentlessly pinched the tube feet of the seastar, which noticeably recoiled each time. Before too long the starfish rapidly slithered off the coral and down the reef in search of a meal that would be less painful.

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*This was originally shot off Maui, Hawaii on Kodachrome (some of you may have to Google that) back in the 80's and then scanned. Likely this was a Canon F-1 in an Ikelite housing with a manually focused macro lens and two large Ikelite 150 substrobes.*

**Do you have a shot which has a story within a story?**  
**If so e mail it with up to 750 words of text and yours could be the next Parting Shot.**  
*Images can be any size bigger than 20cm (horizontal or vertical) @ 150dpi saved as jpeg format and about 500 - 750 words would be fine.)*

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# Parting Shot 2

by Eric Lambert

Some moments in underwater photography are so fleeting, so unexpected, that you only realize their true significance when reviewing your images back on land. This was one of those moments. A moment underwater that lasted only a fraction of a second—but left an impact that lingers forever.

Drifting along a coral reef, I had my eyes set on a Rhinopias, one of the ocean's most masterful illusionists. With its frilly, leaf-like appendages, it blends into the reef like a living, breathing piece of coral. These elusive scorpionfish are a prized subject for photographers, their bizarre shapes and hypnotic camouflage making them one of the ocean's most fascinating creatures. I hovered patiently, waiting for the perfect shot, admiring its intricate patterns and textures.

Then, in a flash, something unexpected happened. The Rhinopias yawned—or so I thought.

In an instant, the Rhinopias snapped open its cavernous mouth in a slow, exaggerated yawn. A harmless display, I thought—until I saw the flash of electric blue and orange stripes deep inside. My camera clicked instinctively, capturing a moment I

hadn't even fully processed. There, staring out from the abyss of the Rhinopias's throat, was another fish—Blue-banded surgeonfish, vivid and helpless, caught in the jaws of fate. A fish which was staring back at me from deep within the predator's mouth.

It was only later, reviewing my images, that I saw the full story unfold. The unfortunate Blue-banded surgeonfish had been swallowed whole—still vividly intact, frozen in a moment between life and death. A tragic masterpiece of nature's raw survival.

Predation is a fact of life in the ocean, but rarely do we see it unfold in such a surreal way. The Rhinopias, with its quiet, ambush-hunting strategy, had likely been resting motionless for hours, waiting for the perfect opportunity to strike. The surgeonfish, unaware of its deadly surroundings, had made one fatal mistake—swimming too close to what it thought was just another part of the reef.

This is the ocean's silent reality. No sound, no struggle—just the split-second vanishing of one life into another.

Back on land, reviewing the image on my screen, I was struck by



*Sony A7rIII in Nauticam Housing, with a Sony 90mm f/2.8 macro lens, 1/80 sec, F16, ISO 100, with 2 Inon Z-330 strobes on TTL*

the rawness of what I had captured. The last fleeting moment of the surgeonfish's life, frozen in time. A haunting, mesmerizing farewell—a parting shot, quite literally.

The ocean is full of stories. Sometimes, we don't even realize we've captured them until it's too late.

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