

Parting Shot 1

My last half dozen overseas trips have been solely with other underwater photographers and I hadn't been on a trip with my dive club for a couple of years. So when I went to the Red Sea in September with the club on a 'Simply the Best' safari (Brothers, Daedalus and Elphinstone) on MY Blue Seas, I wondered if it really would be 'the Best'.

The problem was that I had become used to taking time with a subject. I knew that on this trip I'd probably only have time for one or two shots – three if I was lucky – before my buddy became impatient and wanted to move on. So I was worried that I'd have difficulty getting some decent images; and that my buddy wouldn't be talking to me by the end of the trip!

I kept telling myself that the point of this trip was to go diving with old friends again, not photography. But that didn't stop me feeling stressed. Although about half the divers had a camera, I was the only one with housed dSLR and dual strobes. So I also felt the need to justify why I had spent around twenty times as much on my kit as everyone

else had.

Despite being right about my buddy's impatience, I was able to get a few competent shots of soft and hard corals on the first few dives at Little Brother – some even using unsuspecting divers as models. So I was feeling more confident and beginning to relax and enjoy myself.

But the stress returned when we encountered the resident female Napoleon Wrasse on Big Brother.

Perhaps it's my camera; or maybe it's my technique; but I have always had great difficulty getting the camera to focus on a Napoleon wrasse. I assume that the problem arises from the even colours and lack of defined edges of the fish. Whatever... I was having the same problem again.

It didn't seem to be a problem for everyone else though. They were all clicking away making the best of the opportunity afforded by this tame wrasse – and getting, I imagined, some wonderful close up shots. All I was getting was a series of blurred images... and stressed!

Then I remembered 'TCUP' – the mnemonic that helped England win the Rugby World Cup in 2003:

'Think Clearly Under Pressure'! So after taking a deep breath and calming myself down, I focused on a nearby diver, hoping to get diver and fish on the same plane, or both within the depth of field.

This is the one in-focus shot I got of the Napoleon wrasse on that dive: a somewhat surreal image of a diver and fish in synchronicity – both apparently looking at the same thing in the near distance; with a third diver adding depth to the scene, but looking in a different direction and seemingly oblivious of all that is happening beneath him.

On the next dive I managed to get a few good shots of the same wrasse and a larger male. But everyone thought this was the best.

The trip really was 'the Best' too – it was the most enjoyable I've been on had with the club; and my buddy was still talking to me at the end...



*Nikon D200, Subal ND20, 2x Inon Z-240 strobes
Tokina 10-17mm at 17mm. 1/45 @ f9.5 Manual,
ISO 200.*

Parting Shot 2

On more than one occasion I have looked at a Snake Eel hiding in the sand and wondered what these guys would eat for lunch (they have to be guys, cause no girl in her right-mind could be this ugly).

I imagined a lone cardinal fish, perhaps a wandering flounder, maybe even a small octopus. Well I was about to find out that this particular Snake Eel was hungry enough to eat poisonous prey!

We (me and my faithful spotter wife –Dawn) were meandering around the shallows of Puri Jati, one of Bali's famous muck diving sites. We'd really only just descended and had already found a nice coconut octopus living in an old boot, a beautiful orange ornate ghost pipefish hiding near an algae patch.

It was while I was taking a photo of the ghost pipefish, that something moving caught my attention a couple of metres away. We both saw it at the same moment; a snake eel, which neither of us had seen until now, had erupted from its sandy burrow and captured a puffer fish in its fearsome jaws.

Now please just let me digress here, because you need to know some details. I was taking photos with my

Olympus E-330 DSLR fitted with a long macro lens, a telconverter plus a Reefnet SubSee Macro Wet Lens. I was actually taking shots of the ghost pipefish's eye. Now I have a snake eel eating a puffer that I want to get photos of.

It went like this; unscrew the SubSee lens adaptor (I knew I should have bought one of the ReefNet swing-out adaptors – I could have saved valuable seconds here) and sit it on the bottom, no time for careful storage in my BC pocket. Move my strobe arms out, re-adjust strobe powers.

The Eel is still just sitting there with the puffer sticking out of its mouth... but for how much longer? Open lens aperture, hold breath, gentle kick. First shot... puffer now fully inflated, I think it's jammed in the eel's throat! No it's taking another bite... Second Shot. Now it's swallowing hard... Third Shot. Now it's firmly stuck in the eel's throat and it can't fit back in its sandy home to hide... fourth shot.

It was later while inspecting the



photos, I saw the large flounder sitting in the background, maybe it was hoping for a bit of puffer fish lunch as well. Surely there are nicer fish to eat than these inflatable pin cushions?

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Do you have a nice shot with a short story behind it?

If so e mail me and yours could be the next "Parting shot".
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