

Parting Shot

We have all seen it: that time-honored image of a tiny fish being eaten by a slightly larger fish, only for this fish to be devoured by the largest fish of them all. While this may be an over-simplified delineation when it comes to illustrating the hierarchy of marine predation, it can symbolize the natural order of the food chain that we may be lucky enough to observe on any given dive.

It was my last night dive on an exhilarating, weeklong live-aboard in Belize and I was eager to make the most of it. Switching on the bright focus lights of my twin Sea and Sea strobes, I began my descent into the black abyss, comforted only by two otherworldly lights echoing down from the hull of the boat nearly sixty feet above. As I made my soft touchdown on the sea floor, I steadied my strobes to light up the reef ahead of me, and before long I had captured the regulars of Caribbean night dive such as a large balloon fish and several spiny lobsters. Impressed by the effectiveness of my strobe's focus lights, I quickly discovered a flaw that couldn't be found at any online forum or magazine review: they began to attract millions of tiny bloodworms. These worms continued to collide all over my body for nearly forty minutes

and soon made me feel comparable to Gulliver under siege by millions of miniature arrows.

Nearing the end of the dive, both low on air and patience with the swarming bloodworms, I found my final subject: a strangely accommodating banded coral shrimp taking refuge on some dead coral. I soon discovered the crustacean's cooperation was the result of the bloodworms' affinity to my focus lights, which the shrimp began to use as a lure for a midnight snack. Taking into account my new resentment towards the swarming worms, I decided to ignore my instincts to "leave only bubbles and take only pictures", allowing the shrimp to continuously to pick the worms right out of my strobe's tractor beam. After returning to the friendly confines of the boat I immediately began to download my images, eager to see the results of the dive.

I was very pleased with this image that perfectly captured my momentary interference with the marine food chain: a shot of the banded shrimp in the middle of ripping apart one of my helpless victims.

As divers we are often reminded not to interfere with the natural order



Nikon D300s, Sea and Sea Housing, 60mm Lens, F22 @ 125sec ISO 200, with dual Sea and Sea YS110 strobes on TTL

of the marine environment. However, when we choose to forgo our responsibilities as "ambassadors to the environment" (even in a moment of weakness spurred on by millions of tiny worms) we can find ourselves in a unique opportunity to view the marine food chain in action from ringside

seats. If we are even more fortunate, we may end up leaving with an image of such an experience that we will not soon forget.

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Do you have an interesting shot with a short story behind it?

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