

Parting Shot 1

It is cold here. The subdued light further enhances the effect as I leave the region which still supports photosynthesis in the great kelps. The security of the underwater forest is now a mere shadow far above me. Few of my peers in this overcrowded planet know of this place. For a brief moment, I escape the trivial concerns of that society, and visit a world which knows another kind of existence. A place where one is immersed in the universal solvent and movement is in three dimensions. Where nutrients bathe your body and sound travels four times as fast. The pressures here are crushing but predictable. A life which has little in common with the surface world.

I have reached 170 feet and all the color is gone. Monochromatic blues are all that is left. Less than ten percent of the sun's light makes it this far, most of it has long been absorbed high up in the water column. My H. sapien eyes strain to gather the remaining photons so that my brain can paint some kind of visual image of the universe I have invaded. It is a difficult chore at first, until I illuminate the scene with my flashlight. Brilliant yellows and reds jump out from the living carpet below me. Colors which have

been locked out by the physics of this environment explode in vibrancy. Scores of antennae wave frantically as the startled finned dwellers scurry for cover. Their senses are developed for life here as it exists, not in the way I have temporarily disturbed it.

The inhabitants are finished and complete. Eons of evolution have provided them with all the necessary refinements with which to prosper. They live in balance; connected by the complex inter-relationships of which we know so little. I marvel at their form; each movement coordinated and precise. They fit perfectly with the ebb and flow of the watery world around them.

We, however, must encapsulate ourselves with the means to survive a visit: A bubble of air in front of our eyes to see. A second skin to ward off the cold. Extensions on our feet to propel us, and of course, an atmosphere on our backs with which to breath. It is this very air however, that creates the largest barrier of all. At this depth, I am well aware of the limitations of my breathing gas. Along with six atmospheres of pressure, the nitrogen component of air has conspired to deaden my senses and make even simple tasks challenging. Despite these effects, or maybe because of them, I yearn to glide up and over the ledge and descend to the vast depths beyond. Surely great



Nikon D2X in Subal ND2 housing, Nikkor 10.5mm FE, f/10, 1/160sec, ISO 200, two Ikelite DS-125 strobes @ 1/2 power.

secrets must be hidden just beyond the limit of visibility. My training and experience help me overcome these desires though, and I begin the slow ascent back toward my realm. The twelve minutes I am able to spend here has expired.

The time has now come to pay the penalty for my brief excursion into the deep. For the next half-an-hour, I must stop at fifteen feet below the surface to “burn” the excess nitrogen from my tissues. As I hang on the anchor line, I can look up and easily see my companions attending to various tasks aboard the boat above

me. It strikes me as odd, that I can neither join them at this time because of the threat of dire physiological consequences, nor can I descend back to the place I just came from, due to lack of air. I, for the moment, belong to neither province. From this unique perspective, I become very aware of the frailty of life. Of how there must be a balance between give and take on this finite world. No living being from this planet is exempt from the natural laws.

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Parting Shot 2

It was the penultimate day (and thirty-second dive) of an exhilarating and exhausting ten-day photo expedition to Komodo led by Mauricio Handler. But it was fast turning into 'one of those days'. The viz for the afternoon dive on Yellow Wall of Texas had been poor and we hadn't spotted much on the wall. Now, thirty minutes into the night dive at Torpedo Alley all I had seen was two hermit crabs.

Looking around in frustration, the only potential subject I could see on the expanse of sand was a solitary slender sea pen. I decided that if there was nothing on it worth photographing, I would end the dive and have a well-earned beer before dinner.

The sea pen was host to a goby and two tiny porcelain crabs. At last, a decent subject; and the goby (uncharacteristically) was scarcely moving. I forgot about a beer and moved in to take some shots.

Unable at first to get a clear view of the goby and a decent background (and wishing I had a 105mm lens on my camera), I moved around the sea pen. This was better, so I settled down – and twenty minutes later it was time to ascend with several dozen shots on my card.

On downloading the images, I took a closer look at something I'd noticed on the back of the goby (see top picture) but not paid much attention to underwater. Thinking these might be parasites, I showed the photo to marine biologist Jamie Watts, along with one of the few early shots I had taken from the other side (see bottom picture). Jamie confirmed my suspicions and identified them as parasitic copepods.

Having anchored their mouth deep in the host, these copepods lose their crustacean segment structure and effectively become a pair of blood-sucking gonads with egg sacs hanging off the other end. Very efficient for the parasite, but in the words of the expert: 'the little goby is basically screwed'!

I was left wondering why I hadn't spent more time shooting the parasites. I was so pleased at finding a subject, that I rushed in and just started shooting without looking more closely. A missed opportunity perhaps; certainly a lesson learned always to take a closer look in future!

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Many host goby (Pleurosicya mossambica) with parasitic copepods on a slender sea pen (Virgularia sp.) Nikon D200, Subal ND20, 2x Inon Z-240 strobes, Nikkor 60mm lens, 1/250 @ f22 Manual ISO 100 (Image below is a 1:1 crop



Parting Shot 3

In June six recession hit container ships which had been laid up for about a year in the sheltered waters of Loch Striven on the west of Scotland were towed one at a time out of the loch and up the Firth of Clyde to a transit anchorage off the port of Greenock. Here a local commercial diving company were contracted to check and clean everything below the waterline of each vessel before they returned to service. I was given the opportunity to photograph the commercial diving operation as the last of the six vessels was made ready for its return to sea. Within a few minutes of agreeing to go along I found myself wondering how I was ever going to make this work.

This was not going to be the clear blue water frequently seen in the background of UwP's finest images, this was an estuary, this water was dark, this water was turbid, this water was moving, this was the Maersk Brooklyn, 294 metres long and 32 metres wide. To compound my rapidly expanding sense of self doubt I thought about working divers and the inevitable density of suspended matter that would appear in the surrounding water.

It is interesting how the reality can often turn out so much better than expected and how things improve when you say sod it and just try to make it happen. Using a full frame DSLR with a mid-range resolution I was able to take advantage of high ISO settings without generating excessive noise. I opted for the versatility of a wide angle zoom lens knowing that the high ISO would permit the use of small enough apertures to minimise the characteristic soft corners sometimes delivered by such lenses. Two high power wide angle strobes on

relatively short arms provided the lighting. Strobe placement was critical with each unit positioned well behind the large dome on the housing and angled slightly outwards.

The diver in this image was working under the stern of the ship burnishing a huge stainless steel propeller and helpfully the debris from his efforts was removed downstream by the current. Unfortunately all sorts of other fascinating stuff was passing by as two divers behind me did a grand job of scraping growth from the hull.

The best photo opportunity arose when the divers behind me stopped briefly to reposition themselves. Taking advantage of the reduced in-water debris I anchored myself over the drive casing and managed to get some shots off. Realising that I hadn't taken any verticals I rapidly repositioning one strobe to illuminate from above and managed one shot before the guys behind me recommenced their onslaught on the hull growth. The vertical is shown here as it proved to be the most appealing image out of the string. It would have benefitted from the upper strobe being positioned a little further back.

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Nikon D3 with 14-24 mm zoom at 14mm, Subal housing with a large dome and extension to match the lens. 2 x Sea & Sea YS250 strobes with diffusers on full power, one above and one to the right. ISO800, 1/60th @ F11.



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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