

Parting Shot(s)

I came to Adelaide, Australia to dive with the leafy sea dragons but the day after my arrival, the weather changed from dead calm to gale force winds, which turned the ocean into its best interpretation of a washing machine in full agitation mode. Although the leafy sea dragon sites were totally undiveable, Diana, my friend and local guide extraordinaire, was able to find us a good macro dive site which was sheltered from the wind and had surprisingly calm ocean conditions.

The dive site she chose had no shortage of good photographic subjects. We saw blue ring octopi which were everywhere along with cool looking fish and nudibranches. Suddenly, I heard Diana's noisemaker, signaling to me she had found something particularly interesting. By the intensity and duration of the noise, it must have been something extra special. When I caught up with her, she spun around and started swimming furiously away from me. When she finally stopped, she turned to face me and started doing all sorts of exaggerated arm movements. It looked like she was saying frogfish, she was hungry for lunch and that my next pitch should be a fastball down the middle. My face must have shown my utter confusion so she finally just started pointing towards a pillar. I scanned the area and saw a filefish that seemed to be stuck on a sea urchin. Cool, but not that exciting, I thought to myself.

Then all of a sudden, the sea urchin moved off the pillar and started swimming. What? Sea urchins don't swim. I took a closer look and realized that this was no sea urchin but a tasseled frogfish with the filefish's spine impaled on the



side of its face. At this point, all hell broke loose. I swam like a madman to get in a good position to photograph this spectacle and proceeded to kick up enough sand to make any photography impossible. As I was wondering how to salvage the situation, I realized the frogfish was swimming towards me. Looking around, I determined the direction to the nearest clear water and swam there. To my amazement, the frogfish followed, slowing swimming in midwater. I couldn't believe my luck. I calmed down and began taking pictures. When I was satisfied with my shots, I moved to the frogfish's "good" side and got some shots of it without its photobombing filefish friend. Then it dawned on me why the frogfish was following us. It needed our help to remove the filefish. I made sure Diana was done photographing the frogfish then signaled to her to try and separate the two fish. Now I wish I could end the story here by saying Diana delicately separated the two fish and the fish became best friends instead of their previous predator/prey relationship, which we later surmised, created this unfortunate connection in the first place. But I can't. This is what really happened next.



Diana calmly put out her hand next to the frogfish and the frogfish stopped and just hovered. She grabbed onto the filefish and gave it a gentle tug. No success. She then tugged progressively harder and harder but nothing would separate these fish. I decided to first take a couple more shots for good measure then I positioned my muck stick in between both fishes and firmly tried to separate them. After a couple unsuccessful attempts, I think the frogfish and I came to the same conclusion that I was not going to be of any help. And with that, the frogfish slowly turned and swam away. Diana and I both felt very conflicted after the dive. We were blown away by what we had just witnessed but were saddened that we could not help these fish from what will be an early death. I am now in the market for some good diving shears.

Todd Aki

Do you have a shot which has a story within a story?

If so e mail it with up to 500 words of text and yours could be the next Parting Shot.

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