



Mark "the Shark" Quartiano

THERE WILL BE BLOOD

STEP INTO THE KILL ZONE WITH THE MAN REVERED BY AMATEUR SHARK HUNTERS—AND REVILED BY SHARK CONSERVATIONISTS.

BY KEVIN KAMINSKI PHOTOS BY OMAR VEGA

The relentless pounding of 6-foot swells is taking its toll on the first-time passengers aboard Striker-I, two of whom (out of five) will heave their breakfast overboard and into the turbulent Atlantic before noon. The vessel's captain, meanwhile, is steady as he goes.

Perhaps that's because Mark Quartiano understands better than anyone that turbulence, especially on this type of charter, comes with the territory.

Quartiano—known professionally as Mark the Shark—is the undisputed king of South Florida shark hunters, having pulled, by his count, some 10,000 out of the water ("More than anybody on the planet with a rod and reel," he says) for paying customers over the past three-plus decades.

He's also public enemy No. 1 in shark conservationist circles. Critics call him everything from a butcher to a killing machine—and those are among the kinder descriptions. Quartiano, cut from the "there's no such thing as bad publicity" mold, defiantly dismisses the backlash as he steers his 46-foot Hatteras along the curve of the Gulf Stream, some 2 miles off the coast of Miami.

"Every kind of wacko conservation group you can think of sends me hate mail—Sierra Club, Greenpeace, PETA" the Pompano Beach resident says. "They call me 'fish-

monger,' 'fish-killer.' They hope that a shark will eat me. ... One person sent a picture of a great white jumping out of the water—and [the image was doctored so that] I was in the mouth of the shark. The caption read, 'One day, this will be you.'

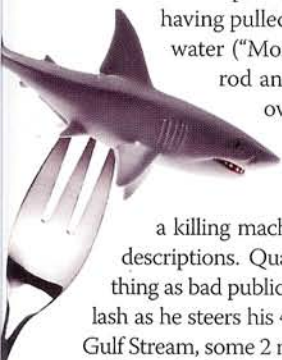
"I kept that one. It's a pretty cool picture."

His train of thought is interrupted when one of three custom-designed fishing rods in use begins to bow. Quartiano turns to his shipmate, Tim O'Hare, on the deck below. O'Hare confirms—they've hooked something big.

The boat slows, giving O'Hare time to strap one of the customers, 16-year-old Nick Hodgson from Nova Scotia, into the signature feature of Striker-I—an extreme fishing chair that's rigged to extend well out over the water. Quartiano stole the idea for the swiveling contraption from the boat piloted by Captain Morgan, Humphrey Bogart's character, in "To Have and Have Not."

Hodgson, whose father, Vaughn, earlier hooked and lost a 6-foot hammerhead, barely has time to settle into his seat when some 500 yards of braided line begins screaming off of a gold-plated Alutecnos reel. Quartiano, still steering the boat from his perch on the upper deck, begins a guttural, high-decibel play-by-play of the action.

"ON THE WIRRRRRRE! ... THIS A NICE FISH, HERE ... OH YEAH!! ... LOOK AT HIM TAKING LINE ...





OOOOHHHHHHHHH! LOOK AT HIM GO! SHOW-TIME, BABY! ... BEAUTIFUL, BEAUTIFUL ... THAT'S A REAL FISH! ... THIS IS WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT, RIGHT HERE! YOU'RE LIVIN' THE DREAM—HOOKED UP TO A MONSTER."

Quartiano glances at a passenger seated to his right and points to his chest.

"This is my world out here," he says.

AS THE WORLD TURNS

Though data varies on the total number of shark species worldwide, most experts place the figure at more than 450. The World Conservation Union estimates that as many as

115 of those species—upward of 25 percent—are in danger of extinction within the next few years. (Thirteen species found in Florida waters were designated "prohibited" to fishermen in 2006 by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, including bigeye thresher, longfin mako and Atlantic angel sharks.)

The problem, shark experts universally agree, is man. According to the American Elasmobranch Society, which promotes the scientific study of sharks, commercial fishermen may kill as many as 100 million sharks in a single year. Research published two years ago in the journal *Ecology Letters* estimated that "26 million to 73 million sharks are killed each year [just] for their fins," a delicacy



Quartiano stands next to the catch of the day—an 8 1/2-foot hammerhead—which was reeled in by Nova Scotia native Nick Hodgson.

especially popular in China.

Quartiano's contribution to the mortality rate of sharks is miniscule by comparison. He and O'Hare captain approximately 500 charters per year out of their home dock in front of the Miami Marriott Biscayne Bay. By law, they're limited to two sharks per trip—but not all trips result in shark fatalities; some expeditions seek nothing but large game fish. Still, in today's catch-and-release culture of sport fishing, anyone embracing a thrill-of-the-kill approach is considered a pariah.

Or worse. Quartiano is painted by his harshest critics as a more bloodthirsty incarnation of Quint, the salty, monomaniacal captain of the Orca in "Jaws." An August 2005 article published in *Miami New Times* portrayed his reputation as

ATTACK! THE FLORIDA STORY

Florida is not only the shark attack capital of the United States, it also accounts, on average, for more than one-third of worldwide attacks in a given year. That makes for a good headline, but, as the numbers reveal, there's more to this story.

397 Number of shark attacks in Florida from 1990–2007, more than 63 percent of all U.S. attacks (621) reported during that period.

4 Number of fatal attacks in Florida from 1990–2007. The last Florida fatality* occurred in 2005 at Miramar Beach in the Panhandle, when a 14-year-old girl was attacked (likely by a bull shark) while boogie-boarding in a sandbar area.

210 Number of shark attacks in Volusia County (New Smyrna Beach area) from 1882–2007, out of the 577 recorded in Florida. Brevard (90, Cocoa Beach area) and Palm Beach (57) rank second and third on the county list during that stretch.

1 Number of combined fatal shark attacks in Volusia, Brevard and Palm Beach counties during that 125-year period.

32 Number of unprovoked shark attacks throughout Florida in 2007, accounting for 45 percent of worldwide attacks (71).

17 Number of shark attacks in Volusia County last year, its highest total since 2002.

8 Number of fatal shark attacks in Florida from 1948–2005.

17 Number of fatal alligator attacks in Florida from 1948–2005.



449 Number of lightning fatalities in Florida from 1959–2007.

Source: International Shark Attack File, Florida Museum of Natural History, University of Florida, Gainesville

*An Austrian tourist died in late February of this year when he was attacked during a commercial diving trip that originated in South Florida. However, that incident occurred near the Bahamas some 50 miles off the coast of Fort Lauderdale—in water that had been baited with bloody fish parts to enhance the "extreme" diving experience.

Shark Quiz



How well do you know your shark facts? Take this quiz, with information provided by local shark expert **Stephen Kajiura**, who works in the biology department at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton.

How many species of sharks can be found in Florida waters? Upward of 15 common shark species call Florida waters home, including lemons, scalloped hammerheads, bulls, nurses, sandbars, bonnetheads, makos, blacktips and spinners.

Do sharks find human blood irresistible? Sharks have an uncanny sense of smell, "but they're not particularly attracted to human blood," Kajiura says. "Sharks are optimized to hunt for fish, squid and whatever else. The constituents of human blood do not represent a strong stimulus for sharks."

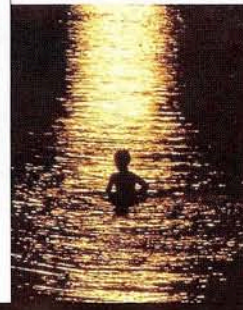
Can sharks see very well? "Not only do they have better vision than most people think, they can see color, spot [contrasts], and they can see long distances."



What about their hearing? "There is very good evidence that sharks have good long-distance hearing, particularly pulsed, low-frequency noises. If you're on your boat with a lot of low bass pumping on the stereo, it may draw interest from sharks."

Am I taking a risk by swimming at night? You bet. Sharks tend to venture close to shore after the sun sets.

Is there a certain time of year to stay out of the water? Over the past 96 years, more unprovoked shark attacks in Florida have occurred during September than in any other month. "What happens is that you have annual migration of bait fish, and the sharks follow them close to shore."



"Jaws": Fact or fiction?

Mark the Shark weighs in on classic quotes from the 1975 film that still keeps some beachgoers on dry land. Why? *Because we're not talkin' about pleasure boatin'. We're talkin' about working for a livin'—we're talkin' about sharkin'!*

Are larger sharks powerful enough to dive underwater while attached to buoyant devices intended to drive them to the surface? "If you put a dart in a shark and use a larger keg, all that buoyancy would rip out the dart if the shark tried to dive."

Is the ocean the only place you're likely to encounter a shark? "Nurse sharks, bull sharks ... they make their way into our canal systems here [in South Florida]. Not big ones, you might get a 5-footer. But they're there. They'll come into the inlet looking for food."

You're gonna need a bigger boat.

Two barrels, and he's going down again.

This was no boat accident.

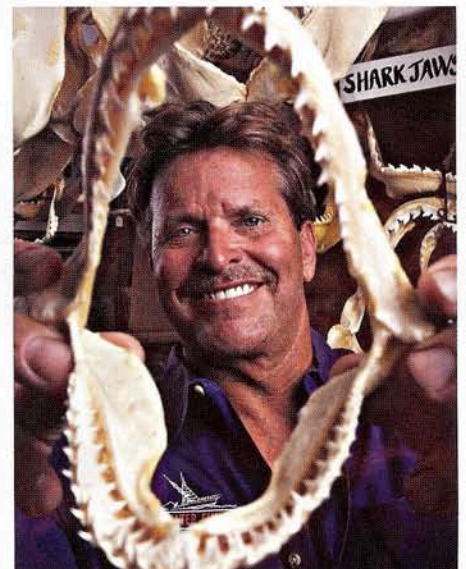
He's going in the pond!

I don't believe it—he's chasing us.

Can sharks thrust out of the water and into a boat like the great white does at the end of the movie? "We've had a couple of makos that, as we're trying to hook them up, have jumped into the boat. They have a hook in their mouth. The knee-jerk reaction is to leap out of the water."

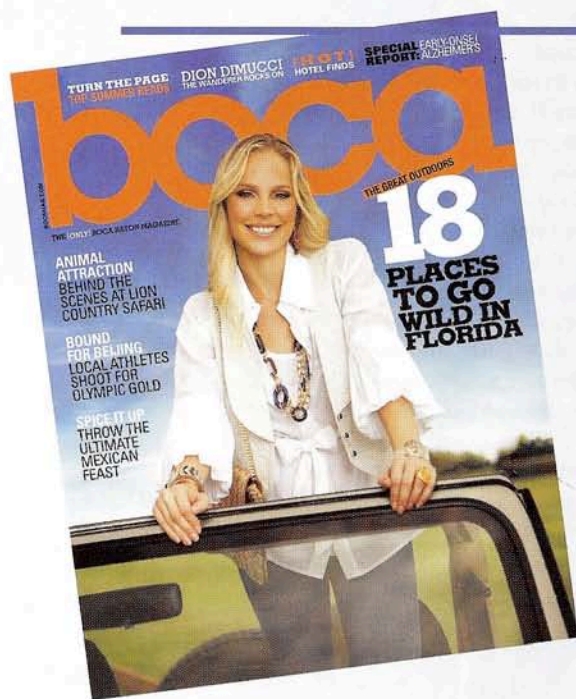
Are certain species of sharks really as aggressive toward humans as the man-eater in the movie? "Bull sharks are not only aggressive, I think they're the smartest of all sharks. They go after divers all the time. They're mean and very territorial."

Do sharks carry a vendetta against those pursuing them? "Over the years, I think the sharks have associated the noise of the boat with food. They hear the sound of the motor, and they know food will be in the water. But beyond that, no. You're giving them too much credit. If sharks carried vendettas, I wouldn't be here talking to you."



Coming Next Issue

in *Boca Raton* magazine's September/October issue:



Trading spaces: This edition of our annual interior design special features do-it-yourself renovation ideas that will completely transform your home.

Hits the spot: Our resident foodie scoured the tri-county area to find the best sandwiches South Florida has to offer. Sample his selections in this tasty roundup, including the most delicious sandwich sides.

Pop quiz: How well do you know the history of a state that always seems to make headlines during election years? Test your knowledge of Florida's political history with our quiz. Plus, locals involved in our state's colorful political past share their stories.

Strange but true: Discover some of the Sunshine State's wackiest people and places, from the psychic community of Cassadaga and an underwater hotel in Key Largo to Homestead's mysterious Coral Castle.

Plus, check out our comprehensive tri-county dining guide, the extensive A&E section, area travel ideas and more—all in our September/October issue, on newsstands everywhere Sept. 1.

To subscribe, visit bocamag.com or call 561/997-8683, ext. 272.

there will be blood

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 117

lately?" Quartiano said to O'Hare. "No? Well, did he sign the waiver?"

But now, as Nick finally draws his prize to the surface, captain and shipmate are all business. It's another hammerhead, this one checking in at nearly 9 feet and more than 300 pounds. Quartiano kills the motor and, from the upper deck, slides a 20-foot-long harpoon from its mooring. He quickly makes his way to the side of the boat and, like an Olympic javelin thrower, buries the harpoon just north of the shark's dorsal fin.

O'Hare then produces a hook large enough to hold sides of beef in a meat locker, drives it through the shark's head and, with his partner's help, drags its still-flailing body onto the boat. Quartiano pins the shark with his foot and removes the hook; blood spurts from the wound, quickly turning the deck of Striker-I crimson. Ten minutes later, the shark is still thrashing in the back of the boat, occasionally thrusting its head and tail skyward at the same time. Before taking its final breath, the shark will lift its head into the cabin, a few feet from a photographer.

Back on the swivel chair, Nick is sending the remains of his breakfast into the Gulf Stream.

O'Hare prepares a noose around the shark's head and hangs it high for passersby to see on the way back to Biscayne Bay. At least a half-dozen boaters will snap pictures of the bloodied catch, which Quartiano will offer to Camillus House, the nonprofit organization that services the poor and homeless in Miami.

He and O'Hare, Quartiano notes, also capture sharks at the request of scientists around the state—including researchers at the University of Florida's Museum of Natural History, home of the "International Shark File." José Castro, senior biologist at Mote Marine Laboratory in Sarasota, recently traveled to South Florida to study a pregnant mako caught by the crew of Striker-I.

Standing in front of the captain's chair as the boat motors into the midafternoon glare, Quartiano points to the Hodgson men, who are discussing a day they will never forget.

"Look at those happy faces," he says. "That's why I'm still out there. I'm making memories. I have people from 20 years ago who call to tell me that they're still talking about 'the catch.' They remember every detail of that day.

"Twenty years from now, you're not going to be able to kill sharks. Whatever fish are left after the commercial guys wipe them out will be protected. It's sad. This is the last generation of hunters. I'm a dinosaur."

Quartiano pauses, and then he grins.

"But if I kill the last shark, I don't care." ☪