

# SHARK DRAMA

: ROLAND HANEWALD

+ THE INCIDENT HAPPENED A COUPLE OF YEARS BACK, AND THE STORY HAS BEEN TOLD BEFORE. BUT ALL DIVERS HAVEN'T HEARD ABOUT IT YET, SO IT SHALL BE TOLD AGAIN. IT'S ABOUT SULPICIO JARANILLA, A SPEARFISHERMAN FROM THE PHILIPPINE ISLAND OF CALUYA (SEMIRARA ARCHIPELAGO), WHO WAS BITTEN IN THE HEAD BY A TIGER SHARK – AND SURVIVED THE ORDEAL.

It was a fine cloudless day on the west coast of Caluya when Jaranilla got ready for the hunt. The dropoffs at Napay Point, where he was headed, are about a hundred yards from the shore and descend steeply to 100 feet and more before levelling off with the seafloor. At about eight a.m. the diver lowered himself into the lagoon in the shadow of the headland, briskly swimming out beyond the reef towards the deep blue of the open sea, where he dove under.

His first catch was a small garupa, less than a foot long. The *pana* – Philippine speargun – is a primitive yet highly efficient weapon, and Jaranilla knew how to handle it with deadly accuracy. The diver carelessly affixed the dying fish to his belt and started down anew.

He'd bagged some more fish and a squid and was ready to return home when the attack took place. Something like a huge mail-coated fist closed in on Jaranilla's head, his goggles were ripped off, and unyielding blades cut into his temple and lower jaw. Blood spurted forth instantly, greenish-brown at 50 feet, and the diver's scream died away in a shower of air bubbles. The hunter had become prey, a shark had seized him.

Sulpicio Jaranilla knew what held him in a viselike grip, and he fought for his life. There was no pain. The formidable teeth had sunk into his head and ploughed with

**EVEN THOUGH HALF-DEAD, THE DIVER STILL CLUTCHED HIS SPEARGUN**



This is where the shark grabbed Jaranilla's head



Jaranilla's face bears scars, but his soul bears none

## surviving shark attacks°

indifference through tissue, tendons and bone, but as far as the victim was concerned, it was as though someone else's body had been bitten into. Shreds of living flesh eddied about as the desperate diver struggled to free his head from the merciless clamp dragging him into deeper, deadlier reaches. Then, close to 100 feet down and at the immediate threshold of Hades, the shark let go.

Almost drowned and with the black shadows of shock closing in on him, the diver instinctively made for the surface. It was a long way to go with lungs all but devoid of the last trace of wind. And halfway through the ascent the shark returned!

His goggles gone and his head obscured by a veil of blood, Jaranilla sensed that he actually saw the huge striped shape rushing at him. Purely out of reflex, he pushed forward his puny speargun which he hadn't let go even at the verge of death. The spear point made contact with the nose of the shark. Within a split second, the stricken man felt a stupendous force fade away. With a flick of its tail, the shark whirled about and disappeared in the distant blue.

Jaranilla surfaced in a pool of blood. As soon as he hit the air, the pain struck him like a cat-o-nine. The upper row of the shark's teeth had laid bare the diver's skull, and his left cheek gaped open and revealed the jaw bone, both wounds generously bathed by stinging salt water. And the bleeding wouldn't stop...

The precious juice was still oozing from Jaranilla's body when he finally reached the shore and was eventually bundled into a canoe by beach dwellers, who had at first fled screaming from the zombielike figure that staggered towards them. It was about nine o'clock when the incident happened, and when what was left of Jaranilla was delivered to the little island hospital, it was five p.m. The doctors went to work at once, but there wasn't much they could do. Lacking blood conserves even, they treated his wounds as best they could, then put him on dextrose and prepared everything for a terminal case.

But the tenacious diver refused to die. He'd made it all the way to this safe and sound hospital bed, where his family hovered about him day and night and implored him not to leave them, and he was determined to live.



This is how Jaranilla described the attack (water colours by author)



The innocuous-looking seashore where the ambush occurred

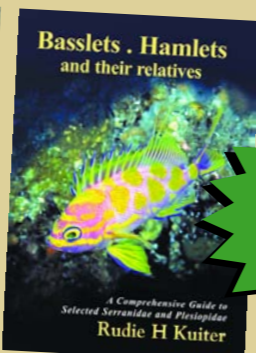
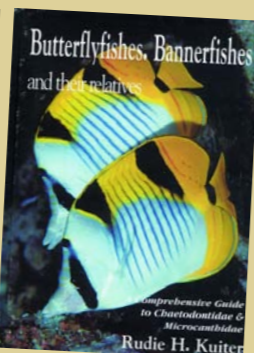
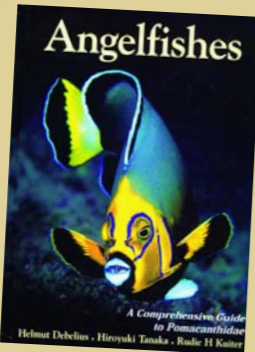
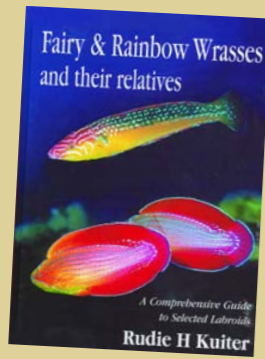


Spearfishing is a way of life in the Semirara Islands

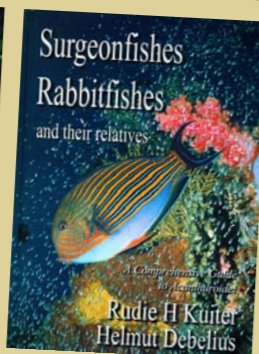
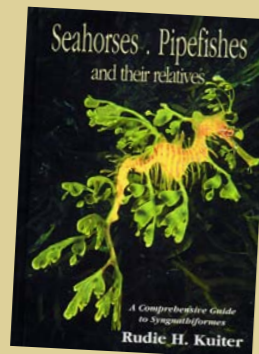
Two weeks after escaping from the jaws of the tiger, Sulpicio Jaranilla walked out of Caluya General Hospital to move back into his airy shanty in the hills and to tend to his ample flock of children, pigs and chickens. There were scars in his face, but none in his soul. Intrepidly, the diver went on diving, continuing a way of life that had almost killed him, but had also given him the strength and endurance to survive, "in spite".

I, the author who interviewed Jaranilla after his accident, must add a little comical note. The word for shark in most Philippine dialects is 'pating'. But my inquiries about the man who had been bitten by a pating were met with incredulity and laughter by the islanders. It was only much later that I learnt that the word stood for 'pigeon' in the local lingo. I inspected Jaranilla's scars and shuddered inwardly. Yes, the man had been bitten by a creature much, much larger than a pigeon...

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