

Peter Benchley is famous for writing the novel Jaws, which describes the efforts of a group of men to capture a killer great white shark. Read the excerpts from Jaws and from an essay by Benchley about his own experience of swimming with a great white shark. Answer the questions that follow.

from **Jaws**
by Peter Benchley

- 1 Hooper stopped himself before he hit the bottom of the cage. He curled around and stood up. He reached out the top of the hatch and pulled it closed. Then he looked up at Brody, put the thumb and index finger of his left hand together in the okay sign, and ducked down.
- 2 “I guess we can let go,” said Brody. They released the ropes and let the cage descend until the hatch was about four feet beneath the surface.
- 3 “Get the rifle,” said Quint. “It’s on the rack below. It’s all loaded.” He climbed onto the transom and lifted the harpoon to his shoulder.
- 4 Brody went below, found the rifle, and hurried back on deck. He opened the breach and slid a cartridge into the chamber. “How much air does he have?” he said.
- 5 “I don’t know,” said Quint. “However much he has, I doubt he’ll live to breathe it.”
- 6 “Maybe you’re right. But you said yourself you never know what these fish will do.”
- 7 “Yeah, but this is different. This is like putting your hand in a fire and hoping you won’t get burned. A sensible man don’t *do* it.”
- 8 Below, Hooper waited until the bubbly froth of his descent had dissipated. There was water in his mask, so he tilted his head backward, pressed on the top of the faceplate, and blew through his nose until the mask was clear. He felt serene. It was the pervasive sense of freedom and ease that he always felt when he dived. He was alone in blue silence speckled with shafts of sunlight that danced through the water. The only sounds were those he made breathing—a deep, hollow noise as he breathed in, a soft thudding of bubbles as he exhaled. He held his breath, and the silence was complete. Without weights, he was too buoyant, and he had to hold on to the bars to keep his tank from clanging against the hatch overhead. He turned around and looked up at the hull of the boat, a gray body that sat above him, bouncing slowly. At first, the cage annoyed him. It confined him, restricted him, prevented him from enjoying the grace of underwater movement. But then he remembered why he was there, and he was grateful.
- 9 He looked for the fish. He knew it couldn’t be sitting beneath the boat, as Quint had thought. It could not “sit” anywhere, could not rest or stay still. It had to move to survive.
- 10 Even with the bright sunlight, the visibility in the murky water was poor—no more than forty feet. Hooper turned slowly around, trying to pierce the edge of gloom and grasp any sliver of color or movement. He looked beneath the boat, where the water turned from blue to

gray to black. Nothing. He looked at his watch, calculating that if he controlled his breathing, he could stay down for at least half an hour more.

11 Carried by the tide, one of the small white squid slipped between the bars of the cage and, tethered by twine, fluttered in Hooper's face. He pushed it out of the cage.

12 He glanced downward, started to look away, then snapped his eyes down again. Rising at him from the darkling blue—slowly, smoothly—was the shark. It rose with no apparent effort, an angel of death gliding toward an appointment foreordained.

13 Hooper stared, enthralled, impelled to flee but unable to move. As the fish drew nearer, he marveled at its colors: the flat brown-grays seen on the surface had vanished. The top of the immense body was a hard ferrous gray, bluish where dappled with streaks of sun. Beneath the lateral line, all was creamy, ghostly white.

14 Hooper wanted to raise his camera, but his arm would not obey. In a minute, he said to himself, in a minute.

15 The fish came closer, silent as a shadow, and Hooper drew back. The head was only a few feet from the cage when the fish turned and began to pass before Hooper's eyes—casually, as if in proud display of its incalculable mass and power. The snout passed first, then the jaw, slack and smiling, armed with row upon row of serrate triangles. And then the black, fathomless eye, seemingly riveted upon him. The gills rippled—bloodless wounds in the steely skin.

16 Tentatively, Hooper stuck a hand through the bars and touched the flank. It felt cold and hard, not clammy but smooth as vinyl. He let his fingertips caress the flesh . . . until finally (the fish seemed to have no end) they were slapped away by the sweeping tail.

17 The fish continued to move away from the cage. Hooper heard faint popping noises, and he saw three straight spirals of angry bubbles speed from the surface, then slow and stop, well above the fish. Bullets. Not yet, he told himself. One more pass for pictures. The fish began to turn, banking, the rubbery pectoral fins changing pitch.

18 "What the hell is he doing down there?" said Brody. "Why didn't he jab him with the gun?"

19 Quint didn't answer. He stood on the transom, harpoon clutched in his fist, peering into the water. "Come up, fish," he said. "Come to Quint."

20 "Do you see it?" said Brody. "What's it doing?"

21 "Nothing. Not yet, anyway."

22 The fish had moved off to the limit of Hooper's vision—a spectral silver-gray blur tracing a slow circle. Hooper raised his camera and pressed the trigger. He knew the film would be worthless unless the fish moved in once more, but he wanted to catch the beast as it emerged from the darkness.

23 Through the viewfinder he saw the fish turn toward him. It moved fast, tail thrusting vigorously, mouth opening and closing as if gasping for breath. Hooper raised his right hand to change the focus. Remember to change it again, he told himself, when it turns.

24 But the fish did not turn. A shiver traveled the length of its body as it closed on the cage. It struck the cage head on, the snout ramming between two bars and spreading them. The snout hit Hooper in the chest and knocked him backward. The camera flew from his hands, and the mouthpiece shot from his mouth. The fish turned on its side, and the pounding tail forced the great body farther into the cage. Hooper groped for his mouthpiece but couldn't find it. His chest was convulsed with the need for air.

25 “It’s attacking!” screamed Brody. He grabbed one of the tether ropes and pulled, desperately trying to raise the cage.

. . .

26 “Throw it! Throw it!”

27 “I can’t throw it! I gotta get him on the surface! Come up, you devil! . . .”

28 The fish slid backward out of the cage and turned sharply to the right in a tight circle. Hooper reached behind his head, found the regulator tube, and followed it with his hand until he located the mouthpiece. He put it in his mouth and, forgetting to exhale first, sucked for air. He got water, and he gagged and choked until at last the mouthpiece cleared and he drew an agonized breath. It was then that he saw the wide gap in the bars and saw the giant head lunging through it. He raised his hands above his head, grasping at the escape hatch.

29 The fish rammed through the space between the bars, spreading them still farther with each thrust of its tail. Hooper, flattened against the back of the cage, saw the mouth reaching, straining for him. He remembered the power head, and he tried to lower his right arm and grab it. The fish thrust again, and Hooper saw with the terror of doom that the mouth was going to reach him.

Swimming with Nightmares

from Shark Trouble

by Peter Benchley

1 I gripped the aluminum bars of the shark cage to steady myself against the violent, erratic jolts as the cage was tossed by the choppy sea. A couple of feet above, the surface was a prism that scattered rays of gray from the overcast sky; below, the bottom was a dim plain of sand sparsely covered with strands of waving grass.

2 The water was cold, a spill from the chill Southern Ocean that traversed the bottom of the world, and my core body heat was dropping; it could no longer warm the seepage penetrating my neoprene wetsuit. I shivered, and my teeth chattered against the rubber mouthpiece of my regulator.

3 *Happy now?* I thought to myself. *Ten thousand miles you flew, for the privilege of freezing to death in a sea of stinking chum.**

4 I envisioned the people on the boat above, warmed by sunlight and cups of steaming tea, cozy in their woolen sweaters: my wife, Wendy; the film crew from ABC-TV’s *American Sportsman*; the boat crew and their leader, Rodney Fox, the world’s most celebrated shark-attack survivor.

* *chum* — scraps of fish used as bait to attract sharks

- 5 I thought of the animal I was there to see: the great white shark, largest of all the carnivorous fish in the sea. Rarely had it been seen under water; rarer still were motion pictures of great whites in the wild.
- 6 And I thought of *why* I was bobbing alone in a flimsy cage in the frigid sea: I had written a novel about that shark, and had called it *Jaws*, and when it had unexpectedly become a popular success, a television producer had challenged me to go diving with the monster of my imagination. How could I say no?
- 7 Now, though, I wondered how I could have said yes.
- 8 Visibility was poor—ten feet? Twenty? It was impossible to gauge because nothing moved against the walls of blue gloom surrounding me. I turned, slowly, trying to see in all directions at once, peering over, under, beside the clouds of blood that billowed vividly against the blue green water.
- 9 I had expected to find silence under water, but my breath roared, like wind in a tunnel, as I inhaled through my regulator, and my exhales gurgled noisily, like bubbles being blown through a straw in a drink. Waves slapped against the loose-fitting top hatch of the cage, the welded joints creaked with every torque and twist, and when the rope that tethered the cage to the boat drew taut, there was a thudding, straining noise and the clank of the steel ring scraping against its anchor plate.
- 10 Then I saw movement. Something was moving against the blue. Something dark. It was there and gone and there again, not moving laterally, as I'd thought it would, not circling, but coming straight at me, slowly, deliberately, unhurried, emerging from the mist.
- 11 I stopped breathing—not intentionally but reflexively, as if by suspending my breath I could suspend all animation—and I heard my pulse hammering in my ears. I wasn't afraid, exactly; I had been afraid, before, on the boat, but by now I had passed through fear into a realm of excitement and something like shocked disbelief.
- 12 *There it is! Feel the pressure in the water as the body moves through it. The size of it! My God, the size!*
- 13 The animal kept coming, and now I could see all of it: the pointed snout, the steel gray upper body in stark contrast with the ghostly white undercarriage, the symmetry of the pectoral fins, the awful knife blade of the dorsal fin, the powerful, deliberate back-and-forth of the scythelike tail fin that propelled the enormous body toward me, steadily, inexorably, as if it had no need for speed, for it knew it could not be stopped.
- 14 It did not slow, did not hesitate. Its black eyes registered neither interest nor excitement. As it drew within a few feet of me, it opened its mouth and I saw, first, the lower jaw crowded with jagged, needle-pointed teeth, and then—as the upper jaw detached from the skull and dropped downward—the huge, triangular cutting teeth, each side serrated like a saw blade.
- 15 The great white's mouth opened wider and wider, until it seemed it would engulf the entire cage, and me within it. Transfixed, I stared into the huge pink-and-white cavern that narrowed into a black hole, the gullet. I could see rows and rows of spare teeth buried in the gum tissue, each tooth a holstered weapon waiting to be summoned forward to replace a tooth lost in battle. Far back on each side of the massive head, gill flaps fluttered open and shut, admitting flickering rays of light.

16 A millisecond before the mouth would have collided with the cage, the great white bit down, rammed forward by a sudden thrust of its powerful tail. The upper teeth struck first, four inches from my face, scraping noisily—horribly—against the aluminum bars. Then the lower teeth gnashed quickly, as if seeking something solid in which to sink.

17 I shrank back, stumbling, as if through molasses, until I could cringe in relative safety in a far corner of the cage.

18 My brain shouted, *You . . . you of all people, ought to know: HUMAN BEINGS DO NOT BELONG IN THE WATER WITH GREAT WHITE SHARKS!*

19 The shark withdrew, then quickly bit the cage again, and again, and not till the third or fourth bite did I realize that there was something desultory about the attack. It seemed less an assault than an exploration, a testing. A tasting.

20 Then the shark turned, showing its flank, and by instinct I crept forward and extended my hand between the bars to feel its skin. Hard, it felt, and solid, a torpedo of muscle, sleek and polished like steel. I let my fingers trail along with the movement of the animal. But when I rubbed the other way, against the grain, I felt the legendary sandpaper texture, the harsh abrasiveness of the skin's construction: millions upon millions of minuscule toothlike particles, the dermal denticles.

. . .

21 I saw a length of rope drift into its gaping mouth: the lifeline, I realized, the only connection between the cage and the boat.

22 *Drift out again. Don't get caught. Not in the mouth. Please.*

23 The great white's mouth closed and opened, closed and opened; the shark shook its head, trying to rid itself of the rope. But the rope was stuck.

24 In a fraction of a second, I saw that the rope had snagged between two—perhaps three or four—of the shark's teeth.

25 At that instant, neurons and synapses in the shark's small, primitive brain must have connected and sent a message of alarm, of entrapment, for suddenly the shark seemed to panic. Instinct commandeered its tremendous strength and great weight—at least a ton, I knew, spread over the animal's fourteen-foot length—and detonated an explosion of frenzied thrashing.

26 The shark's tail whipped one way and its head the other; its body slammed against the cage, against the boat, between the cage and the boat. I was upside down, then on my side, then bashed against the side of the boat. There was no up and no down for me, only a burst of bubbles amid a cloud of blood and shreds of flesh from the chum and the butchered horse.

27 *What are they doing up there? Don't they see what's going on down here? Why doesn't somebody do something?*

28 For a second I saw the shark's head and the rope that had disappeared into its mouth—and that's the last thing I remember seeing for a long, long time. For when the shark's tail bashed the cage again, the cage slid down four or five feet and swung into the darkness beneath the boat.

29 I knew what would happen next; I had heard of it happening once before: the shark's teeth would sever the rope. My survival would depend on precisely where the rope was severed. If the shark found itself free of the cage, it would flee, leaving the cage to drift away and, perhaps, sink. Someone from the boat would get a line to me. Eventually.

30 But if the rope stayed caught in the shark's mouth, the animal might drag the cage to the
bottom, fifty feet away, and beat it to pieces. If I were to have a chance of surviving, I would
have to find the rope, grab it, and cut it, all while being tumbled about like dice in a cup.

31 I reached for the knife in the rubber sheath strapped to my leg.

32 *This isn't really happening. It can't be! I'm just a writer! I write fiction!*

33 It *was* happening, though, and somewhere in the chaos of my beleaguered brain I appreciated
the irony.

34 How many other writers, I wondered, have had the privilege of writing the story that foretells
their own grisly demise?

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