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Date: October 29, 2007 12:56:00 PM PDT
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Subject: The Article in the New Yorker

For the oceans,

Bobbi

From: Amy [mailto:amy@seashepherd.org]
Sent: Monday, October 29, 2007 8:55 AM
To: Alex; Allison Lance-Watson; Bobbi; Carla Robinson; 'Chris'; Danielle; 'Heather'; 'Jonny'; Kim McCoy; Kristine Vasic; Kurt Lieber; Michelle; Paul Watson; Paula; 'Phyllis'; Sean O'Hearn; Shannon; 'sharon'; Susan-Director; 'Wendy McNeal'
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A Reporter at Large

NEPTUNE’S NAVY

Paul Watson’s wild crusade to save the oceans.

by Raffi Khatchadourian November 5, 2007

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Watson, the founder of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, a vigilante organization that was founded thirty years ago, with one of its ships, the Farley Mowat, a trawler that has nearly sunk three times. Photograph by James Nachtwey.

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One afternoon last winter, two ships lined up side by side in a field of pack ice at the mouth of the Ross Sea, off the coast of Antarctica. They belonged to the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, a vigilante organization founded by Paul Watson, thirty years ago, to protect the world’s marine life from the destructive habits and the voracious appetites of humankind. Watson and a crew of fifty-two volunteers had sailed the ships—the Farley Mowat, from Australia, and the Robert Hunter, from Scotland—to the Ross Sea with the intention of saving whales in one of their principal habitats. A century ago, when Ernest Shackleton and his crew sailed into the Ross Sea, they discovered so many whales “spouting all around” that they named part of it the Bay of Whales. (“A veritable playground for these monsters,” Shackleton wrote.) During much of the twentieth century, though, whales were intensively hunted in the area, and a Japanese fleet still sails into Antarctic waters every winter to catch minke whales and endangered fin whales. Watson believes in coercive conservation, and for several decades he has been using his private navy to ram whaling and fishing vessels on the high seas. Ramming is his signature tactic, and it is what he and his crew intended to do to the Japanese fleet, if they could find it.

Watson is fifty-six years old, pudgy and muscular. His hair, which is white, often hangs over his eyes in unkempt bangs. During trips to Antarctica, he usually grows a beard or a goatee. On January 19th, the day he moored his ships together in the Ross Sea, he wore a black, military-style sweater adorned with Sea Shepherd patches, and a rainbow-colored belt that held a sheathed knife. Watson was captaining the Farley, a rusty North Sea trawler built in Norway in 1958. The ship, black with yellow trim, featured a skull and crossbones painted across its superstructure and, on the forward deck, a customized device called “the can opener”: a sharpened steel I-beam that is propelled outward from the ship’s starboard side and is used to scrape the hulls of adversaries. Watson’s plan was to transfer as much furniture, equipment, and crew as he could from the Farley to the Hunter, in part because the Farley was old and barely seaworthy, in part because it was operating illegally and could be confiscated upon entry into port, and in part to ready it for a procedure that he called Operation Asshole—so named because it involved ramming one vessel into another’s stern.

When Watson is separated from land, he tends to behave like Captain Nemo, which is to say that he does what he thinks is right, even if it involves a violation of custom or the destruction of property. There are a number of rules belonging to civilization that outrage his sense of morality, among them the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which asserts that sovereign states alone are the ocean’s enforcers. If such rules interfere with his agenda, then, as far as he is concerned, rules be damned. This is particularly true when whales are at issue. Watson believes that whales are more intelligent than people, and that their slaughter is tantamount to murder. (He once compared their extermination to the Holocaust.) The Japanese take a different view. They have been hunting whales with a modern industrial fleet since the nineteen-thirties, and the more resolutely the rest of the world condemns their hunt the more adamantly their government seems to support it. Watson maintains that if his opponents are forced to defend their actions in public they will demonstrate the untenable nature of their position. A key part of his strategy is to force the issue.

Whaling is not banned, but it is not exactly permitted, either—an ambiguity resulting from political compromise and shortsightedness. In 1946, the world’s major whaling nations formed the International Whaling Commission to manage the world’s whale fisheries. It did a terrible job. By the nineteen-seventies, several species were nearing extinction, and by the early eighties the I.W.C. decided that commercial hunts should be halted. This is often referred to as the “ban” on commercial whaling, but it is more accurate to call it a moratorium. Even so, several leading whaling countries declined to abide by it. Whaling for the sake of science has always been permitted anywhere and without restrictions. The Japanese say that they are hunting whales off Antarctica in order to ascertain when there will be enough to harvest for profit. In the winter of 2005, they killed more than a thousand, nearly double the commercial catch of Norway, which rejected the moratorium. The Japanese fleet is run by the government-subsidized Institute for Cetacean Research, in Tokyo, but the institute has produced virtually no research of any regard, and all the whales that are purported to be under study are also butchered for the purpose of selling whale meat to the Japanese public.

Watson has a tendency to see things in their essence rather than in their particulars. A diplomat might say that the Japanese whaling fleet is technically complying with the rules of the I.W.C., and that to stop it one must first upset the status quo that permits the fleet to hunt whales. Watson, who cannot be bothered with the legal nuances of international regulations, insists that the Japanese fleet is breaking the law, and that, because the I.W.C. refuses to act, he and his crew must. He calls his fleet Neptune’s Navy, and he regards it as a law-enforcement agency. Moments before ramming a vessel, Watson will radio its captain and say something that sounds very official, such as “Please remove yourselves from these waters. You are in violation of international conservation regulations.” At times, he loses his cool. “We’re no protest ship,” he once told an intransigent captain. “Now, get out of here.” His sense of urgency, his impressive ego, his argumentativeness, his love of theatrics, his tendency to bend the truth, his willingness to risk lives or injury for his beliefs (or for publicity), and his courage (or recklessness) have earned him both loathing and veneration from those who are familiar with his activism.

Watson's celebrity supporters, some of whom he has come to know personally, include Mick Jagger, Pierce Brosnan, Sean Penn, Aidan Quinn, William Shatner, Edward Norton, Orlando Bloom, and Uma Thurman. In 1995, Martin Sheen travelled with Watson and other activists to the Magdalen Islands, in Quebec, to protest the clubbing of baby seals. The group was threatened by a mob of angry sealers, and Watson was badly beaten. "He's one of the gutsiest guys on the planet," Sheen told me. "I am just so grateful to him for his commitment and his courage and his daring and his humanity." Steve Wynn, the Las Vegas casino magnate, once helped Watson buy a submarine (though it was missing essential parts and so couldn't be used). John Paul DeJoria, the C.E.O. of John Paul Mitchell Systems, the hair-care-products company, has raised tens of thousands of dollars for Watson's campaigns. Sea Shepherd's board of advisers includes Elizabeth May, the leader of Canada's Green Party, and Roger Payne, one of the world's foremost experts on whales. Watson is portrayed as a savior in the fiction of Edward Abbey, the author of "The Monkey Wrench Gang" (1975), a seminal book for eco-saboteurs. The Dalai Lama has given him a written endorsement and a statue of Hayagriva, a wrathful deity who, according to early Buddhist texts, yells with a "dreadful voice" and "subdues all demons and all evils." Within the animal-rights community, Watson is treated like a demigod. "I think he's a hero," Peter Singer, the Princeton ethicist and the author of "Animal Liberation," told me. "He's been prepared to put himself on the line to stop the abuse of animals in places where no one else was prepared to go."

Watson's detractors are no less adamant. Officials in Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Japan, Canada, and Costa Rica have denounced him; some have even called him a terrorist. In the mid-nineties, Norway convicted him of attempting to scuttle a whaler named Nybræna, and he spent eighty days in prison. "He is persona non grata in Iceland," Kristján Loftsson, the managing director of Hvalur, Iceland's largest whaling company, told me. Watson has made enemies of other conservationists, too. For decades, Greenpeace has wanted nothing to do with him—a rebuke that is particularly stinging because he was a founder of the organization. Last year, Watson resigned from the Sierra Club's national board, after feuding with other members about the group's policies. He has been barred from I.W.C. meetings since 1986, when Sea Shepherd scuttled two of Hvalur's ships in Reykjavik's harbor—an act of sabotage that many conservationists believe helped turn Icelandic public opinion against the cause of saving whales. Sidney Holt, one of the principal architects of the whaling moratorium, told me, "I think his involvement in all this is an absolute disaster. Almost everything he has been doing has had blowback for those who want to see an end to whaling. In too many cases, playing piracy on the ocean, and creating danger for other ships, is simply not liked."

As the ships of Neptune's Navy were tied together in the Ross Sea, Watson stood on the deck of the Farley and observed his crew transferring equipment to the Hunter, a former Scottish-fisheries patrol vessel that was built in 1975. Watson's default temperament is one of detached amusement, and as he surveyed the work of his volunteers—most less than half his age, idealistic, loyal, zealously vegan—he told them, "You guys are like locusts." Sea Shepherd, which has an annual budget of about two million dollars, has a paid staff of fourteen people. Watson is committed to keeping his organization small, and does not believe in spending money on fund-raising or recruitment; he raises money by giving lectures and advertising Sea Shepherd's work on the Internet, and by appealing to donors, often celebrities, directly. He has no trouble staffing his ships with volunteers. The Farley's bridge was being stripped bare by a senior officer, a forty-one-year-old electrical engineer from Florida named Pedro Monteiro, who was dismantling redundant navigational equipment: an extra radar console, a global-positioning system. On the main deck, crew members using a crane transferred several tons of steel beams and plating to the other ship. The steel was to be used to construct a platform deck on the Hunter, and volunteers wearing welders' masks and gloves began building it almost immediately. On a similar deck at the Farley's stern, under a gray tarp, a Hughes 300c helicopter sat ready to conduct reconnaissance.

Watson had hunted for the Japanese whaling fleet here before: in 2002, he searched for weeks but didn't find it; in 2005, he sideswiped two Japanese vessels. This time, he faced a new predicament: hours after leaving Australia, the Farley, which had been registered in Belize, was stripped of its flag by the authorities there. (The Japanese government had been educating other countries about Sea Shepherd's activities.) Without a flag, a ship is considered stateless, which means that if it is attacked on the high seas no government is likely to defend it. The Farley, in effect, had become an outlaw ship—a cause for celebration by its crew. Sea Shepherd volunteers tend to share Watson's frustration with civilization, not only for its relentless expansion into nature but also for the many compromises that come with life on land. As Watson once wrote, "No words can describe the personal liberation that heading seaward bestows upon me. In this aquatic realm no man or woman is subject to the petty decrees of social bureaucracy." From the bow, the ship flew a Sea Shepherd flag, a version of the Jolly Roger featuring a trident crossed with a shepherd's crook. Watson told his crew, "Now you're on a pirate ship."

On the high seas, the greatest danger that the Farley posed was to itself. Since 2002, it had nearly sunk three times. On two occasions, divers had had to repair breaches to the hull with wooden stakes to keep the ship afloat. ("Luckily, we weren't in a storm," a crew member recalled. "You can't send divers down when there are five-metre swells.") Watson reasoned that the best way for the Farley to end its days at sea was as a battering ram in the service of marine life. To succeed in this, though, the ship would have to overcome a crucial obstacle: speed. Its top speed was ten knots, nowhere near that of any of the Japanese vessels. The Hunter, a much faster ship, would have to delay the whalers until the Farley could catch up—assuming that the fleet could be found. The Institute for Cetacean Research harvests whales within the Southern Ocean Sanctuary, fifty million square kilometres designated a protected area by the I.W.C. With two ships and a helicopter, Neptune's Navy hardly had the advantage.

Weeks of searching followed the high-seas rendezvous. By early February, Watson told me, he was preparing to order his navy back to port. His ships were running low on fuel, and the mood among his volunteers was grim. ("Every day that passed, it got a little more dismal," a crew member recalled.) Then, on February 9th, a little before 4 A.M., the Hunter located a cluster of ships on its radar: an unusual pattern of blips moving across the console at 14.7 knots, faster than drifting icebergs. The sky was black. The air was cold. The Hunter's captain, Alex Cornelissen, could not see more than a few feet off the bow. He decided that before notifying Watson in the Farley, twenty-five miles away, he needed more information. He steered toward the closest blip and ordered the helicopter to investigate the largest. At dawn, the sky turned a dark shade of blue, and the helicopter's pilot saw a lighted ship moving slowly across the water. He radioed Cornelissen to say that he had located a whaler, and a crew member on the Hunter's bridge announced, "We have found the fleet."

The ship was the Nisshin Maru. A colossus at sea, more than four hundred feet long, it is what whalers call a "factory ship"—the only one still in operation. Other vessels deliver their catch to the Nisshin Maru for butchering, packaging, refrigeration, and study. For conservationists, it has come to represent everything that is wrong with the modern whale hunt: mechanized slaughter on a vast scale. Greenpeace crews have frequently sailed to the Southern Ocean to protest and document the fleet's work. The Institute for Cetacean Research has painted the word "research" in block letters across the ship's hull; the word is clearly propaganda, but for Neptune's Navy it serves as a taunt.

Around 6 A.M., the Hunter pulled alongside the Nisshin Maru. The whaling ship blasted its horns and turned on its water cannons, which sent powerful jets overboard. The two ships were close enough to collide, but Watson had instructed Cornelissen to delay the ship, not to ram it. On the Hunter's deck, crew members dressed in black uniforms, their faces covered by masks, began throwing cannisters of butyric acid—a relatively harmless substance that smells like rancid butter—and smoke bombs onto the Nisshin Maru's deck. At the waterline, motorized dinghies called Zodiacs arced around the whaler. Most of the Zodiacs had come from the Farley, which was not yet in visible range. Their crews carried cameras and prop-foulers—long knotted coils of polypropylene—which they hoped would get entangled in the Nisshin Maru's propellers. Other Zodiac crews were equipped with nail guns. They drew the dinghies beside the Nisshin Maru and nailed shut scuppers through which whale blood was released into the ocean. As the confrontation went on, the temperature dropped. Waves surged, and snow, driven by shifting winds, hit the ships at wild angles.

One of the Farley's Zodiacs disappeared in the storm. Its crew, Karl Neilsen and John Gravois, did not respond to radio calls. Watson stood against the back wall of the bridge, near an old brass pilot wheel, and bit his upper lip. "What?" he said in disbelief to Monteiro. Referring to Neilsen, the Zodiac's pilot, he asked, "He doesn't have flares? I don't know why he doesn't have flares." As the Farley began to search for the missing boat, Watson grabbed several flares, went to a bridge wing, and fired them into the air. Their light barely penetrated the fog and snow. He faced a difficult decision. Several miles away, the Hunter was harassing the Nisshin Maru, and if he ordered it to join the search for the Zodiac it would not reach the whaler again. He decided that the Hunter should stay on course. "A lot of people were freaking out," he recalled. "But the problem was that I didn't want the Japanese fleet to get away." Cornelissen was having trouble keeping up with the Nisshin Maru, which could move faster than the Hunter in rough seas, and after several hours he decided to disobey Watson's order and join the search. Watson issued a distress call on the radio, and, moments later, the captain of the Nisshin Maru responded, asking how he could help.

What Watson did not know was that the missing Zodiac was badly damaged. It was old and had not been well maintained, and it had slammed into a wave and cracked its hull. As water poured in, it shorted out the radio and the G.P.S. Neilsen and Gravois fell behind the other ships, and eventually found themselves alone in the storm. They were wearing wetsuits and, over their wetsuits, foul-weather gear, but, even so, they were cold, and in the event that they became fully submerged they would not have survived for very long. They steered the Zodiac toward an iceberg and took shelter beside it. The men could not climb out, because the ice surface was nearly vertical, and they huddled together for warmth. After four or five hours, the Zodiac began to drift away from the iceberg. Gravois wrestled with the possibility that he might freeze or drown at the bottom of the world. He saw and heard mirages: phantom ships, a nonexistent helicopter. Neilsen did what he could to keep the Zodiac from moving too far from its last known position. Finally, eight or nine hours after the men had fallen behind the fleet, the Farley appeared through a wall of fog and rescued them. The Nisshin Maru, which had joined in the search, escaped into the Antarctic storm.

Watson had no choice but to order Neptune's Navy to return to Australia. Fuel and supplies were nearly depleted. Some crew members were horrified that he had taken so long to issue a distress call. Others were thrilled by the encounter with the factory ship, convinced that taking life-threatening risks to save animals was central to Sea Shepherd's mission. On February 12th, as Neptune's Navy was preparing to leave the Antarctic Circle, the Hunter located another Japanese whaling vessel, northeast of the Balleny Islands. The ship, the Kaiko Maru, was what whalers call a spotter; it was looking for pods of whales near a field of pack ice. The Hunter rapidly closed in on it, and Cornelissen's first mate radioed the Japanese captain to say, "You have been identified as an illegal whaling vessel. We advise that you leave the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary immediately."

As the Hunter and the Kaiko Maru negotiated the floes, they smashed into each other. The Hunter tilted port, at an angle close to thirty degrees, and veered into a block of pack ice; the impact caused some structural damage to the hull. The Kaiko Maru blasted a looped recording, in English, through loudspeakers on its bridge: "Warning! Warning! This is the Kaiko Maru's captain. Stop your obstructive actions immediately. If you dare to board this vessel, you will be taken into custody and restrained as illegal intruders under Japanese law." The Sea Shepherd crew hurled smoke bombs onto the Kaiko Maru's deck, which soon was covered by an orange cloud. Prop-foulers were again deployed, and one became tangled in the Kaiko Maru's propeller. Sea Shepherd's helicopter, equipped with a film crew, made low-flying passes. When the Farley arrived, Watson radioed the Hunter and said, "Let's see if we can keep them bottled up." He maneuvered the Farley to the other side of the whaler. The Kaiko Maru's captain, in an attempt to free his ship, scraped the Hunter, issued a distress call, and complained that his propeller was vibrating in an unusual way. Then, having exhausted all other options, he began to take orders from Watson's crew, which had confined his ship to a tight circle. Watson offered to send a diver into the water to examine the damaged propeller. "Don't need your diver," an officer on the Kaiko Maru insisted. "O.K.? Understand?"

For a few hours, the ships remained where they were. Watson had arrested a whaling vessel on the high seas, but he was constrained by the fact that he had no real authority to do so. Using a satellite phone, he called officials in New Zealand and Australia—both countries claim sovereignty over parts of the Southern Ocean and are staunchly against whaling—and requested that a naval vessel take the Japanese ship into custody. Both countries refused. Australia's environment minister, Malcolm Turnbull, publicly denounced the tactics that the Sea Shepherd crew had used. "Threatening to put lives at risk, or vessels at risk, is completely unacceptable," he said. "They must act safely and peacefully. They are not advancing the anti-whaling cause they espouse by threatening lives in this way." Officials from New Zealand's maritime search-and-rescue agency responded to the Kaiko Maru's distress call and spoke to Watson. "These guys are involved in illegal operations down here," Watson told the officials. They ordered him to give the Kaiko Maru free passage, and he reluctantly complied.

Since Watson did not have authority, he made use of what he did have: publicity. Earlier in the day, as the Farley chased the Kaiko Maru, he had conducted interviews with reporters in Australia and New Zealand by satellite phone, in an attempt to get them to write about Japanese whaling. (Complaining about the press to crew members on the bridge, Watson said, "It's all human drama. That's all anybody's interested in, human drama. Nobody is questioning the whales that are dying out here." Then he muttered, "Hominids, man, goddam hominids.") Watson told the reporters that if Australia and New Zealand didn't take action against the Japanese whaling program he would hunt down the Nisshin Maru and give it a "steel enema" by jamming his ship into its slipway. This was unlikely—the Nisshin Maru was hundreds of miles away—but the threat had an effect. For several days, members of the political opposition in Australia made use of the incident to criticize the government. A Labor Party minister implied that his party, if elected, would order the Australian Navy into the Southern Ocean to monitor "illegal" whaling. From New Zealand, Chris Carter, the conservation minister, phoned Watson to dissuade him from carrying out Operation Asshole and, shortly afterward, announced, "I have made it clear to Mr. Watson that New Zealand is vigorously opposed to whaling and will continue its efforts on the international stage." Watson responded by telling the *New Zealand Herald* that he was standing down. "We're not going to ram the Nisshin Maru, but we will obstruct any whaling activities that we come across," he said. "I will not watch a whale die. I've not seen a whale die since I left Greenpeace, in 1977. When we show up, whales don't die."

The day Watson returned his ships to Australia, on February 19th, the Hunter, like the Farley, lost its flag. It had been registered in the United Kingdom until, presumably, the Japanese saw fit to educate the British, too. In any case, the authorities in Melbourne chose to overlook Sea Shepherd's lack of valid paperwork. (Both ships were soon registered in Holland.) Watson left the Hunter in Australia, where it was to undergo preparations for his next Antarctic campaign, in December. The Farley, he decided, would cross the Pacific. It would stop in the Galápagos, where Sea Shepherd has an office that helps Ecuador's police fight marine poaching, and then continue to the Grand Banks, off the coast of Newfoundland, where the crew would dump into the ocean twenty tons of steel I-beams welded together to form large spikes. Watson called the spikes "net rippers," because they would be designed to destroy bottom-trawling nets. He planned to scatter them across the Grand Banks seabed, and announce that they were there but not say where. The tactic—much like tree spiking, a nineteenth-century method of sabotaging logging equipment, which Watson helped revive in the eighties—would mix propaganda with action, so that fishermen would have to assume the worst. Watson has a habit of blending fact with rhetoric in this way. "You will not ever perceive the truth that is reality," he once wrote. "There are many realities."

Watson spends nearly as much time writing as he does planning for campaigns at sea. He has written several books and, on a Panasonic Toughbook computer that rarely leaves his side, produces a constant stream of poems, essays, and blog postings. Much of his writing is autobiographical, and he seems unable to discuss his personal history without giving it mythic contours. In the opening pages of "Earthforce!," a strategy manual for radical environmentalists that he self-published in 1993, he wrote, "I was born on December 2, 1950, in the hereditary lands of the Huron on the north shore of Lake Ontario," which was his way of saying that he was born in Toronto. He went on, "I was raised in the east, in the lands of the Alquonquin Micmac on the shores of the Passamaquoddy Bay"—in other words, in the Canadian province of New Brunswick. Watson's descriptions of himself at the age of nine mirror his presentation of himself today: as a fearless and uncompromising defender of animals. In "Seal Wars," a memoir that he published in 2002, he writes that when he was a young boy his best friend was a wild beaver (which he named Bucky); that he spent much of his time alone in the woods or near a wharf destroying animal traps (after Bucky was killed by one); that he was horrified by a seal hunt, which an uncle took him to see; that he once used his BB gun to shoot a boy who was about to kill a bird; and that he was bullied by other children ("Lost some battles, won most"). By his account, he was an eco-warrior before puberty.

Watson has six younger brothers and sisters. His parents, Anthony Watson (known as Tony), a French-Canadian who grew up in New Brunswick, and Anamarie Larsen, who was from Toronto, endured a difficult marriage. As a child, Watson looked up to his maternal grandfather, Otto Larsen, a painter and bare-knuckled boxer who was a veteran of the Spanish-American War and the Boer War and later became a war resister. (Larsen, a native of Copenhagen, was expelled from Denmark as a teen-ager after refusing to kneel before the Queen.) Watson lived with Larsen while his father fought in Korea, and when he returned, in the mid-fifties, the family moved to a fishing town on the Atlantic called St. Andrews by-the-Sea. "It is the Atlantic Ocean I remember most vividly from those years, more than I remember my own parents," Watson later wrote. "Looking across the water, I was always curious about what lay beyond." In 1959, the family moved to a village twenty miles inland called Milltown, on the Maine border. Fights between Watson's parents grew intense. In moments of rage, Watson told me, his father was abusive toward him. "When your method of parenting is to beat the hell out of you—I just don't get that," he said. He developed a habit of running away, though never very far, or for very long. In 1962, Tony Watson left for Toronto. "My father just disappeared," Watson told me. "I didn't see him for two years. He was gone."

During his absence, Watson's mother quietly began to see another man, and in 1963 she became pregnant. In January, 1964, she was hospitalized as a result of medical complications, and relatives watched over the family. Then Tony Watson suddenly returned. He gathered his children in the living room and told them that their mother had died. (The baby was stillborn.) Watson, who was thirteen years old, jumped up, looked at his father, and yelled, "No, you're lying. It's all your fault." After the funeral, Watson's father moved the family to Toronto. Watson tried several times to run away, and lived briefly in a Catholic boarding home for wayward children. His arguments with his father became explosive. "I was sixteen, and my father hit me," Watson told me. "Suddenly, I said to myself, 'I'm bigger than this guy.' I just turned around and slugged him, and actually that was a very therapeutic moment for me, because I took all the animosity I had out on him." He fled to Montreal and found work at Expo 67, as a tour guide. Afterward, he hopped a freight train to Vancouver. "I wanted to get as far away as possible," he told me.

Vancouver in the sixties was a haven for political radicals, draft dodgers, artists, and drifters. "I landed there and I didn't really know where to go," Watson said. He made his way to the University of British Columbia, which was built on a large promontory ringed with wilderness and beaches. Watson climbed down to Wreck Beach, where there were two abandoned gun towers, built during the Second World War to protect Canada from a Pacific invasion. He had brought a sleeping bag with him, and he made his home in one of the towers. In the evenings, to keep warm, he built a fire with driftwood. Sometimes he looked for shelter in town. "At the time, you could go to any police station and say, 'Can I spend the night in the jail?' " he said. "The police would usually throw in a breakfast." He found odd jobs, worked on getting his high-school diploma, and, when he had enough money for rent, stayed in boarding houses. "He was in Vancouver penniless," a friend remembered. "Once, he sat on the steps of the Vancouver General Hospital and swallowed a bottle of aspirin, thinking they must take him in. It looked lovely and warm inside. So he went into the hospital, and they sent him out to the Health Sciences Centre on the U.B.C. campus. He stayed there for a while. They had to get the police to kick him out."

Watson took courses in archeology, linguistics, and communications at Simon Fraser University, known among students at the time as Berkeley North. (He never finished a degree.) In 1968, in need of work, he skipped a semester to join the Coast Guard, and for several weeks he served aboard a weather ship. He enjoyed the experience enough to enlist, in 1969, on a Norwegian cargo vessel for eight or nine months. Periodically, during the next five years, he left Vancouver for stints in the merchant marine. While at sea, Watson travelled to Southeast Asia, where he watched, from a distance, the bombing of Vietnam; to the South China Sea, where he suffered horrendous weather ("I read Conrad's 'Typhoon' during a typhoon"); to Iran, where he says he was detained and interrogated by the Shah's security agents after photographing a military installation ("I was tortured some, nothing too heavy, simply bamboo slivers under the fingernails and a few strokes with a lash"); and to Mozambique ("When I was finally able to see my surroundings, I panicked. I was on a bed in a hut"). Watson possessed what George Orwell once called a "lonely child's habit of making up stories"; through embellishment, he used his adventures to construct an indomitable persona. He loved to impersonate John Wayne. At protests, he was among the angriest radicals. In 1971, several hundred activists built a tent camp in Vancouver's Stanley Park, taking over a portion of it to protest the building of a hotel. The land was already fenced off for construction, and Rod Marining, one of the organizers of the demonstration, recalled, "Paul showed up and he took a crowbar and he began ripping the fence down, and as soon as he did this—the police were right behind him—they arrested him."

At the time, the nexus of countercultural life in Vancouver was a weekly called the *Georgia Straight*, and Watson soon began writing for it. "He virtually lived in the office for a while," Dan McLeod, the paper's longtime editor and publisher, told me. Watson's earliest articles were brief, irate, and punctuation-deprived. In a piece about a rowing club, he wrote with disgust about "the industrious upper class boys straining at their oars as if Caesar himself was watching." About the protest in Stanley Park, Watson wrote, "The cops present were full of contradictions as usual, and couldn't get it through their thick stubborn skulls that the land that they were on was not under their jurisdiction, that it was free land, Indian land, and only subject to natural and tribal law. The pigs expect us to obey their strange laws without question."

In the early seventies, Watson, along with some two dozen other environmental activists, created Greenpeace. In 1975, alarmed by the declining number of whales, the group decided to confront a Soviet whaling fleet off the coast of California. Their plan was to use Zodiacs to put themselves between the harpooners and the whales. When Greenpeace caught up with the fleet, Watson jumped into a Zodiac with Fred Easton, a cameraman. The two men witnessed a Soviet harpooner firing into a pod of whales. At one point, an injured sperm whale charged toward them. "It scared the hell out of us in the beginning," Easton said. "I just remember Paul saying, 'Here he comes!,' and we sat there. I couldn't get my camera going, and we both sat at the edge of the Zodiac, on the other side of which the whale was approaching. He swam right past us, and I swear to God he couldn't have been any more than ten feet away, and he was a huge male sperm whale, and he had an eye about the size of a dinner plate, and he did look at us with some sort of compassion, in the sense that he was certainly capable of doing harm to us in the circumstances, and had he been human we might have expected him to." The two men, watching the whale swim away, were overcome with emotion. "In an instant, my life was transformed and a purpose for my life was reverently established," Watson later wrote. He has retold the story countless times. During his recent trip to Antarctica, he composed a sixteen-hundred-line poem titled "Planet of Whales," which he later read to me in one sitting. It took fifty minutes. The poem's opening segment includes the following lines: "Leviathan's solitary eye haunts me still. / I am obsessed and driven mad with anger."

Fred Easton's footage generated considerable publicity and prompted an outpouring of donations to Greenpeace. Watson desperately wanted to undertake a campaign to save seals, thousands of which are slaughtered as pups every year in northeastern Canada. Some members objected, arguing that the group should focus on whales. Nevertheless, in 1976 and 1977, Watson brought teams of Greenpeace protesters to the ice fields of Newfoundland, where the seals were hunted. During the second trip, Watson spotted a sealer working near a pile of pelts, and became furious. He threw the pelts in the water and then tossed the sealer's club in, too. A Greenpeace volunteer had never before acted so aggressively. When the campaign was over, the foundation's twelve-member board met to discuss Watson's behavior.

"It was a crisis point for the organization," Paul Spong, a whale researcher who was on the board, told me. "It was a point at which Greenpeace was trying to clarify itself and its objectives." Many board members believed that Watson's actions violated the group's pacifist ethos. Robert Hunter, a journalist and the group's most influential member (as well as the namesake of Sea Shepherd's ship), argued that Watson should be expelled. Hunter, who nevertheless remained a supporter of Watson's work until his death, two years ago, explained his decision in a history he wrote of Greenpeace, "Warriors of the Rainbow." Referring to Watson, he wrote, "No one doubted his courage for a moment. He was a great warrior-brother. Yet in terms of the Greenpeace gestalt, he seemed possessed by *too* powerful a drive, too unrelenting a desire to push himself front and center, shouldering everyone else aside." Watson had broken the law and jeopardized Greenpeace's ability to raise money. "People had their different relationships with Watson," Rex Weyler, a board member at the time, told me. "He could be inspiring, but he was not an easy person to get along with. If it wasn't the club, it would be the next thing, and the next thing, and the next thing." The vote to remove Watson was eleven to one. (Watson dissented.) "No one felt good about it," Hunter wrote. "We all felt we'd gotten trapped in a web no one wanted to see develop, yet now that it had, there was nothing to do but bring down the ax, even if it meant bringing it down on the neck of our brother."

Soon after he was expelled from the board, Watson, with a few friends, founded his own group, Earthforce. It had little focus or momentum until, in 1978, he wrote to Cleveland Amory, the writer and animal-welfare advocate, to ask for help. Amory's organization, the Fund for Animals, paid for Watson's first ship, Sea Shepherd, which he used to ram and incapacitate a notorious pirate whaling vessel called the Sierra, off the coast of Portugal. Watson nearly lost his life in the process, and, after the campaign, he was forced to scuttle Sea Shepherd. He wrote an account of his adventure that was optioned by the producer Tony Bill and, with the money, he was able to buy another vessel. (Watson says that he has sold the film rights to his story more than twenty times, though a movie has yet to be made.) After the Sierra campaign, Watson told the Washington *Post*, "People sometimes say I have a suicide complex. Well, in fact I enjoy being alive, more than most people. But people can't believe a man will risk death to save whales. That's what they can't understand. So they think I'm crazy or that I attach no value to my life." He added, "I guess I plead guilty to being a vigilante, but I can tell you something, if there are no police then vigilantes will appear because crime will never be given a free rein." He renamed his organization after his first ship, and set out to protect the oceans as he saw fit.

A list of Watson's campaigns in the eighties reads like a catalogue of Tintin adventures. In 1981, he secretly entered Siberia to document a Soviet food-processing facility that was converting illegally harvested whale meat into feed for animals at a fur farm. He succeeded in avoiding the K.G.B. and in outmaneuvering the Soviet Navy around a pod of gray whales. (Greenpeace, which visited the facility the following year, got caught; one of the Greenpeace activists told me, "I was taken into a room with a K.G.B. guy who asked, 'Do you know Paul Watson?' ") In 1982, from a chartered airplane, Watson dropped paint-filled light bulbs on a Soviet trawler in the northern Pacific. He has used spoiled pie filling, fired from water cannons, as a weapon at sea. During the Falklands War, he contacted the British Navy and offered to assist its fleet by ferrying medical supplies to the front—"so I could head off any Argentine move to kill penguins," he told me. The British declined the offer. In 1983, he brought the Canadian seal hunt to a near-standstill by blockading the port of St. John's, Newfoundland, and announcing that he would ram any sealing vessel that left the wharf; when the authorities threatened to board his ship, he replied that he would sink it at the mouth of the harbor, thereby creating an impassable reef. Watson eventually left the harbor, under cover of fog, and he was later arrested on an ice field where the hunt was taking place. (Since 1977, it has been a crime in Canada to observe the seal hunt without a permit.) His ship was confiscated, he was charged with conspiring to commit mischief and extortion, among other crimes, and he spent several days in jail. He was released after Mike Farrell, the actor who played Captain B. J. Hunnicut on "M*A*S*H," posted his bail. Watson was acquitted on appeal, and his ship was returned to him.

Watson is a keen tactician. "He generally baffles the police so badly they walk away at times when I would be in handcuffs," Peter Brown, a filmmaker who has been a Sea Shepherd crew member for more than twenty-five years, told me. Watson conducts most of his campaigns in international waters, where the law is vague and enforcement is weak. He nearly always publicizes Sea Shepherd's activities, which helps convey the impression that what he is attempting to do is perfectly legal. One of his preferred tactics is what he calls the Brer Rabbit Ploy: "If you have a political or moral advantage, then let the authorities know and believe that you want to be put on trial." On several occasions, he has demanded to be charged for sinking or ramming vessels, and he has even flown to a country that is considering his arrest. Watson says the ploy works because his adversaries fear that he will use the courts to publicize their own wrongdoing. But he has also claimed responsibility for damage to ships that in fact was caused by accidents or by other activists. "Let me just give you a warning about Paul," an anti-whaling conservationist told me. "He takes credit for more than he's due." (By Watson's count, Sea Shepherd has sunk ten whaling vessels in port. By my count, he and his crew have attempted to scuttle two vessels and have successfully sunk two others.) Still, he is adept at using the judicial system to his advantage. After the incident involving the paint-filled light bulbs, he was charged with four violations of Canada's Aeronautics Act. But, because the Soviet crew could not be subpoenaed, Watson was the government's only witness. According to the Toronto *Globe and Mail*, at a pre-trial hearing the judge shook his head in disbelief as he asked the prosecutor, "You have no witnesses other than the accused?" The prosecutor conceded: "That is correct, Your Honor. The location of the incident comes from Watson." The case was eventually dismissed.

In the early nineties, instead of simply claiming the side of morality, as he did after ramming the Sierra, Watson began to assert legal authority for his actions. For this, he cited primarily the U.N. World Charter for Nature, a resolution passed by the General Assembly in 1982, which allows for private citizens to help "safeguard and conserve nature in areas beyond national jurisdiction." But it is not a license for vigilantism. The charter is nonbinding, and does not have enforcement provisions. It indicates that individuals should act only "to the extent they are able," a clause that Watson interprets to mean physical capability but which is obviously meant to encompass legal authority as well. No country regards ramming, disabling, or scuttling ships to be legal activities, and, except on rare occasions, even naval ships cannot lawfully interfere with foreign vessels on the high seas. When I described Watson's use of the charter to David Caron, the co-director of the Law of the Sea Institute, at the University of California at Berkeley, he said, "Clearly wrong. There is no ambiguity."

In June, Watson was interviewed on a CBC radio talk show. The host, Susan Bell, asked him about his aggressive tactics, and he explained, "We intervene against illegal activities, and we are simply upholding international conservation law, and the United Nations World Charter for Nature allows for us to do that. It says that any nongovernmental organization, or individual, is empowered to uphold international conservation law. That's why I've sunk ten whaling ships and destroyed tens of millions of dollars' worth of illegal fishing gear, and I'm not in jail." Watson spoke in a calm, authoritative voice, and Bell changed the subject. It was a brilliant evasion. But, the more I heard him invoke the charter, the more I began to suspect that he actually believed that it authorized him to police the sea; some of the people who know him best admitted that they, too, could never be certain when he was tactically stretching the truth and when he was deceiving himself. In "Earthforce!," Watson advises readers to make up facts and figures when they need to, and to deliver them to reporters confidently, "as Ronald Reagan did." Watson possesses Reagan's intuitive grasp of the media, and, like Reagan, at times he seems astray in the labyrinth of his own illusions.

Several years after ramming the Sierra, Watson gave himself the title of captain, though he does not have a captain's license. "He loves to dress up in uniform, as 'Captain Paul Watson,' and suddenly there's enough gold braid on his shoulders to skipper the Queen Mary," David Sellers, an old friend and former Sea Shepherd crew member, told me. In the eighties, Sellers and Watson fought so bitterly over the seaworthiness of Watson's ship that they did not speak for fifteen years. (Sellers, a licensed captain, had insisted that it was not safe for ocean travel.) Many of Watson's colleagues from the seventies and eighties no longer work with him; they have grown tired either of the campaigns or of Watson's style of leadership—"anarchy run by God," a longtime volunteer called it. "He doesn't like people who disagree with him."

Watson has been married three times and is currently divorcing his third wife, Allison Lance, whom he met at an animal-rights conference in 1997. His second wife, Lisa DiStefano, was a *Playboy* model. (DiStefano was a Sea Shepherd volunteer, and Lance still is.) His first wife, Starlet Lum, was a Greenpeace bookkeeper. With Lum, Watson had a daughter, Lani. Now twenty-seven, she is a video-game producer living in Seattle. When Watson is not travelling or at sea, he lives in Friday Harbor, Washington, on the grounds of a former Buddhist retreat, which also serves as Sea Shepherd's headquarters. He is close to his daughter now, but for several years he was not. He wrote in one of his memoirs, "I had never felt that a person's vision should be forsaken because of parenthood. In fact, to follow one's bliss is in my opinion the single most important example a father or a mother can set for their child. I would never abandon my dreams for domestic enslavement."

Watson believes that humanity's impulse to organize its surroundings, no matter how benign-seeming or elevating, is inherently destructive. This impulse—dating as far back as the first hoe—has been considered beneficial, Watson argues, because people have assumed that altering the shape of nature does not have real consequences, or because they have measured those consequences only in relation to how they affect humanity, or because they believe that they have a God-given right to do what they wish with plants and animals. Watson considers religion to be the invention of an arrogant species that has spent too much of its existence attempting to remove itself from the animal kingdom. This is why he prefers to call people hominids. "The Hebrew word for man was *adamah*—so there's where you get your Adam—and *adamah* means 'soil,' " he told me. "Cain was a farmer, and farmers began to kill off hunter-gatherers. Our ancestors fed from the table of life; in other words, they fed from nature, but we alienated ourselves from nature by depending upon agriculture, which is what I consider to be the forbidden fruit. "

In the seventies, Watson became interested in the writings of Henry Beston, an early-twentieth-century naturalist, who wrote, "The animal shall not be measured by man. In a world older and more complete than ours they move finished and complete, gifted with extensions of the senses we have lost or never attained." Watson found similar ideas in the work of Henry Fairfield Osborn and William T. Hornaday, and in the Deep Ecology movement, associated with Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosopher and mountaineer, who, in the early seventies, noticed that some environmentalists had begun arguing that no species was of greater worth than another, and that ecosystems should be protected for their own sake, not simply to benefit mankind. A "deep" ecologist would clean up a pond because plants and animals deserve to be free of pollution; a "shallow" ecologist would preserve the pond so that his grandchildren could have a nice place to swim.

Naess believed that the two outlooks could coexist, but Watson argues that they are in profound conflict. He contends that there are only two social currents that really matter, anthropocentrism and biocentrism, and they function in his thinking much like a Marxist dialectic: the former being a dominant and amoral world view that, fixated on the interests of one species, is inherently unstable, violent, and destined to collapse; the latter being a view that is held by a vanguard, egalitarian and just, and that, representing every species' interests, is destined to triumph. There is a strain of misanthropy in this way of thinking, and Watson attracted the attention of the Drudge Report and a number of right-leaning Web sites recently, after he called for drastic but unspecified measures to reduce the world's human population to under a billion. "He likes people to be shook up," Starlet Lum, his first wife, told me. "Maybe it's a bit of the unrest that's in him." Watson has said that "cancer is a cure to nature's problems," that earthworms are more ecologically important than people, and that humanity resembles a virus on the verge of killing its host, the planet.

"People say, 'You're incredibly arrogant,' " Watson told me. "I say, when you're dealing with a species that's as arrogant as the human race you've got to be arrogant to believe that you can actually change it." He regards civilization's greatest artistic and cultural achievements—from architecture to music and film—as expressions of human vanity, "worthless to the earth." He sometimes asks people to imagine the outrage that would occur if someone were to destroy, say, the Vatican or the "Mona Lisa," and he compares that with the indifference that people exhibit toward the mass extinction of plants and animals. "In anthropocentric society, a harsh judgment is given to those that destroy or seek to destroy the creations of humanity," he has written. "Monkey-wrench a bulldozer and they will call you a vandal. Spike a tree and they will call you a terrorist. Liberate a coyote from a trap and they will call you a thief. Yet if a human destroys the wonders of creation, the beauty of the natural world, then anthropocentric society calls such people loggers, miners, developers, engineers, and businessmen."

In lectures, Watson often avoids this dialectic, and talks mainly about the dying oceans. For many conservationists, the near-extinction of numerous whale populations in the seventies, and their continued threatened status today, is emblematic of a much more severe problem: the wholesale harvesting, whether for human consumption or for industry, of too many living things from the sea. Life in the oceans is being eliminated so rapidly that science can barely measure how much of it is gone. Sea Shepherd exists because Watson is arrogant enough to make sure that it is there, but also, perhaps, because our collective faith in the sea's resiliency runs so deep and has become so dangerously comforting that a certain amount of rage and fantasy is demanded to shake it.

Changes to the ocean have never been easy to document. In the seventies, Jacques Cousteau speculated—without much hard evidence—that roughly a third of all life in the oceans had vanished. In 1984, Farley Mowat, the Canadian naturalist and writer, for whom Watson named his flagship, published "Sea of Slaughter," a thoroughly researched but primarily anecdotal book that gave substance to Cousteau's claim. "We are now facing the possibility that the seas may become virtual life-deserts in the not-far-distant future," Mowat wrote. Sifting through ship records, some dating as far back as the sixteenth century, he found evidence of startling abundance among whales, seabirds, and fish. ("Cods are so thick by the shore that we hardly have been able to row a boat through them," a skipper observed in the early sixteen-hundreds.) The records presented a sharp contrast with what Mowat saw in the North Atlantic: the collapse of the cod, haddock, and halibut fisheries, and the virtual extirpation of the right whale—all driven by what he called a "spiral of exploitation." ("As the fish became scarcer, so their value rose," he explained. "They were hunted harder, and became scarcer, and their value rose.") It took Mowat five years to complete the book, and by the end he was despondent. He told me, "I was so depressed that I contemplated blowing myself up. Well, not exactly, but that gives you the idea."

It was not until the mid-nineties that fisheries scientists turned their attention to the spiral of exploitation and attempted to gauge its consequences. They discovered that their discipline had been measuring biodiversity with a very narrow lens: looking, for instance, at habitats only in a particular region of the ocean, or at the rise or decline of a particular species, and usually with respect to benchmarks that had been set just decades earlier. No one had tried to determine what the full spectrum of life in the ocean looked like a hundred years or five hundred years in the past. "We forgot the wonder and splendor of a virgin nature," Watson wrote recently. "We revise history and make it fit into our present perceptions." In 1995, the process of forgetting was given a name—"shifting baseline syndrome"—by Daniel Pauly, a scientist at the University of British Columbia. "Essentially, this syndrome has arisen because each generation of fisheries scientists accepts as a baseline the stock size and species composition that occurred at the beginning of their careers, and uses this to evaluate changes," Pauly argued in the journal *Trends in Ecology and Evolution*. He concluded, "The result obviously is a gradual shift of the baseline, a gradual accommodation of the creeping disappearance of resource species." When Pauly and others took a longer view, they noticed another worrying trend. Humanity had been eating its way down the ocean's food web; as large marine predators became scarce, people developed a taste for smaller and smaller fish. Animals that were once used for bait or that were considered worthless (hagfish, sea cucumber) were later taken in large quantities for human consumption. "Bait thirty years ago was calamari," Pauly told me. "Now it is served in a restaurant. It is very nice. But it was bait before." Future generations, Pauly predicts, only half in jest, will grow up on jellyfish sandwiches.

Technology both furthers the depletion and helps mask it. The tools of industrial fishing (drift nets, bottom trawls, and longlines) compensate for the diminishment of marine life that they cause by taking what little is left all the more intensively. Drift nets—free-floating veils of monofilament webbing that can be as long as twenty-five miles—were essentially banned on the high seas by the United Nations in 1992; at the peak of their use, in the eighties, there was enough drift netting in the ocean on any given day to encircle the planet, if measured end to end. Bottom trawling, which involves raking the ocean floor for food on a huge scale, leaves behind wastelands where there had been complex ecosystems. Like the other forms of industrial fishing, longlines, some of which submerge thousands of hooks in the water, yield immense quantities of bycatch, or unwanted fish, most of which is severely injured or dead. Every year in the United States alone, more than a million tons of bycatch is discarded; in relative terms, this amounts to more than twenty per cent of all the fish hauled out of American waters. Some fisheries are more wasteful than others. Among the most notorious is the shrimp harvest in the Gulf of Mexico. Conducted by bottom trawling, it results in more than eighty per cent bycatch, and countless plants and corals have been uprooted and dumped overboard. There is no terrestrial equivalent of this type of harvest. Pauly says that it would be like bulldozing whole forests to hunt deer.

Watson refers to our collective misuse of the sea as a tragedy of the commons. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization has declared that sixty-nine per cent of the world's major fisheries are either "fully exploited" or "overexploited." Among the most pessimistic studies, one published in *Nature* in 2003 estimated that the combined population of large predatory fish—including tuna, marlin, and swordfish—has dropped to a tenth of what it was before the advent of industrial fishing. A more revealing statistic, perhaps, is the number of scientists who have spoken out about the problem. Earlier this year, more than a hundred signed a letter to the World Trade Organization, urging it to scale back subsidies to the fishing sector. "There are only decades left before the damage we have inflicted on the oceans becomes permanent," the scientists wrote. Watson began ramming drift netters in 1987, before the U.N. ban. In 1993, he pulled his ship alongside a Cuban bottom trawler on the Grand Banks and attacked it with butyric acid. For the past seven years, he has combatted illegal fishing in the Galápagos Islands, one of the ocean's richest and most unspoiled marine habitats. Watson often says, "If we can't save Galápagos, we won't be able to save anything."

In June, after crossing the Pacific from Australia, the Farley arrived in Puerto Ayora, on Santa Cruz, the most populous island in the Galápagos. In a harbor filled with small pleasure boats, it seemed out of place. According to Watson, although the Farley was designed as a North Sea trawler, it was never used for fishing and during the Cold War it was a NATO spy vessel. Some furniture and equipment had been returned to the ship since the Antarctic expedition, but not much. Among the few remaining decorations were paintings of sea animals, including one of Mocha Dick, the whale that apparently inspired Melville's novel.

Unlike campaigns at sea, Watson's work in the Galápagos requires him to negotiate a complicated government bureaucracy. The Galápagos National Park manages the protection of wildlife in the third-largest marine protected area in the world. The Ecuadoran Navy, which monitors and controls the movement of all ships in the area, is reluctant to fight environmental crimes and, at times, has blocked other agencies from combatting them. Ecuador's Environmental Police has the authority to make arrests in the Galápagos but has no real presence on the islands.

And the Galápagos National Park, which patrols the waters, and is eager to end illegal fishing there, is not permitted to use force to prevent criminal activity. In April, Ecuador's President, Rafael Correa, declared that the Galápagos was in a state of environmental crisis, and in June UNESCO announced that the islands were on the World Heritage in Danger List. As many as three hundred thousand sharks are killed annually in the reserve, where shark hunts and industrial fishing are banned.

Conservationists often complain that it is difficult to gain popular support for saving sharks—animals that tend to evoke fear rather than sympathy. In 1975, in the *Georgia Straight*, Watson wrote an angry critique of "Jaws." ("The movie has proven itself more dangerous to marine life than sharks are or ever have been to human life.") Since then, numerous species, including oceanic whitetip sharks, scalloped hammerheads, and daggernose sharks, have experienced catastrophic declines in population. Many sharks perish as bycatch, but increasingly they are being hunted for their fins, a delicacy in China and a lucrative commodity. (The annual export of fins is thought to be worth about a billion dollars.) One study, published in *Ecology Letters* last year, estimates that between twenty-six million and seventy-three million sharks are killed for their fins every year. Not long ago, Watson was nearly imprisoned in Costa Rica after confronting shark hunters in Cocos Island National Park, another UNESCO Heritage site, and seizing some of their equipment. He fled the country as the authorities were trying to apprehend him. (The events are documented in a new film, "Sharkwater.")

In 2000, Watson sailed a Sea Shepherd ship to the Galápagos for the first time, and lent (and eventually donated) a ninety-five-foot former Coast Guard vessel to the park, to help the rangers patrol. Several years later, when a ranger needed to learn how to fly light aircraft to expand the park's reach, Watson provided money for lessons. Sea Shepherd volunteers joined park rangers on their missions, to document their effectiveness. If they believed that the rangers were not aggressive enough, they protested, sometimes publicly. "It's been a rocky road," Watson told me. "Over the last seven years, we've been chased out of here three times by the Navy. Fishermen once seized the park and tried to kick us out." Still, Watson persisted. Last year, he decided to open an office in Puerto Ayora, and hired Sean O'Hearn-Gimenez, a thirty-three-year-old computer specialist, to run it.

O'Hearn-Gimenez, who was born in Puerto Rico, first went to the Galápagos in 2000 as a Sea Shepherd observer. One afternoon while we were on the Farley, he told me about a day that changed his life. He was at sea with the rangers, who had found shark poachers in the reserve; the men argued over what to do with a shark that had become tangled in a line off the poaching vessel's transom. "One of the fishermen got angry and just hooked the shark, gaffed it, and slammed it against the deck. And he goes, 'There you go, there's your shark.' And there is this live shark flapping on deck, bleeding, and they're discussing exactly what to do, and finally one of the fishermen cut the line and threw him overboard. But before he cut the line you could see that the shark was flapping around, injuring himself, because he was desperate to survive. And it was horrible. It was probably the moment where I said—" O'Hearn-Gimenez's eyes began to fill with tears. After a moment, he said, "Sorry. I didn't care. I was willing to die. I didn't give a shit, because the shark almost broke his own tail, trying." He paused again. "And then the shark stood still, gasping, and that's when they just cut the line and threw him back into the water, like he was a piece of nothing."

By May of this year, O'Hearn-Gimenez had turned the Puerto Ayora office into a private intelligence service designed to fight environmental crimes. He identified poachers who were trying to move contraband out of the country, and provided the authorities with the resources—fuel, food, lodging—that they needed to apprehend the criminals. Sea Shepherd began making the Ecuadoran papers. When O'Hearn-Gimenez learned that the mayor of the Galápagos' Isabela Island had cut down a ninety-year-old mangrove forest, he publicized the incident, and the mayor was prosecuted. (The case is pending.) In late June, O'Hearn-Gimenez provided the Environmental Police with information that led to the seizure of nearly nineteen thousand shark fins that were being smuggled to Peru, presumably for shipment to Asia. It was one of the largest shark-fin busts in Ecuador's history.

Watson was due in the Galápagos in early July, after a short trip to Quito, Ecuador's capital, to accept an award from the government for Sea Shepherd's work. In the meantime, Alex Cornelissen was captaining the Farley, and he decided to take the ship out to sea for a couple of days to patrol for illegal long-lining within the reserve. He did this without notifying the park, much to the annoyance of some senior rangers. During the ship's first evening out of port, Cornelissen gathered the crew and announced, "I just want you to know that Sean was supposed to come with us, but the reason why he is in Quito is because there was another bust. With our help, the police confiscated twenty thousand sea cucumbers." The crew cheered.

The next morning during breakfast, three high-pitched alarms rang in the galley. Everyone ran to the deck or to the bridge. A deckhand in the crow's nest had spotted a fishing vessel that was dropping miles of line into the marine reserve. Behind the vessel, a speedboat, a series of empty plastic oil jugs—blue, green, yellow, black—bobbed in the water. The containers were being used as buoys for the longline, braided polypropylene cording. Cornelissen, looking through his binoculars, announced, "Speedboat five miles away." The first mate, Peter Hammarstedt, yelled from the bridge to the deckhands, "Get some grappling hooks. Get a ladder in case someone is going in the water." The plan was to pull up the line. Hammarstedt hung his head out the window to try to gauge the ship's distance from the line.

"It's just off the starboard bow," he said.

"Get it away from the propeller," Cornelissen said.

The line became taut. The crew tried to pull it in, hand over hand, but each pull seemed to edge the line closer to the propeller. Cornelissen turned to Hammarstedt and said, "Get that line out of the water, dude, now!" Hammarstedt ordered the line to be cut. The crew lifted another portion of the line on deck and, this time, brought it to an eyelet at the bow, through which it could be threaded and brought on board with minimum danger to the propellers. Miles of line were pulled through the eyelet. Because the line had not been in the water for very long, most of the hooks were either baited or empty; only a few had snared fish, nearly all of them yellowfin tuna.

As the crew hauled in the line, someone on the bridge noticed that the poachers had fled, and a plan quickly developed to pursue them in a Zodiac. Cornelissen wanted video footage of the speedboat's name and registration number. As a crane hoisted the Zodiac overboard, three crew members leaped in. One was carrying a video camera and a handheld G.P.S., which he had been instructed to frame at the bottom of his shot, to prove that the poachers were in the reserve.

The speedboat was not visible from the Zodiac, which sits very close to the water, but it could be seen from the Farley's bridge. By radio, Cornelissen provided the Zodiac with directions, and for the first mile or so the dinghy, driven by a volunteer named Adam Conniss, raced across the empty water. Conniss's face was sunburned, and his dreadlocks were blowing behind his ears. "Ahaaa, you motherfuckers!" he screamed. After a few minutes, the Farley radioed to tell him that he was going the wrong way. He adjusted the Zodiac's course, and the poachers came into view.

The Zodiac was moving faster than the speedboat, and when the poachers noticed this they began to jettison evidence of long-lining. They threw bait into the water—the trail of fish oil in their wake was visible more than a mile away—and dumped spools of polypropylene cording, which floated near the surface. The first spool became tangled in the Zodiac's propeller. Conniss stopped to cut it away, and after that he steered more carefully. Minutes later, the Zodiac pulled alongside the poachers. The speedboat contained three men, and its name, Siempre Maximo, was painted on the bow. As the two vessels raced side by side, the fishermen looked at the Zodiac with befuddlement. Clearly, the Farley did not belong to the Navy or to the park, and yet its crew was acting as if it had authority to police the area. Stranger still, perhaps, was the end to the pursuit. Once the video footage was shot, the Zodiac veered away from the Siempre Maximo and headed back toward the Farley.

The rest of the afternoon was spent pulling in lines, an arduous task. When a longline is taut, it is likely to cause blisters in the hands of the person pulling it aboard; when the line is slack, there is a danger that some part of it will drift into a propeller. Longlines are slippery in the water and, in this case, the line was coated with broken jellyfish tentacles that stung. By evening, the crew had pulled in roughly ten miles of line and about two hundred and fifty hooks. It had untangled fifteen tunas, most of them carcasses, and two rays. All the animals, alive or dead, were returned to the sea.

That night, I climbed into my bunk thinking about the fishermen we had pursued. The Siempre Maximo did not belong to a commercial fleet; its lines were handmade. And yet, even if one could confirm that the men's financial predicament was dire, it would not make the ocean seem less vulnerable. In a day's catch, assuming for the sake of argument that the Farley had interrupted the fishermen while they were in the middle of their work, and that only ten per cent of their hooks caught anything, the lines could have snared about fifty animals; in a week of solid fishing, about three hundred and fifty; in a year, nearly twenty thousand—all this, potentially, from just three poachers in a tiny boat off the coast of South America.

Watson and O'Hearn-Gimenez arrived in Puerto Ayora on July 5th. "We met with the Vice-President and the Minister of Foreign Affairs," Watson told me. The ceremony had been followed by talks with the general commander of the National Police, who wanted to discuss how Sea Shepherd could assist the police in fighting poachers. The talks concluded with a signed pledge formalizing the relationship. One clause stated that Ecuador might grant Watson's crew the authority to conduct joint patrols with the police in the reserve. "This was a surprise," O'Hearn-Gimenez said. "I'm sure this was the result of the successful operations we had. I didn't think that we were going to have meetings, and then last night the general—"

"Get this," Watson interrupted. "The general wants to go on the Antarctica campaign—"

"He came to the ceremony, and in the end he mentioned this joint coöperation," O'Hearn-Gimenez continued. The two men spoke excitedly about the meetings. "The problem is the goddam Navy," Watson said. "Everybody in Quito knows the Navy is on the take." Earlier in the year, rangers had attempted to prevent the Navy from giving illegal tours in the Galápagos; in return, members of the Navy and the Air Force had assaulted the director of the park, Raquel Molina, and several rangers. (The Ministry of Defense is investigating the incident.) When Watson met with Molina to find out how he could further help the park, she spoke about the assault and seemed shaken. It was obvious that the more involved with the government Sea Shepherd became, the more it would have to compromise.

Watson's initial plan had been to take the Farley through the Panama Canal to the Grand Banks, to dump the net rippers, and then, possibly, to Iceland, to combat whaling there. Most of the crew had joined with the hope of going to Iceland, which now appeared to be suspending its planned whale hunt. In any case, Watson, excited about the agreement he had signed in Quito, decided to linger in Ecuador. He had also learned that an American company called Planktos was planning to send a ship into international waters about three hundred miles from the marine reserve; Planktos had announced that it would dump tons of iron dust in the ocean to spark the growth of phytoplankton, and then sell credits based on how much carbon the phytoplankton consumed. Activists and government officials in Ecuador and in the United States had expressed concern about the project's environmental impact; Watson thought that he might intervene. He spent hours at his computer, researching the project, and continued to meet with officials. The head of the Environmental Police, Colonel Teresa Carranza, came to Puerto Ayora for a tour of the Farley. At a dinner that Watson held for her, she raised her glass and announced, "Paul Watson and all of you here, what you've been doing is very contagious. I have been influenced by what you do." Then she turned to Watson and handed him a gold pin. She continued, "Now, with everything that has happened, Sea Shepherd is part of the Environmental Police, an extension of the Environmental Police, and this shield is a great honor. It is only worn by police officers." Watson smiled. The pin was a symbolic gesture, another step toward being given real authority to protect the sea, but the praise seemed to make him uncomfortable. He glanced down, pointed to O'Hearn-Gimenez, and said, "I haven't done anything. He's done it all."

In the morning, droplets of seawater and precipitation pricked faces, arms, and legs. From the Farley's deck, the panorama was one of humanity pushing into nature: ships, noise, people, and the mundane detritus of civilization—water bottles and diesel exhaust—spreading out from the shoreline. Since 1990, the population of the Galápagos has grown from under ten thousand to thirty thousand. On board the Farley, the crew was restless. Watson's volunteers had spent more than a month crossing the Pacific, determined to save whales in Iceland. For many crew members, the campaign against Planktos presented a confusing moral calculus, and it wasn't even certain that Watson would pursue the company's ship. Without a clear objective, the cycle of chores that kept the Farley running—the continuous battle against rust and decrepitude—became tedious, eroding morale each day. At least ten people planned to leave the ship. One volunteer said, "It's getting a little silly, just feeling useless." Watson told me that there were worse places to sit idle than the Galápagos. "They can all jump ship," he said.

"I have received death threats, and I'm pretty much in a safe house right now," O'Hearn-Gimenez told me from his cell phone on August 3rd. I was back in New York, and he was on the Ecuadoran mainland. He had orchestrated another huge shark-fin bust—as much as three tons, he speculated, in three hiding places. But during the seizures mobs of fishermen had gathered at two of the hideouts, and a high-ranking officer had called off the bust. O'Hearn-Gimenez told me that the contraband belonged to "one of the biggest Mafia leaders in Ecuador," whom he suspected of interfering. Whether or not corrupt officials were involved, the government's position on the shark-fin trade was changing. In late July, the President decreed that sharks accidentally caught could legally be sold—a significant loosening of the ban. On August 4th, he announced, "We are not going to allow Americans from Sea Shepherd or wherever else to come here to tell us what to do." He ordered that O'Hearn-Gimenez be deported. As O'Hearn-Gimenez was packing his bags, however, the order was rescinded.

Still, it seemed that Sea Shepherd's position in the country had grown much more tenuous. The Farley's port clearance had expired, and the Ecuadoran Navy was anxious to see the ship leave the Galápagos. As the Farley sailed from Puerto Ayora, Watson wrote me a long e-mail from the radio room, in which he declared his intention to stay and look for poachers in Ecuadoran waters. His defiance reminded me of something he had once said about Conan the Barbarian, the comic-book hero. "It's a wonderful ethic that this guy has," Watson said. "You know, he wouldn't hesitate to take your head off. But there is a code: always doing the honorable thing, even when it put him in life-threatening situations. He always honored everything that was weaker than he was. He had that mercy quality. But, at the same time, strength. And he never hesitated. He would never stop to think, Am I doing the right thing? He knew he was doing the right thing."

Watson was also doing, not thinking. He wrote, "We are making our way in the darkness between the islands and we should be in the area where we suspect illegal long-lining is taking place by early morning. The Navy has been hailing us on the radio but we have been ignoring them. I don't think they have any idea where we are or where we are heading. We were ordered to go due east and out of the Galápagos marine reserve. Instead we are going southwest and deep into the marine reserve." Humpback and sperm whales had surfaced near the ship; a red-throated frigate bird had perched on the foremast for most of the day. "The seas are calm," Watson wrote. "The night sky is inky black, without a star in sight and no moon. It is like cruising through deep space. In the far distance we can see the dull glow of Puerto Ayora to our stern. It's amazing cruising through these waters flying our black-and-white Jolly Roger, in defiance of the Ecuadoran Navy. Not much different than the pirates of the seventeenth century, really, challenging authority in defense of the living treasures of the Enchanted Islands." ◆

PHOTOGRAPH: VII