

The HangLine

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A Parallel Universe

Floating in the darkness with nothing but the twinkling sparkles of bioluminescence, which shine from floating microscopic animals, bestows a true feeling of weightlessness and mystery. As the sun drops quickly into the western horizon, the once bright clear blue waters become a thickened pool of slick fluid, an empty void painted by a diver's torch.

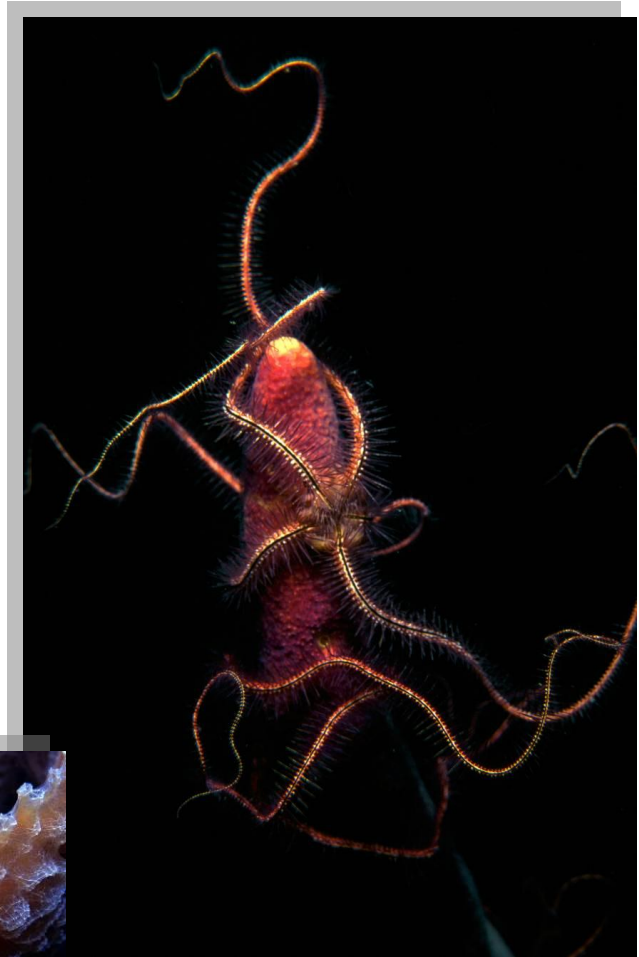
Descending down into this environment you have no sense of how deep or wide this ocean is - just that it is deep, and wide. You are overwhelmed with a sense that daylight never existed and never will, and that this place could be called Narnia. You begin to believe that this is a not her universe and the creatures within are not from our planet.

Yet surprisingly, this whole experience is filled with tranquility and wonder. This is the Caribbean sea at nightfall where the sea animals begin a behavioral pattern so dynamic that it is now considered a world-class phenomenon.

Along the edge of the shoreline, the lights from land reflect and bounce off the shallow hardpan coral



that extends out the first twenty feet or so from shore. This is the area eroded by wave action and is normally quite featureless. Yet at night, these barren coral heads become provocative sculptures





illuminated by a greenish-blue supernatural glow reflecting from the lights on shore.

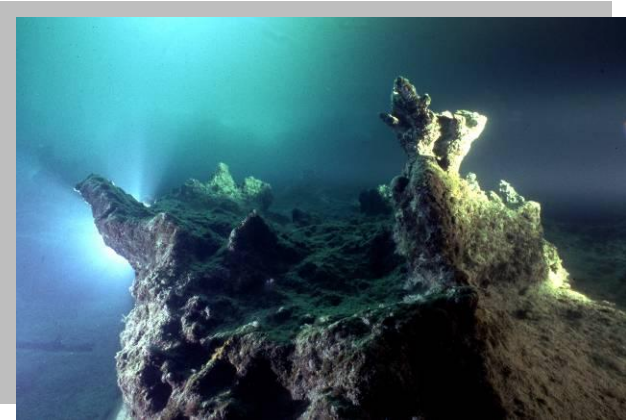
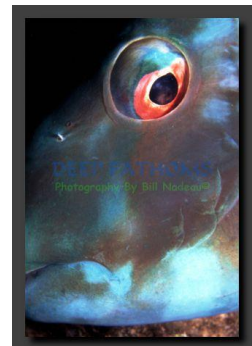
It is like a dreamy mist-filled path cutting through a forest in a faraway world. A little further out, the sea fans and small groupings of fish appear, casting shadowy outlines with only faint hints of colour as they sway to and fro, with the gentle swell.

Up above, the large tropical moon casts enough ambient light that a divers torch is useless and I suddenly realize that the night sky is also part of this environment. Swimming and diving in amongst these coral spurs and grooves gives one the feeling they have been animated into a Walt Disney fairy tale.

Further out, a cluster of colourful soft corals and sponges are caught by a panning dive light. Swimming up to an extended piece of Finger Sponge, I notice it is crawling with active Brittle Stars. One star is reaching far out into space as if it were attempting to make contact with something or someone. I drop down under the ledge where the sea stars and sponge have met to conference and explore what lurks in the shadows.



At night, most nocturnal critters go out to hunt and feed and mate but some remain hidden - quite awake - quite aware that food may pass, or that they may pass as food. At first nothing appears to be hiding in this crack. And then, without warning, a large lobster emerges from the shadows to greet me - and my camera lens. He extends his feelers and cautiously probes my space. Over the bank and down into the sandy ocean floor, a squadron





of large silvery Tarpon are drawn to smaller feeder fish now dancing in the light beams of our flash lights. One by one they pick off the small fry, which appear hypnotized by the light. The Tarpon's large strong bodies fly effortlessly as they follow us like fighter jets escorting a cargo plane. Two other beams light up the next ridge and the Tarpon soon break formation to check them out. It is a pair of divers approaching us from the deeper water. We shut off our lights and follow along, enjoying how the distant lights from our neighbors illuminate the reef. Just then, we are startled as one of their torches suddenly blasts a candescent beam up the back of a tall bronze mermaid statue, giving her the brief appearance of possessing wings. She emerges between the high walls of a narrow canyon and looks as if she were expecting us but longing for someone else.



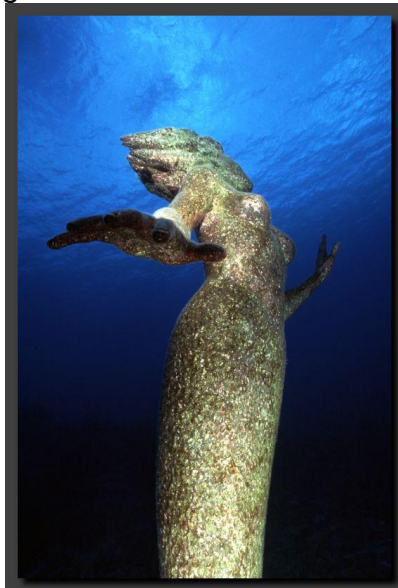
they both dive again to the bottom where the male releases a cloud of sperm and the female agitates uncontrollably in his wake.

Back in the shallow hardpan, a dozen or so reef squid hover in unison spinning their bodies to match our movements. Their translucent fins are pulsating with purple and red navigation lights like a visiting alien ship scanning the earth's surface.

When we break the surface, the strange world disappears instantly. In the distance I can hear cars passing on a nearby road, people laughing in a nearby beach bar, and the palms rushing as a gentle tropical breeze picks up. A plane flies overhead and a dog barks at a cornered cat. But my mind is still ed of something Albert Einstein once said;

"The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all art and science"

As we trace our path back to the shore we pass a roaming octopus who appears more concerned with finding a crab for lunch than it is with our threat to his wellbeing. We swim a little further and discover a pair of spawning Flounder, ascending through the water column in a furious dance before



That feeling that I had earlier, that the night would never end, still has not gone. When I look up at the stars and the moon I feel that they now belong to the sea. And I wonder if any of the creatures I saw tonight will remember me like I will remember them.

~Safe Diving

