

ricane, but a story about the ethics of recovery. Without an honest reckoning of the storm's moral implications, Smith concludes, "we seem doomed to perpetuate the recovery divide the next time a powerful Atlantic storm decides to cut its teeth on southern soil."

Deep Trouble

We should be more afraid *for* sharks than of them

REVIEW BY RICHARD ELLIS

DEMON FISH:

Travels Through the Hidden World of Sharks

By Juliet Eilperin, Pantheon, 320 pp., \$26.95

THE NUMBER OF papers, books, notes, letters, and articles about sharks is almost incalculable. This is not surprising when one considers the fascination that these creatures have inspired since humans first became aware of them. We can assume that the earliest seafarers saw the sinuous shapes lurking near the water's surface and quickly learned that they could prove dangerous. The first reference to the shark is unknown, but an aboriginal drawing in Australia, more than 30,000 years old, shows a sharklike creature eating a man. Pliny, Aristotle, and Herodotus wrote of sharks, and by the middle of the 16th century, *shark* had entered the English language. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, declaring the word to be "of obscure origin," suggests it may have been introduced by the sailors of Captain John Hawkins's expedition to the Yucatán, who brought home a specimen that was exhibited in London in 1569.

I am curating an exhibit about sharks for

Richard Ellis is the author of *The Book of Sharks*; *Great White Shark* (with John McCosker); and *The Great Sperm Whale*.

the Fort Lauderdale Museum of Art (yes, *Art*) and was delighted to learn of *Washington Post* science writer

Juliet Eilperin's *Demon Fish: Travels Through the Hidden World of Sharks*. It will make a perfect adjunct to the exhibit, providing interested visitors with additional information not readily available elsewhere. Eilperin's use of the word *demon* in the title might suggest she believes sharks are evil or frightening; instead, she finds them intriguing and more than a little important to humans. "If we pay attention, sharks can tell us about their watery world and its implications for the land we inhabit," she writes. "How we negotiate sharing the planet with sharks could help determine what our own future looks like, not just theirs." Author Peter Benchley (*Jaws*) and filmmaker Peter Gimbel (*Blue Water, White Death*) are the two icons of shark encounters, but Eilperin discusses many others who have brought sharks into human consciousness—Jules Verne, Edgar Allan Poe, Ernest Hemingway, and Jacques Cousteau; to this list, we must now add Eilperin herself.

For this inclusive and important book, Eilperin traveled around the world to find people who study, fish for, dive with, venerate, or have been attacked by sharks. Delving deeply into the shark scientist's world, she reports on new developments in shark research, such as "Critttercam Accelerometers," which determine a shark's speed by means of a video camera affixed to its back. The devices rely on "the same motor-sensitive computer chips used in smart phones, iPods, and the Nintendo Wii," Eilperin writes, "and they are providing unprecedented detail about how sharks move beneath the water." Outfitting sharks with satellite tags has given us a much better idea of where they can be found at a given time. And Mahmood Shivji, of Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, has begun analyzing naturally occurring geographic markers in the DNA of sharks caught and butchered by local fishermen to determine where they were caught, and thus which populations need protection. Researchers have learned that virtually all shark populations are threatened, and none more than the oceanic



whitetip, once the most numerous shark species in the Gulf of Mexico but now almost extinct there.

One prevailing theme has governed the intertwined destinies of men and sharks: fear. Throughout history, almost everyone believed sharks were a menace and ought to be avoided, if not eliminated outright. Stories of shark attacks dominated the literature for centuries, and then along came *Jaws* to ratchet up our fears exponentially. I do not believe there has ever been another novel (or movie) that has caused so many people to change their behavior. (How many people do you know who are still afraid to go swimming in the ocean?) But as modern fishing technology has improved, sharks are being caught in such numbers that the balance has shifted dramatically: instead of fearing sharks, we now fear for them.

Sport fishermen still target sharks—the bigger the better—but the primary threat comes not from men armed with a rod, a reel, and a big hook (or even a spear gun), but from the long-liners who haul in hundreds of thousands

of sharks every year to be used in the manufacture of shark's fin soup, a practice that has seriously endangered shark populations around the world. At weddings and other celebrations in China, Taiwan, Singapore (and also New York and San Francisco), the soup is a mandatory menu item—not for its taste, but because it is very expensive and trumpets the social status of the host. Eilperin writes, “This is the most stunning aspect of the entire economic empire that has arisen around shark's fin soup: it is, to be blunt, a food product with no culinary value whatsoever. It is all symbol, no substance.”

Eilperin tracks down the heretofore unpublicized shark fishery in Kesenuma, Japan, where, as at larger fisheries in China, fins are cut off to make shark's fin soup. Does Kesenuma sound familiar? It should. It was one of the cities devastated by the recent earthquake and tsunami. The town's fishing boats, factories, and even the museum were destroyed, meaning, at least for the moment, that some sharks have been saved from the slaughter.