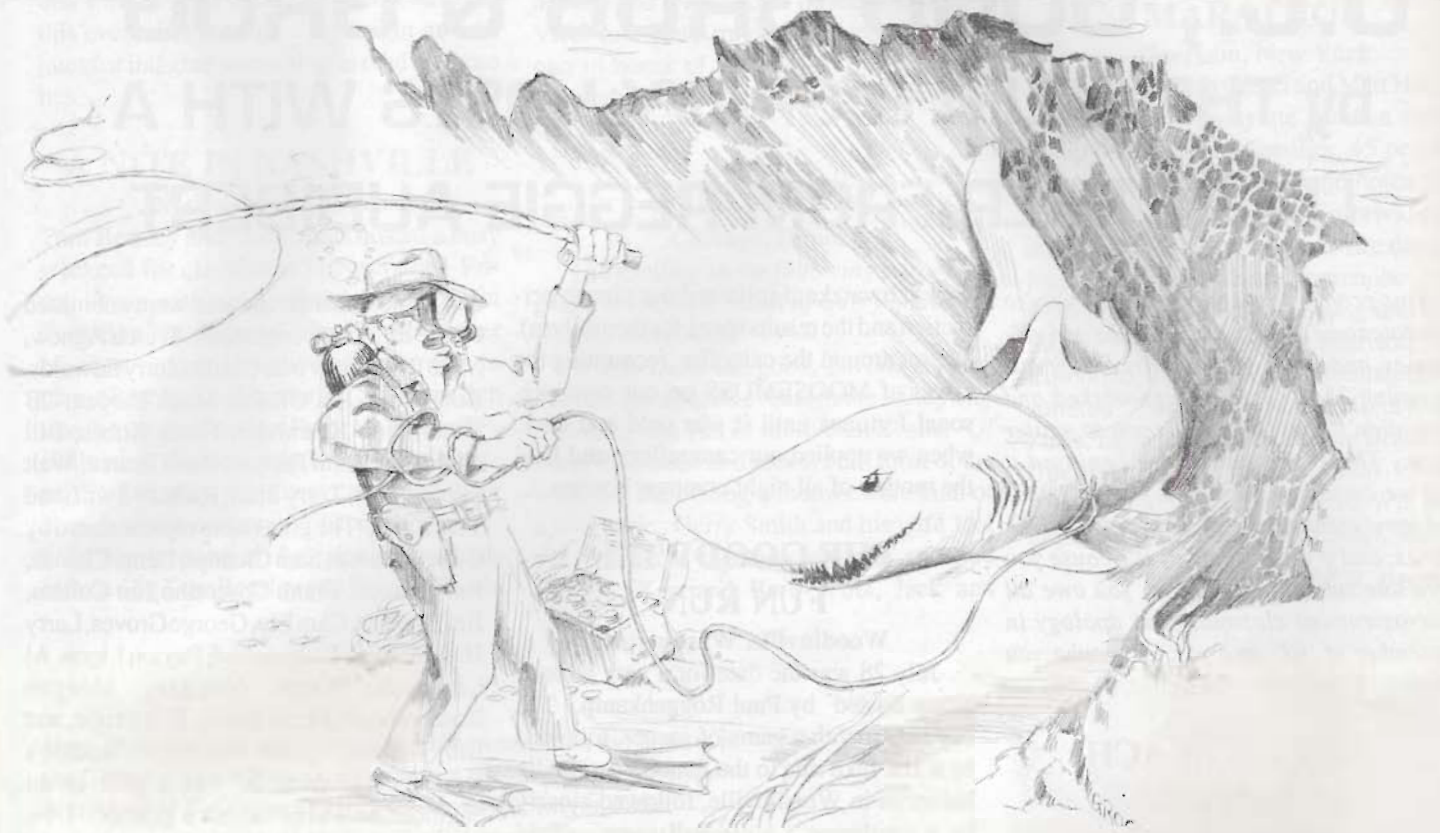


THEODORE P. HILL

AND THE GREAT SHARK



OF THE BAHAMIAN REEF

Two years ago I was leading a group of three inexperienced divers exploring the coral reefs at the West End of Grand Bahama Island when I happened upon a five foot shark resting in a shallow coral cave in six feet of water. One by one I led the other divers into the mouth of the cave to see this somewhat rare sight.

My diving trips are strictly "no frills" and on this particular trip we were camping in the bush illegally (camping is not permitted anywhere on the island) and spearfishing for much of our food. The cold March water and strenuous exercise made us even hungrier campers than usual, and all I could think of at the time was how absolutely delicious shark steaks are. We had no spears which would handle a shark that size, but I marked

the cave with a float anyway before we continued the dive.

After we returned to shore emptyhanded and famished, I decided to make a return run for the shark, which I had mistaken for a relatively docile nurse shark. Combing the beach turned up a length of sturdy rope, and I talked one of the other divers into returning to the cave with me where we found the shark still resting. After several tries I was able to slip a noose around the shark's mid-section from a small opening in the roof of the cave directly above the shark's back. Then I swam into the cave to get the free end of the rope which was dangling from the shark. The shark flinched, but just stared at me while I retrieved the end of the rope and swam quickly back out of the cave. There I

crouched behind a coral head and coiled the rope around my left arm. My hare-brained plan was to simply haul the shark out of the cave and drag it back to shore. I tugged for all I was worth, but the shark did not budge an inch — until I relaxed. Then without warning it suddenly shot out of the cave right toward my coral head. As it made a pass at me the lasso, fortunately, slipped from its body. Anticipating a possible second pass, my buddy and I swam tensely to shore. Safely on shore, my buddy looked at me and shook his head.

"Why the hell did you have me go along?" he asked. "I wasn't any help out there!"

"Because," I grinned, "having you along meant there were two of us in the water. And for a Ranger, fifty percent odds is an acceptable risk!"