

REALITY

ON



THE

HIGH SEAS

BY ANDY DEHNART





IF YOU GO BEHIND  
THE SCENES ON  
**WHALE WARS**,  
IT'S HARD TO TELL  
WHO NEEDS SAVING:  
THE WHALES, THE  
CONSERVATIONISTS  
OR THE ANIMAL  
PLANET CREW WHO  
RECORDS IT ALL

**T**he skull glides through the gray evening air, its hollow black eyes surveying the Faroe Islands,

land that seems to have risen from the sea just to be photographed and admired. On a map, the 18-island archipelago looks like Italy flooded by melting ice caps; from the sea, it looks like the creation of Hollywood digital-effects artists, volcanic rock exposed where streams cut through the green of swaying grass that blankets the islands. Some of its 700 miles of coastline juts up dramatically, towering above the ocean—no trees, only sheep that fearlessly walk in places it should be impossible to walk. In coves where the land slopes toward the sea, two-story houses nestle in the grass. On this Friday night, the windows in one cove twinkle, literally, as residents take pictures of the blue and gray ship that is approaching their harbor, their dock, their home.

Cameras are filming from aboard the *Steve Irwin*, the flagship vessel of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, which

ILLUSTRATION BY GREGORY MANCHESS



**"THAT'S THE JOB: HOURS OF SHEER BOREDOM FOLLOWED BY MINUTES OF INCREDIBLE EXCITEMENT."**



**THE AGING STEVE IRWIN IS ONE THREE SHIPS SEA SHEPHERD USES TO MOUNT ITS ANTI-WHALING CAMPAIGNS.**



**PAUL WATSON (RIGHT) FOUNDED SEA SHEPHERD AFTER LEAVING GREENPEACE IN A CONTROVERSIAL HUFF. "MY JOB IS TO MAKE PEOPLE ANGRY," HE SAYS. HIS MOST RECENT TARGET: THE LITTLE-KNOWN AND LARGELY IGNORED FAROE ISLANDS, HALFWAY BETWEEN SCOTLAND AND ICELAND. DESPITE HIS NEWFOUND TV STARDOM ON WHALE WARS, HE'S ONE OF THE MOST HATED CONSERVATIONISTS ALIVE. "I'M LIKE AN ACUPUNCTURE NEEDLE," HE SAYS.**



announces its presence with a massive two-story version of the skull-and-crossbones flag that has marked pirate ships for 300 years. Its Jolly Roger is modified with obvious symbolism: The outlines of two dolphins swim in a circle on the skull's forehead, a shepherd's staff and a trident replacing the bones underneath. This modern pirate ship is potentially dangerous, even deadly, to the volunteers who crew it and to anyone who boards, such as a visiting journalist from *PLAYBOY* and the people who produce *Whale Wars*, the Animal Planet series that follows Sea Shepherd. *Whale Wars* is well watched in the Faroe Islands, yet it is not a show this tiny, independently governed Danish territory wanted filmed here, even if it will make millions of people aware of its existence for the first time. Cameras came to the Faroe Islands for 38 days last summer to watch as Sea Shepherd's two ships cut through fog, a helicopter circling overhead, because in this nation of fewer than 50,000 people, they kill and eat whales.

The Faroese have been keeping records of whale hunts, known in their Nordic language as *grindadráp*, since 1584. Commonly called the *grind* (pronounced "grinned"), the hunt is noncommercial, with the communities that kill the whales sharing the meat. That is one of many ways the Faroe Islands' whaling industry differs from Japan's, which Sea Shepherd is best known for targeting. Although the International Whaling Commission banned commercial whaling for its member nations in 1986, Japan continued its hunt in the Southern Ocean, exploiting a loophole that allows the killing of whales for science. In 2011, Sea Shepherd did what the IWC did not: It stopped Japanese whaling. The fleet returned to Japan early, citing the organization's harassment: activists in small inflatable boats zipping around towering whaling ships, splattering them with bloodred paint and dropping ropes in the water to entangle their propellers. This is the work of Sea Shepherd founder Paul Watson, a man who might be the most hated—and most effective—international activist alive. He is also the most unlikely, a frumpy man of 61 who tells stories in a generally monotone Canadian accent through a slack jaw outlined by a white goatee. He doesn't look like a person who would be branded a terrorist or demonized for his unapologetic actions, which range from co-founding and later disparaging Greenpeace to sinking Icelandic whaling ships. Onboard his ship, his presence barely registers. Watson appears to spend most of his time peering at his laptop or conducting interviews with the media in his office, which is directly under the bridge and has portholes framed by square red curtains and a desk that is a mess of maps, books, papers and cables. Watson delegates nearly everything and appears disconnected. On the bridge one day, the Skype telephone system failed to connect the ship to (continued on page 128)



## HIGH SEAS

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someone who may have been reporting a *grind*. “Whoever’s in charge of this better get it fixed up,” he says, not a trace of emotion in his voice.

Watson is an enigma who’s impossible to ignore because he does what few people are willing to do: define what matters and pursue it relentlessly. Sea Shepherd does other work to protect marine life, from the Galapagos Islands to its home country of Canada, and this is not its first visit to the Faroe Islands. But it is its first visit accompanied by camera crews from the internationally popular Animal Planet reality series that has, for four years, followed the group’s efforts in the Southern Ocean and transformed both the network and Sea Shepherd, bringing attention that a stream of press releases couldn’t match. Sea Shepherd spent \$293,733.82 on this campaign, called Operation Ferocious Isles, but its real impact may be felt this spring, when the Faroe Islands episodes are aired and the world sees the group in action.

Long-finned pilot whales, a species of oceanic dolphin like the killer whale, are about 20 feet long, weigh between 3,000 and 6,000 pounds and have large, round foreheads. When they are spotted swimming near the Faroe Islands, a series of events unfolds, tradition codified into law that’s specified in the Faroese government’s detailed Executive Order on the Pilot Whale Drive. The crew that spots the whales attaches a cloth to their boat’s mast and immediately contacts the district’s *grindadráp* administrator, who is in charge of organizing the hunt along with the whaling foremen, who are appointed to five-year terms they cannot refuse. Wearing approved badges or uniforms, the administrator and the foremen set out on boats with the Faroese flag flying. Together, they decide whether to drive the whales and, if they do, which pre-authorized whaling bay to use and whether to drive the animals back out if there are too many for that bay. They may also designate a whaling area, which includes land and airspace, and clear it of all vessels not participating in the hunt—such as Sea Shepherd’s small inflatable boats and Jet Skis, which sit on decks waiting to be deployed to do whatever possible to stop a *grind*.

Boats are arranged in a semicircle to corral whales, and stones are thrown into the water to keep them moving forward. As the animals splash toward shore, misty geysers erupting from their heads, Faroese men run into the water, hooking blowholes with government-approved tools to drag ashore those whales that haven’t beached themselves. Unsheathing their *grindaknívar* (knives with artfully crafted wooden handles), they cut deep across the whale’s neck, splitting the flesh open and severing the spinal cord. Blood splatters the men and turns the bay the color of cherry Kool-Aid.

Once on land, where dead whales can be used to teach others how to kill them, the carcasses are cooled by carving slits in their stomachs, as though opening the luggage compartment of an airplane, and letting the intestines spill out. Within an hour, everyone

who took part in the *grind* is identified, and the whales are measured (the unit is the *skinn*, which is approximately 75 pounds of blubber and 84 pounds of meat) and labeled. Based on a distribution system outlined by the government, the catch may be divided among everyone from the person who first spotted the whales to the entire community, and those who have a share of a whale help butcher it. The sheets of whale are hung in the cool breeze and dried into black pieces that will be eaten with potatoes. All this is done in the open. The process is detailed, including photographs, on an unexpectedly transparent website ([whaling.fo](http://whaling.fo)) maintained by the Ministry of Fisheries.

There were 1,107 whales killed this way in 2010 in the Faroe Islands; 726 died during nine *grinds* in 2011. None were killed during the five weeks and three days Sea Shepherd was there.



Chris Aultman, piloting the *Steve Irwin's* helicopter, is wearing a green flight suit with removable patches that allow him to hide the Sea Shepherd logo for this campaign—a tiny bit of anonymity that made life easier as he sipped coffee at the islands' only airport waiting to refuel. Aultman banks the MD 500 helicopter and circles back after the *Whale Wars* camera operator sitting behind him notices something. It's just some detritus, perhaps seaweed. "That's the job: hours of sheer boredom followed by minutes of incredible excitement," Aultman says.

One day on the bridge, where an old PC sometimes streams music from Spotify, a *Whale Wars* audio engineer is tucked into a corner listening to crew members, who wear mikes inside their shirts so devices can record everything they say. Cameras and mikes are also placed overhead to capture anything that might be missed by the camera operators, one of whom is perched on a table, sometimes filming, sometimes chatting. Watson comes in and walks over to a map used to plot their position. Suddenly everyone is racing around. "We're going." "We're going up as quick as we can." "Could be a hoax. We're just going to haul ass." Aultman moves quickly through the narrow hallway, down a flight of stairs and out the back of the ship to the onboard hangar, ready to take up the helicopter to investigate a report of Faroese herding whales. The *Brigitte Bardot*, a Sea Shepherd interceptor vessel named after the actress and animal rights activist, has also been notified so it can race over to attempt to stop the *grind*.

The hangar door begins to pull back, telescoping into itself, until it's stopped by an awful noise—a large bolt has fallen on the track and bent. Aultman puts it into a vise and tries to bend it back. When that doesn't work, he grabs a mallet and bangs away as two deckhands—one of whom has just raced in, looking disheveled—start to assemble the helicopter's rotor, the blades of which are removed when the aircraft is not in use. "Chris, what's the best time to OTF you?" asks *Whale Wars* producer Philippe Denham, referring to an on-the-fly interview, which differs from those conducted in the ship's office, away from anyone else's hearing, at least until the crew members' comments air

on international television. "Right before I get in." The five blades slide in, bolts slide down, and the helicopter is ready. Aultman is thrilled. "Fourteen minutes. That's a new record," he says. Inside the transparent bubble, Aultman plays with the stick, and the helicopter moves a bit. The area is engulfed in an incredible downdraft and noise that's loud even with protective earphones.

Another camera operator runs back and forth, filming the helicopter from different angles, until he slips and falls, tumbling toward the hangar—a potentially fatal fall anywhere else, as guard rails have been lowered to allow the helicopter access. After a few minutes, Aultman lifts the helicopter effortlessly off the ship, banking toward the reported *grind*. It's suddenly quiet. The camera operator now wants to interview Beatrice Yannacopoulos, the deckhand whose time off was interrupted by a call to come help. "No, let's not talk about that," she says. "I'm not going to say I was fast asleep." But he encourages her, and finally they begin. With the camera positioned on her face, she recaps. "I was on a break," she says, laughing. "I can't lie. Fuck." She ends up saying she was "taking it easy" when she heard about the *grind*, and the cameraman drops his equipment and hugs her. "You did such a good job," he tells her.

Back on the bridge, quiet is occasionally interrupted by radio static. The phone rings, and a crewman answers: "That you, Chris?" Then comes the verdict: "Confirmation that it was a race and not a *grind*. So, false alarm." The 15 boats someone on shore had spotted were part of a regatta, not a whale hunt.

Built in 1975 to patrol and protect Scotland's marine life, the *Steve Irwin* shows its age, from worn carpet to rusted metal, and smells of toast, fuel, burning tar, sour hotel rooms and human sweat. Life aboard is not glamorous; it is not the kind of place you want to be unless you have a reason, a passion. If *Whale Wars* misleads viewers, it's only in the compression of time: The editing skips across the surface of weeks or months at sea until the requirements of advertiser-driven television win and it plunges into confrontation: ships colliding, water cannons blasting, projectiles launching. Instead, hours of boredom and rote tasks consume the lives of the Sea Shepherd's different crews, a diverse, international group of mostly volunteers who range from an American college student to an Australian property developer, all of whom wear the Sea Shepherd uniform of long-sleeved black T-shirts or hoodies emblazoned with its logo. Volunteers don't just give their time, they pay \$100 to apply—the popularity of *Whale Wars* has helped the organization with its recruiting and fund-raising—and pay their way to and from the ship. Once onboard, they're assigned jobs in different areas of the ship, such as the bridge, engine room, galley and deck, and trained on the job. Watson is convinced his team of untrained volunteers is far more effective than professionals, whom he mostly loathes.

The deck crew, who operate the small boats used in confrontations, has the most routine set of jobs, such as cleaning toilets and emptying the nearby buckets of shit-

covered toilet paper. (Detailed instructions tacked to a board direct that these be emptied overboard if the ship is more than 12 miles offshore.) The work is shared: One morning, Yannacopoulos, the deck crew member who works on the helicopter, mops hallways so narrow it's impossible to stretch out even one arm.

Before a campaign begins, a senior crew member gathers the volunteers for brief media training. They are told to speak to cameras both honestly but positively, not swearing or focusing on personality conflicts—the meat of most reality-television shows. That may explain why conversations with Sea Shepherd volunteers tend to take an on-ramp into passionate but predictable and almost rote comments about the importance of saving whales, discussions almost inhuman in their predictability except for the passionate veneer of belief that coats every word. At first, *Whale Wars* struggled to get even that.

In the summer of 2007, Charlie Foley, who'd left Animal Planet a year earlier, was working for the Discovery Channel on a film about the Gettysburg Address when new Animal Planet president Marjorie Kaplan, hired to reshape the network, recruited him to return. During his interview, Foley said he'd take the job only if Kaplan let him pursue a series following the efforts of anti-whaling activists. "I was expecting what would have been the sort of harsh, mealy-mouthed answer or maybe an inscrutable look," he says. "Instead, she broke into that huge Carly Simon grin she has and said, 'I absolutely want to do that.'"

As the network's vice president of development, Foley commissioned a report about the possibility of following the activities of Greenpeace or Sea Shepherd. The consultant said of Sea Shepherd, "Stay away. They are very dangerous. They're going to cause you no end of trouble if you do this." But Foley moved forward. "Animal Planet needed something to be iconoclastic, to break with this sort of treachy, family-friendly image it had," he says, and a series about volunteers under the leadership of a "cop who's thrown away the badge and is pursuing the fight on his own" was it. The success of Discovery Channel's *Deadliest Catch* had encouraged

Watson to let his efforts be filmed for television. "If these guys could do it with crabs, we can sure as hell do it with whales," Watson says. After the campaign ended and Foley watched the raw footage for the first time, he sent an e-mail to Kaplan. Its subject: "Holy shit." The body: "We've got a hit."

The series remains Animal Planet's second-most-popular show, after *River Monsters*. "What makes this gripping is that nobody can script this ending," Foley says. "I am still sometimes amazed we got this on the air, and delighted. But it's kind of astonishing." Executive producer Liz Bronstein's Lizard Trading Company produces the series for Animal Planet, hiring independent contractors to film on the ships. In the Faroe Islands, there were three camera operators, one producer, one associate producer and one sound technician on the *Steve Irwin*, and two camera operators/producers on the *Brigitte Bardot*.

Producers have no control over anything that happens on the ship, including who comes aboard. They are also subject to every Sea Shepherd decision; they're along for the ride, which has included being pelted with bolts and blasted by water cannons from a Japanese whaling vessel and filming as a Japanese ship tore the front off the tiny Sea Shepherd vessel *Ady Gil*, causing it to sink. During the second season, as Watson navigated the non-ice-class ship through icebergs, *Whale Wars* broke the fourth wall to show its then director of photography and a crew member watching the vessels' steel flex inward as ice scraped by. "This is where my commitment ends. I am not drowning," the cameraman said, setting down his equipment.

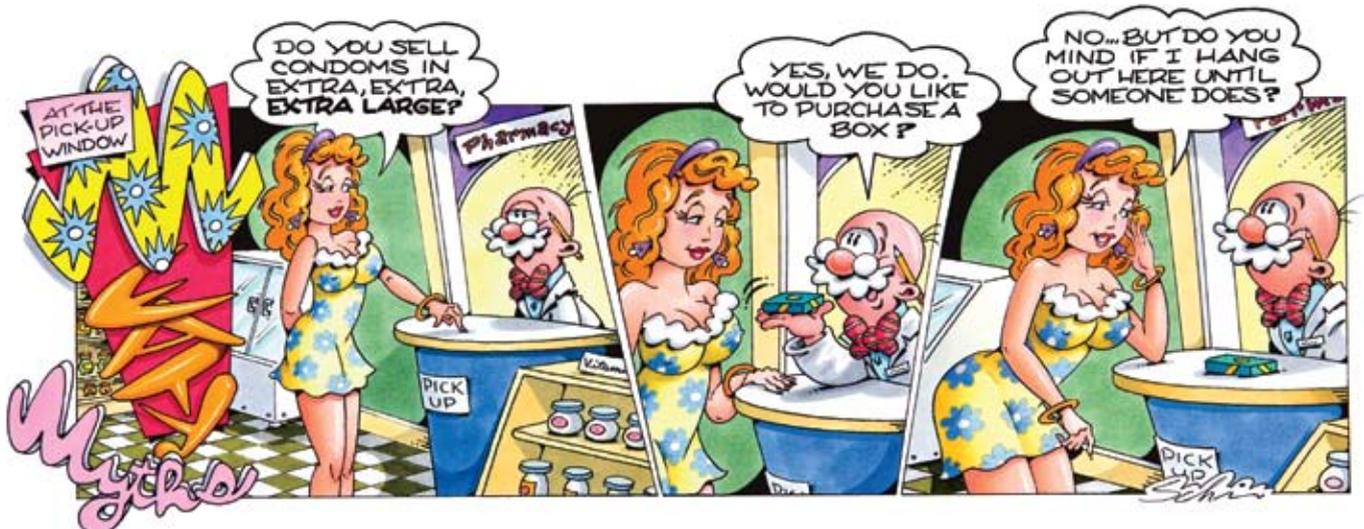
A lot has changed since then. "I never find Sea Shepherd to be reckless," *Whale Wars* producer Philippe Denham says, though the show certainly makes it seem that way. Once, when he was outside with a satellite phone, the boat listed and he slid toward its edge. "That was probably the most dangerous thing that ever happened, just by making a phone call back to the office," he says. Bronstein praises Denham for helping repair the antagonistic relationship filmmakers had with the crew during seasons one and two. They eat and live with

their subjects, but Denham has a clear line: "Never make it about yourself. It's never about us. If you're sitting around a poker table, let them tell the joke."

Empathy is critical with his subjects. "If you're here to respect what they do, then you're good to go, then they respect you. If they feel you're trying to sabotage what they do and make them look stupid, then they'll just clam up, and you're the enemy," he says.

Life aboard the ship is not for everyone: not showering for weeks, flushing with a pail full of water, eating vegan food but no fresh produce. Second-season crews created the ETS, or egg transportation system, by which eggs hidden in the producers' cabin were transferred to be microwaved in their production suite, two small adjoined cabins that serve as an off-limits base and living quarters for most of the TV crew. There, associate producer Sess Hyman, who is also Denham's wife, sits at a computer monitor, watching and copying footage. Loggers will later transcribe everything that is said on the tapes, but Hyman's notations form the basis of the day's story notes, which Denham creates. The footage is duplicated and periodically shipped back to the United States on special hard drives. The process isn't easy: Tapes were once confiscated by Australian authorities investigating confrontations; it took five months to get them back. During the second season, one of two FedEx boxes of masters arrived late, having clearly been opened: The tapes were dirty, and a bubble-wrapped marijuana pipe had been tucked among the footage, a subtle signal that their work was vulnerable and not appreciated.

Separating *Whale Wars* from Sea Shepherd is another challenge for the producers and the network, so executive producer Bronstein met with Faroese officials before production began. "Even though you technically don't need a permit to film in the Faroes, it still seemed like the right thing to do," she says. "I also didn't want to appear secretive, and I didn't want it to appear that we were a part of Sea Shepherd, because we're not; we're documentarians. I said there might be—there will be—a time where if Sea Shepherd



gets in the way of the *grind*, we'll be on the boat. They said, 'Well, then you're complicit and you'll go to jail.'"

The show and Sea Shepherd are one and the same to the Faroese government. "We were not convinced by [Bronstein's] arguments that the intention was to make a 'documentary' rather than another episode in a reality show—entertainment product, which is ultimately designed to maximize profit for a commercial TV network, while at the same time serving to perpetuate and advertise the spurious activities of the organization it has as its subject matter," Kate Sanderson wrote to PLAYBOY in an e-mail message. Sanderson, an Australian who moved to the Faroes in 1985 and now directs a division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and represents the nation in international organizations, is a passionate defender of the Faroese way of life, which she frames as an issue of self-reliance: It's "very important for a small island nation surrounded by the sea to be as self-sufficient in food as possible, when so much else has to be imported." That includes eating sheep, which are locally farmed, and catching sea birds, whales and fish. Despite not welcoming *Whale Wars*, Sanderson wrote, "it was difficult to do anything but accept that she was genuine in her assurances that they were concerned to 'tell the Faroese side of the story,' as she put it. They were, after all, already here and were intent on filming, with or without our cooperation or participation." Bronstein calls Sanderson "very formidable" but ultimately "quite helpful" and says she found the Faroese to be smart, "really good people, really kind, really honest—absolutely mystified as to how they suddenly became the center of all this attention."

The *Steve Irwin* didn't reach the Faroe Islands until August 3. It had been detained for two weeks in Scotland by a court order related to a lawsuit filed by a Maltese fishing company whose bluefin tuna nets the crew had cut the previous year in the Mediterranean. That is quintessential Sea Shepherd—its passion for saving animals sometimes leads to blunders that prevent it from saving animals. Over its four seasons, *Whale Wars* may have earned the organization international attention, but the show's focus on less-successful moments—footage of a small boat flipping over as a crane lowers it onto waves is shown repeatedly—has made Sea Shepherd a joke too. A 2009 episode of *South Park* parodies the show and the group, with "fat liar" Paul Watson graphically harpooned and a cartoon Larry King calling the group "incompetent vegan pussies doing absolutely nothing and trying to turn it into drama." Such treatment doesn't matter to Sea Shepherd: It's attention, and that's what Paul Watson wants.

"My job is to make people angry," he says, sitting in his office as the boat circles the islands through large waves. "I look on being a conservationist as being like an acupuncture needle. You go in and you stimulate a response, you create drama, you get people thinking about things. Controversies create discussions. Discussions bring about change." As the boat rolls, a rusty *grind* knife—found by his crew while diving amid whale bones and now affixed to a piece of wood—falls with its mount off the wall. Watson practices

direct action, a way to create change that stands in stark contrast to the approach of other groups, such as Greenpeace, the organization Watson co-founded—though he was later voted off its board after a dispute with its president. Watson is rarely animated, and his frustratingly passive demeanor makes him seem like the least likely activist aboard the ship. He appears on the bridge to take watch shifts sometimes, but otherwise his work is invisible, as is his compassion for his crew. When the ship's cook asks him at breakfast one morning if they could celebrate the departure of six crew members the next day with a party, he says, "No, I don't think so." After a moment, he sighs and changes his mind. After the party the next day, the crew members depart, waving goodbye to their friends, hugging and even crying. Watson isn't there.

But Watson has his crew's attention and admiration, and this is clear when he holds court with the crew members who sit with him at meals, eating off mismatched plates and bent silverware, drinking filtered water from chipped mugs. He tells raucous or awkward jokes. "How many shots of the heli do you guys have?" he asks a camera operator one day, adding, "You're just waiting for the crash." The camera operator replies, "No, I'm in it." Watson also shares conspiracy theories. President Richard Nixon, he says one day at breakfast, was cast from office by a shadow conspiracy because of his strong record on the environment. The smooth edges of his stories suggest they've been told many times, just as answers to questions are often nearly identical to the succinct, direct, incendiary statements he's written in press releases on SeaShepherd.org. Soon after his arrival in the Faroes, Watson published an open letter to the Faroese people, insisting "that culture and tradition must never be a justification for cruelty and slaughter. When it comes to killing, we draw the line on compromise." Shortly after, the Faroese government released its own statement, emphasizing that it supports "dialogue, freedom of speech and the right of all citizens, both in the Faroe Islands and elsewhere, to express their views and also to organize peaceful protest," but said it would neither talk nor cooperate with Sea Shepherd, citing "its aggressive approach to campaigning, which puts both human lives and property at risk."

Watson frequently notes that no one has ever been killed or seriously injured on his watch, in part because volunteers are more cautious than professionals. He supports his officers' decisions and fires crew members who step out of line, such as saying the wrong thing on camera. "I do think that there's still a culture in Sea Shepherd that just wants to speak the party line and hide the emotion from us," executive producer Bronstein says. "I think you can see it in the show."

When it's time to exchange crew members, the *Steve Irwin* joins up with the *Brigitte Bardot*, its crew anxious to embrace friends. The *Bardot's* crew has a tight bond, thanks to the confined space of the trimaran, which circumnavigated the world in less than 75 days in 1998, a record. Its walls are fiberglass, and there is no hiding, no privacy; when someone is in the bathroom, others

count how many times they flush. For the journey to the Shetland Islands, where new crew members await, the *Whale Wars* camera operators will have to free up the bunks used to store their gear. Duncan Brake and Jillian Morris are among the *Bardot's* inhabitants, but they are "Animal Planet," as Sea Shepherd members refer to the reality-show crew. The *Bardot* arrived in the Faroe Islands two weeks before the *Irwin*, docking at small towns and giving tours to adults and kids—and also dealing with hostile residents, including the drunken Faroese who awoke the crew in the middle of the night, screaming "Fuck Paul Watson," and even tried to board the ship. The *Bardot's* crew "managed to diffuse any confrontation," Brake says, and they had an assist from *Whale Wars*: One angry Faroese man trying to release the boat's lines stopped when he saw first mate Peter Hammarstedt, a Sea Shepherd and *Whale Wars* veteran. Morris says, "They've all seen the show; they all love the show. It was funny because they'd be yelling obscenities at the boat and Peter would step off and they'd be like, 'Oh nice to meet you.'"

Brake's and Morris's experiences filming marine life around the world prepared them for this job, which presents highly unusual challenges. "If we're boarded,

what's going to happen? Are we going to be physically attacked? How are we going to deal with that?" Morris says. Their relationship—they're engaged—helps them deal with one of the more devastating and unexpected challenges of the job. Working on Sea Shepherd's Antarctic campaign for *Whale Wars* almost destroyed producer Denham's marriage. "You start writing e-mails about how it's difficult and you're lonely. And then that taxes the person at home because they feel guilty that you have to do this job, and then they don't know how to react," he says. "Every single crew member will tell you that when they go home it takes them sometimes months to adjust. So you go home and you expect to have the same relationship you left with. But you're not the same." For the Faroes campaign Denham's wife is onboard, and he insists he'd be unlikely to take the job again without her.

As the *Steve Irwin's* ropes are tied off and the crew exits to reunite with their friends, the mild weather turns quickly to cold rain. On the wet dock, the width of a small four-lane road, kids start kicking a ball with crew members and asking questions. "Is this ship American?" "Where was it built?" "Was it built for this?" "Do you have any weapons onboard?" "Is Paul Watson with you?"

"Paul Watson's onboard, yeah," crew member Scott Johnson says.

"Is he coming out?"

"I don't know if he's going to come out or not."

Behind the younger boys asking questions, an 18-year-old hangs back, listening intently, hair neatly parted to the left, purple shoes darkened by the rain. His name is Jacob, which he first pronounces *yay-cub*.

The kids ask why Sea Shepherd is here, and Johnson tells them, "We like you guys." He explains his love for animals but adds that like some of the volunteers, "I'm a meat eater. But at the same time I don't believe in killing whales or dolphins."

Jacob speaks up. "But we're not hunting the whales; we're harvesting the whales."

"I know you've done it forever," Johnson says. "It's a normal thing. It's like us harvesting cows."

"Exactly." Jacob is soft-spoken and holding an umbrella to shield himself from the near-horizon rain.

"But right now, because there's so much pollution in the oceans, there's a high mercury content in the whales, and I don't want you guys, not one of you, to have to eat poison whale meat with mercury in it," Johnson says. Contaminants are not unknown to the Faroese, who gently point out that they are not responsible for poisoning the oceans. Earlier in the summer, the Faroese government said that because of contaminants, adults should never eat whale kidneys or liver and "eat at most one meal of pilot whale meat and blubber per month," while women who are pregnant or breast feeding or who will be pregnant within three months should not eat whale meat, and those who plan to have children should never eat whale blubber.

Later, Jacob concedes that eating whale meat is "not common anymore," but isn't eating it, he asks, "a human right?"

"It is, but I don't want your mom or dad to be feeding that to you. I want you to have that right."

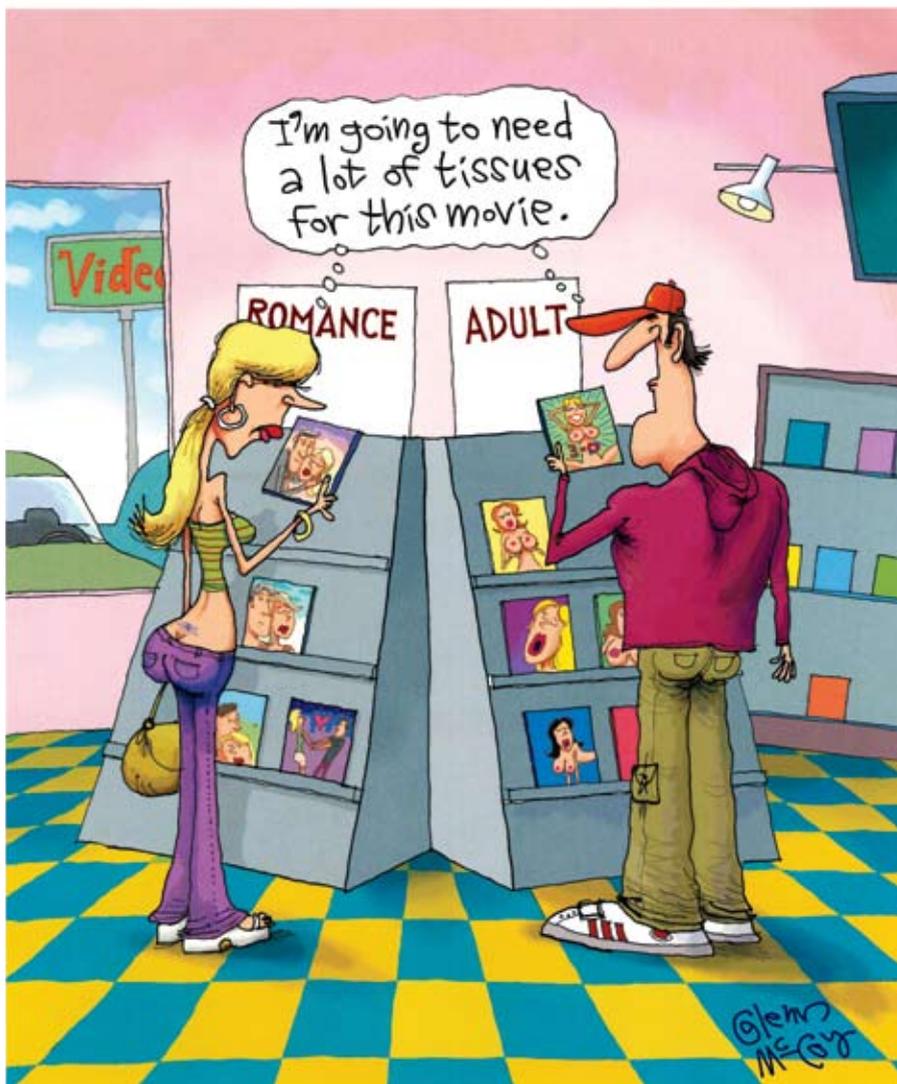
"How about cigarettes? We don't tell you you can't smoke cigarettes," Jacob says.

"Yeah, I don't smoke cigarettes, but if you want to, hey, you can kill yourself with a cigarette."

"Why can't we kill whales?"

"Well, you can if you want. We're just trying to raise awareness to everybody."

As the debate goes on—polite, calm, direct—the kids challenge the crew members about an earlier story on Sea Shepherd's website that used a photo of a Faroese man with a *grind* knife and suggested it was a threat; the kids insist the crew of the *Bardot* had just asked to see the knife. They also talk about Japanese whaling, which Jacob says he opposes. Regarding Sea Shepherd, he mostly objects to "the ridicule that you send to the rest of the world about Faroe Islands," he says—the graphic photos of dead whales are the only images the world sees of his country. What if the only images of the United States were from inside slaughterhouses?



After the crowd clears, crew members head off to a pub in town or back to the ship, to

their thin mattresses on plywood bunks in shared rooms or to the lounge with worn couches and easy chairs next to the mess where Watson and the crew have watched DVDs of such TV shows as *Dexter* and *True Blood*. Fiona McCuaig spends her 8 P.M. to 12 A.M. watch guarding the corrugated metal plank with a hand-painted CREW ONLY sign at its end—the vessel's only security. Crew members come and go. In the artificial light of the ship, McCuaig's eyes seem blue with a hint of green; she makes eye contact and says hello to every car that passes, her Australian accent lingering on the vowels. The vehicles mostly contain people who seem curious, kids waving from backseats, but some men stop their cars and stare, presumably whaling foremen or others directly involved in the *grind*. She waves at them too.

"First, you need to empathize with them," McCuaig says. "If I lived on these islands and grew up in the same situation as you, I'd probably be thinking the same as you." She understands arguments like Jacob's. "We've got blood on our hands. We have all these horrible factory farms," she says. "I'm from Australia, and we are so bad. We kill all these kangaroos, and we shoot possums. We are not perfect either."

Sea Shepherd left the Faroe Islands in late August, and shortly thereafter two *grinds* took place. The organization had declared victory, saying, "Our mere watchful presence prevented any killings" because "Faroese police ordered that no *grinds*... would be allowed for as long as the Sea Shepherd ships were in Faroese waters." The Faroese government said the opposite. Kate Sanderson says that the lack of *grinds* "was not due to any official decision to stop whaling. No such decision was made by the Ministry of Fisheries, which is the authority responsible for the regulation of whaling in general." The *grinds* that took place a week after Sea Shepherd's departure, she says, were predictable. "Had they had a better understanding of Faroese life and culture they may have known that early September is the season for catching young fulmar around the coast, which is done close to shore from small boats. There is quite often a whale drive at this time of the year, as there are more boats out and about than usual."

A few months later, Watson—his fleet of three ships (the third is named *Bob Barker*

after the game show host, who donated \$5 million after a conversation with Watson) preparing to return to the Southern Ocean once again after Japan announced its intention to resume whaling—says he won't know the impact of the Faroe Islands campaign until Animal Planet broadcasts the episodes. "I think what we've proven here is that the most powerful weapon in the world is the camera," he says.

In truth, the cameras mostly captured the monotony of the campaign: circling the islands, sending the helicopter to investigate what usually turned out to be races or festive gatherings. There were also Sea Shepherd's own blunders, like having the acoustic devices they planned to place around the islands confiscated as they tried to smuggle them in a van via a ferry.

Instead of action in the small boats, there were trips to view whale bones underwater and encounters with the Faroese, including a local politician who stood on the dock near the *Bardot* in front of small tables stacked with containers of whale meat, telling a Sea Shepherd volunteer, "You are a vegetarian; you stick to the apple," adding, "Adolf Hitler was the best-known vegetarian in world history." The camera in his face, he said Paul Watson "needs bit of drama, doesn't he? He needs a bit of sensation on television to con more people out of more money, eh?" Of course, that's exactly what he was providing.

Still, Watson characterizes the response as successful. "The Faroese strategy was smart in one way: They actually didn't do anything. They were very concerned about

the cameras. We just did our patrols and found whales, and escorted the whales around and did interviews with people, but nobody really confronted us or anything," he says.

Sea Shepherd has been concerned about cameras too. "They kept expecting that we were going to manipulate it and make them look terrible and that the show wasn't going to be good for them," executive producer Bronstein says. "Everybody wants to control how they're seen and how they're perceived, and the more you try to control how you're seen, the less control you have. What I always tell my cast at the beginning of every shoot is if you are emotionally naked and vulnerable, the audience will love you. And if you hold back and try to control how the cameras see you, the audience will sense it and you will not win fans. Nobody ever believes me until season two."

Sanderson says the Faroese are anxious about *Whale Wars*. "We have always been fully open with the media about whaling, and we have been cooperating with foreign journalists for decades, so there was no reason not to help them with access to accurate information and relevant expertise," she says. "But the important distinction is that this time we were not dealing with documentary filmmakers or news reporters but quite a different kind of media product altogether. So we await the outcome with a certain sense of foreboding."

Will seeing themselves and their way of life on television change the Faroese? Will kids, like those

on the dock, find new appreciation for their cultural traditions now that they've been attacked by outsiders? Or will external forces like pollution make the decision for everyone?

"It's pretty amazing to see how strong they believe in this," camera operator Jillian Morris says later. She is referring to Sea Shepherd's volunteers but could have been talking about the Faroese—or herself, Brake and the other *Whale Wars* crew members. "I just have a new tremendous, positive outlook on what they're doing," she says. "Whether you agree with their tactics or what they're doing, at least appreciate the commitment and the passion they have."

