

ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S
THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA

ET SHORT FORM SCENARIO BY
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THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA

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ABOUT THE SCENARIO

Type

Short form scenario

Playing time

App. 2 hours, including briefing

Genre

Narrative drama

Number of players

3-4 players + 1 game master

Key words

Sensory, Narrative, Hemmingway

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APPENDIX

4 x Player Sheets

Role Cards for the four acts, to be cut out and folded



INTRODUCTION

Cuba, sometime in the early 1950s.

For 84 days the old man has caught nothing. Nevertheless, he once again sets out in his skiff, hoping to get something on the line. Out in the Gulf Stream, farther out than ever before, the old fisherman finally hooks a gigantic fish. Now he must struggle for days with the sea, the fish, and himself.

The *Old Man and the Sea* is an adaptation of Ernest Hemingway's Nobel Prize-winning novella of the same name. It is a short, dwelling, and intense narrative drama about tenacity, dignity, and the relationship with an overwhelming nature all around you.

The main character is a wrinkled, sunburnt, and poor fisherman who, despite his age and lack of luck, faithfully and determined rows out in his skiff every single day. There used to be a boy with him, but after 40 days without a catch the boy's parents no longer allowed him to go along. For the old man is considered utterly *salao* – the worst kind of unlucky. Now, therefore, he is alone on the immense ocean, hoping that the sea, *La Mar*, will finally once again be generous this very day.

The scenario tells the story of the old man's solitary journey out onto the sea and his struggle against the enormous fish he finally manages to hook. For several days and nights, the fish drags the boat along before surfacing, allowing the old man to finally take up the fight. But even when the battle is over and the

fish lies dead, it is not the end: On the return journey toward land, the fish is relentlessly eaten by sharks, which the old man desperately tries to fend off and fight. By the time he, completely exhausted, makes it back to shore, only the bones of the enormous fish remains.

The scenario is for 3–4 players, who can play not only the old man but also a range of other roles, such as the sea, the fish, or the sharks. In each of the four acts, players choose which role to play from a set of role cards placed on the table. Not every role presented on the table must necessarily be played in the act. Within the course of an act a player may also switch to a new role.

The game unfolds partly through description and storytelling, and partly through the different roles speaking to the old man's thoughts. In this regard, there are two special roles defined by the fact that they are actually not present, yet they can still speak to the old man. That is *the boy* who once used to join him in the boat, and *Santiago*, who is the old man himself when he was young.

Each of the four acts takes 20–25 minutes to play. They all follow a set structure, which is briefly outlined to the players at the beginning of the act. The players' task is therefore not to create the overall storyline, but rather to immerse themselves in the mood and the inner drama that unfolds as the old man becomes increasingly pressured and exhausted.

HEMINGWAY'S NOVEL

The Old Man and the Sea is a short novel published in 1952. Two years later, in 1954, Ernest Hemingway was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. This book was in fact the only one explicitly mentioned in the justification for the award.

Despite its brief length of around 100 pages, *The Old Man and the Sea* is a sensory, minimalist, and yet grand novel that evokes a unique atmosphere of an old man's stubborn struggle to preserve his dignity.

It is by no means necessary to have read the book in order to play this scenario, whether as a player or a game master. If you should nevertheless feel like reading it, it is freely available in several places online.



English version of
the book in Google
Docs format



English version of
the book as an e-
book or audio book
at Danish library
service E-reolen

THE FOUR ACTS

In the *first act*, the old man sets out early in the morning. The act establishes the sea, the mood, and the style of play, and the man sets his lines in the water.

In the *second act*, a large fish bites from the depths. The fish stays deep below, where it begins to drag the skiff along with it. For hours and hours, the man must patiently wait for the fish to tire and come closer to the surface.

In the *third act*, the fish finally breaks the surface, and the battle can unfold. It is fierce and intense, until the man at last delivers a final killing thrust with his harpoon. He is utterly exhausted after the overwhelming struggle.

In the *fourth act*, the old man sails back toward land with the fish lashed to the skiff, but he must fight off one shark after another. By the time he reaches shore, only the bones of the fish remains.

The scenario ends with a brief *epilogue*.

MUSIC

If you want to play music during the game to set the mood, a Spotify playlist has been prepared for you to use. It consists primarily of calm piano pieces that create an atmosphere of tranquility, isolation, and the vast sea.



SETTING AND THEME

The scenario takes place in Cuba in the early 1950s. It is a poor and harsh environment of fishermen who sell their catch at the market or to the American tourists who make their way here. The money goes to food—or perhaps a glass of rum and a cigar in a smoky *taberna* filled with salsa music and hours-long arm-wrestling contests.

The old man lives in a small village by the sea. He owns little beyond his fishing skiff and a small shack where he has spent most of his life. In the village, there is a strong sense of community among the fishermen, who both help each other and compete fiercely. It is easy to fall into disfavor—for example, as with the old man, who has been so unlucky that he is declared *salao*.

When not fishing, people follow American baseball, where the mighty DiMaggio is the greatest of them all. They do this either through day-old newspapers or, if they have a little money, via a crackling radio.

THE SEA

The tropical sea off the coast means everything. It is the sea one lives from, and it is the sea's whims that decide whether one lives or dies. Once you leave the shore soon to surrounded by wind, waves, and the vast sky towering above the tiny skiff, it fills everything, both mentally and physically.

The sea is both beautiful and violent at the same time. It is the glittering morning sun in the ripples of the water, the silver gleam of flying fish, and the phosphorescence of algae in the dark night. But it is also violent storms, bloodthirsty sharks, and an intensely burning sun without the slightest bit of shade.



One can speak of the sea as *La Mar*, feminine, or *El Mar*, masculine.

The old man sees it as *La Mar*—as a woman, something to be loved. The sea is everywhere around you, something you are a part of; as something that gives and takes and has its moods. Yet it is always seen as something to love and feel connected to, no matter what it does to you.

The younger fishermen—and perhaps the old man himself when he was young—see it as *El Mar*: something masculine, an adversary, something to be overcome and tamed. It is not something one belongs to, but something one takes pride in defeating.

THEMES

The relationship between *La Mar* and *El Mar* is central to the theme and atmosphere of the scenario.

Much of the game is about evoking the mood of the vast sea and the nature surrounding the old man.

At the beginning of the game, this is largely characterized as something the old man is a part of—in other words, as *La Mar*.

But as the struggle with the fish intensifies, the question arises: can he hold on to his holistic view of it all? For does the fight first make him exhilarated and overconfident—and later perhaps even bitter, grim, and vengeful? In other words: can the old man succeed in preserving his self-respect and dignity?

ON FISHING

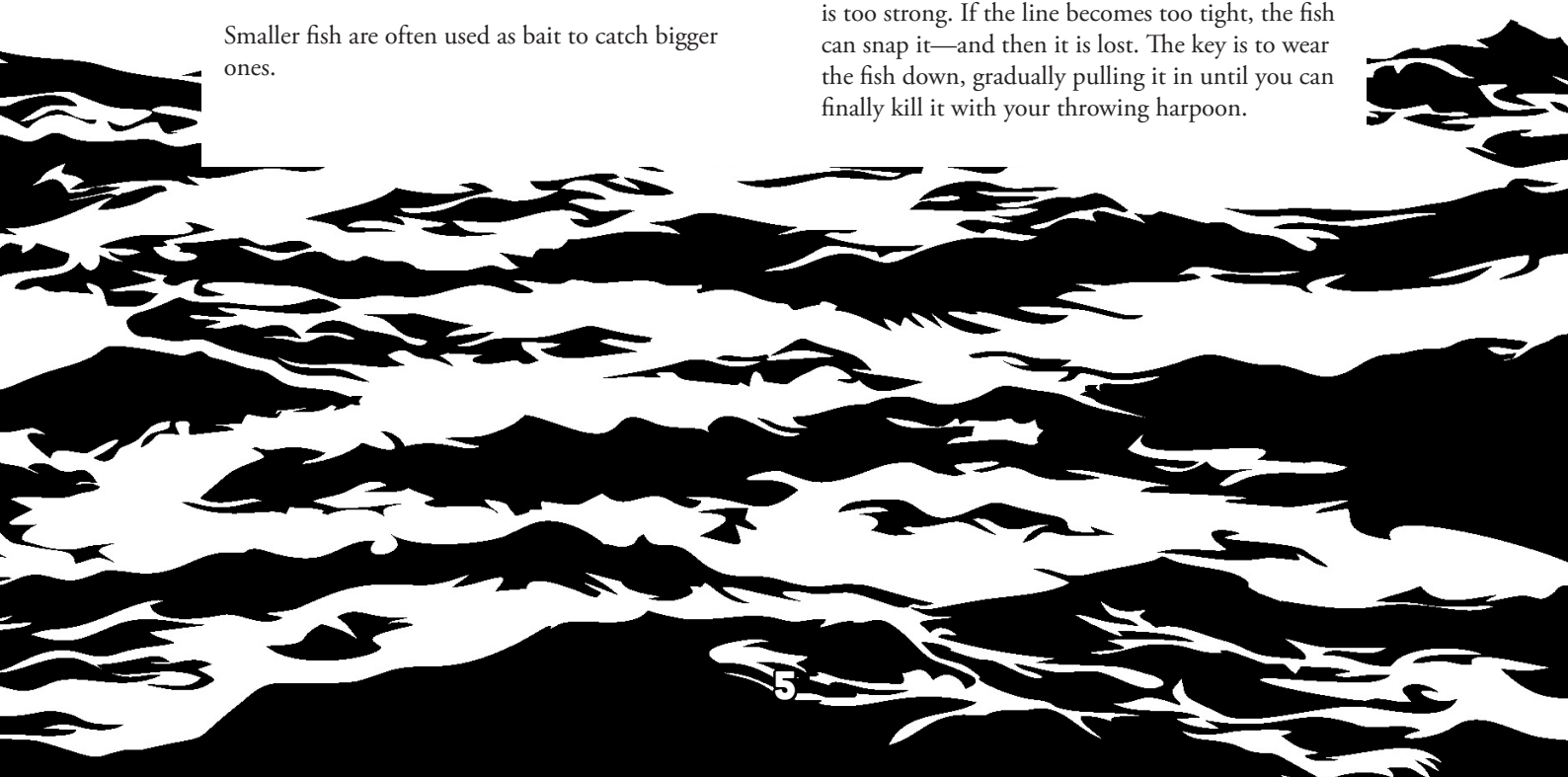
When the old man goes out to sea, it is not just a bit of casual, recreational angling. This is about survival.

In the scenario, the old man ventures all the way into the Gulf Stream. Out here the water is extremely deep, and the current is strong. This is where the truly big fish can be caught—even though it is dangerous and the way back to shore is long.

Smaller fish are often used as bait to catch bigger ones.

The fishing is done from a small skiff with thick lines ending in large hooks. Fishing rods are not used. Instead, the lines are hauled in by hand. The hooks typically hang at different depths, with the deepest hundreds of meters down—where, for example, swordfish hunt.

When you hook a big fish, you don't haul it in right away. That would be too difficult, and the fish is too strong. If the line becomes too tight, the fish can snap it—and then it is lost. The key is to wear the fish down, gradually pulling it in until you can finally kill it with your throwing harpoon.



HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Besides playing the old man, the playing style of the game is based on the concept of the players also playing the world around him and things only existing in his head. To a large degree, it is the players who are responsible of creating the game and its atmosphere. They do so through their descriptions and the conversations their roles have with the old man inside his head.

As game master, your role is to set the frame, present the relevant role cards, and otherwise trust that the players to provide descriptions, play, and momentum—of course with your inputs and questions when needed.

ROLE CARDS AND CHOOSING ROLES

At the beginning of each act, you lay a number of role cards on the table face up. For each act, it is specified which role cards you should place on the table at the start of the act—and whether there are roles that should be placed on the table later in the act.

The role cards should be folded so that the front only has the role's title, while the back contains the role description that the player is to read. The card can stand upright like a nameplate, with the title facing outward so the other players can see it, while the description faces inward toward the player who has chosen the role.

If a player wants to play a particular role, he or she takes the card from the table, reads the role, and places it in front of them. That player now plays the role until they perhaps choose to put the card back on the table and select another. This can easily happen in the middle of an act—at which point another player can choose to take the role instead.

Not all the role cards you have laid on the table need to be picked up by players. A role can remain on the table without anyone choosing it—and often you will have put more role cards on the table than there are players. You will also, in some cases, introduce more role cards during the act, which the players may then choose. You may also choose to remove a

THE CENTRAL ROLES

There are a number of different roles in the scenario. The most central are:

- » **The Old Man.** Alone in his skiff. The player portrays both what the man does and describes his thoughts and inner dialogues.
- » **The Sea.** The sea is the nature surrounding the old man. It can be the water itself, the waves, and the horizon. But it can also be the birds, the schools of fish, and the vast sky. The sea is both *La Mar* and *El Mar* at the same time.
- » **The Fish.** The enormous fish that bites onto the old man's hook. The role exists in two versions: one based on the sea as *La Mar* and one based on *El Mar*. Both can easily be present in the game at the same time, played by two different players.
- » **The Sharks.** The sharks that in the fourth act try to devour the great, dead fish the old man is attempting to bring back to shore. In the fourth act, the sharks are divided across several different role cards.
- » **The Boy.** The boy who once used to fish with the old man, but now can only help send him off each morning. He looks up enormously to the old man and all his experience. The boy is present only as an inner voice in the old man's head, where he may, for example, try to encourage him and speak to his experience and dignity.
- » **Santiago.** The old man's younger self, who, like the boy, exists only in his thoughts. He represents a wilder, more exuberant, and impulsive approach to life and looks down on the old man's physical weakness. During the game he may, for example, try to make the old man appear more strong, battle-ready, and willing to take risks.

card from the table if you wish.

If you need to introduce a new role quickly, you can also simply assign a role directly to a player.

As game master, you may also choose to take on a role yourself. This can especially be relevant if there are only three players and you would like to have more roles in play.

PLAYING THE ROLES

There is only one classic role-playing character present in the scenario: the old man, alone in his boat. The rest of the roles are more abstract and metaphorical in nature, offering the players different ways to express them.

SPEAKING TO AND WITH THE OLD MAN

All of the roles in the scenario can speak to the old man, and he can speak to them. In fact, this is the most obvious way for the roles to interact with him.

Of course, it's not that they literally speak together, but in the old man's head there is nevertheless a kind of conversation. The fish, for example, might talk about the bond it shares with the man. Or one of the sharks might say how they as sharks are greedy and indifferent to the old man, and that they have come to take everything from him.

The different roles can also speak with each other, if it makes sense in the game. For instance, it may at times make sense for Santiago to talk directly to the sea, the fish, or the sharks.

NARRATING AND DESCRIBING

Players can also narrate and describe from the perspective of their roles to create atmosphere and drive the story forward.

For example, the sea-player may describe nature around the boat, and a shark-player may tell of the black fins appearing close by.

They can, of course, also describe how they affect and interact with the old man. The fish-player might, for instance, describe how the man suddenly feels the fish pull hard on the line, causing him to fall down into the bottom of the boat.

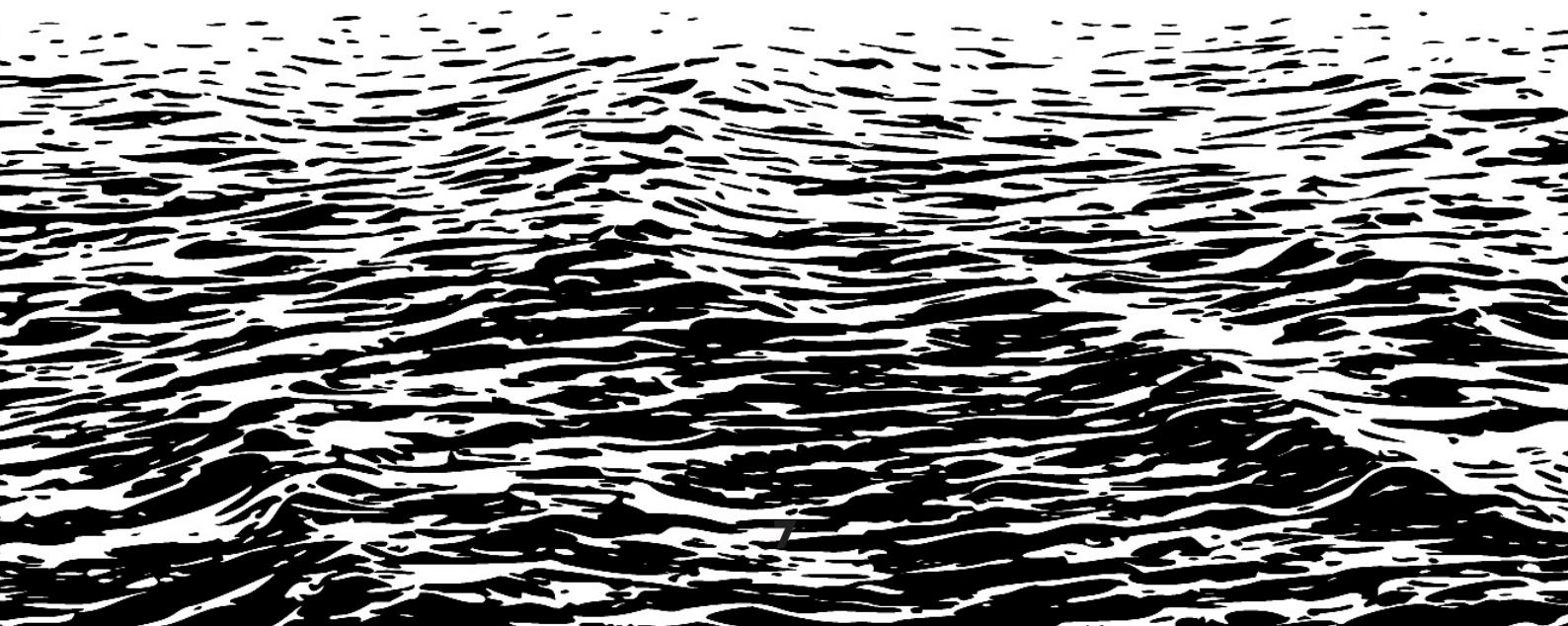
HOW TO RUN THE GAME AS GAME MASTER

As Game Master, your most important task in each act—besides putting out the role cards—is to introduce the act to the players and briefly outline what is about to happen. The players need a clear sense of the overall direction: what the act is about and where it should eventually end, before you begin playing it.

After that, your role is simply to set the scene in a few words. For example, that it is early morning and the old man is ready to set out to sea. From there, it is mainly up to the players themselves to create the play. It is perfectly fine if there is a moment of silence

while you wait for someone to step forward—perhaps with the sea-player beginning to describe the vast ocean around the skiff, and the old man telling what he is doing in his boat.

If nothing happens, you can help the players getting started by asking questions, requesting descriptions, or inquiring what a specific role is doing. In the same way, when needed, you should continue to ask questions, introduce new elements, and generally make sure the game flows smoothly.



GAME START AND BRIEFING

Before you begin playing, you need to tell the players about the scenario.

THE SCENARIO IN A NUTSHELL

- » This is a short scenario. It should take no more than an hour and a half to play.
- » It takes place in Cuba in the 1950s and is about a poor fisherman who hasn't caught anything for 84 days. He sets out once again to catch something. This time, he wants to go all the way out into the Gulf Stream, where the big fish are.
- » He used to fish with a young boy. But no longer, his parents have forbidden it. The man is *Salao*, the unluckiest of all. Still, the boy helps him get ready every morning.
- » The focus is on mood and storytelling, and on everything that takes place inside the man's head.
- » The players can play both the old man and a number of other roles, such as the sea, the boy, or the enormous fish that the man hooks.

THE FISHERMEN AND THE VILLAGE

- » A poor fishing village in a harsh environment, marked by both solidarity and competition.
- » The man owns very little besides his small, dilapidated shack and a skiff with patched sails.
- » The little money people earn is often spent in dim taverns, with sugar-sweetened rum, salsa, and arm wrestling.
- » Baseball is a passion, and the mighty DiMaggio is the greatest hero of them all. News is followed in day-old newspapers or on crackling radios.

ABOUT FISHING

- » Fishing is done with thick lines from the small skiff. Some are several hundred meters long. No fishing rods. Everything is hauled in by hand.
- » They go after large fish, including tuna. Swordfish are the mightiest and most difficult.
- » A big fish cannot simply be pulled in. It must be worn out, which can take hours. It is killed with a harpoon.

THE SEA

- » The sea means everything. It is both beautiful and violent.
- » It can be regarded as both *La Mar* (feminine) and *El Mar* (masculine).
- » The old man sees the sea as *La Mar*—as a woman one loves, even when she is unpredictable and fierce.
- » The young fishermen see it as *El Mar*—as an enemy and an opponent. Something to be fought and conquered.

STRUCTURE AND ROLE SELECTION

- » The scenario consists of four acts of about 20–25 minutes each. At the start of each act, you as Game Master briefly outline the action of the act.
- » At the beginning of each act, you place a set of role cards face up on the table. Players can then choose a role by picking up a card. On the back is a short description the player must read.
- » Role cards should be placed in front of the player as a kind of nameplate.
- » A player can switch roles during play. In that case, they place the role card back in the middle of the table and pick up another.
- » The Game Master might introduce new roles during an act—sometimes directly to a player. And the Game Master can take on roles too.

PLAYING THE ROLES

- » Players can narrate and describe—such as what their role does, or how the old man experiences it. It can also take the form of more poetic descriptions.
- » All roles, whatever they may be, can speak to the old man's thoughts, and he can speak to them. A kind of inner dialogue in his head.
- » Two special roles are not physically present: the boy, and Santiago who is the old man as he once was.

DISTRIBUTE PLAYER SHEETS

Once you have introduced the players to the scenario's concept, you should give each player a player sheet. They are the same for all players and briefly describe the main roles and provide an overview of what is in the boat. Once the players have read it, you are ready to begin.

FIRST ACT:

SETTING OUT

In this first act, the old man sets out in his skiff, heading out to sea.

The act's main purpose is to introduce the old man, the sea, and the playing style. Nothing dramatically significant happens yet, but it is important that both the grandeur and the loneliness of the sea are established.

EXPLAIN TO THE PLAYERS

It is early morning when the old man sets out in his skiff. It is still dark as he leaves, but soon the sun rises, revealing the full expanse of the sea and sky.

He must go far enough toward the Gulf Stream, where it gets deep, before he can set his lines.

The act begins when the old man pushes the boat from shore.

It ends when he has set the lines in the water and caught something that can later be used as bait.

KEY POINTS

The role descriptions suggest that the following can happen:

- » The sea-player describes the sea, the sky, and the journey out on the water. Perhaps more dramatic aspects are mentioned as well.
- » The boy and the old man talk about how they prepared the boat—as they do every morning.
- » The boy and the old man discuss how they used to work together on the sea—and how the old man must now do it without the boy. They may also talk a little about baseball.
- » Santiago talks about past exploits. Perhaps also about the drama he misses when the sea is calm and still.
- » When the old man has reached a sufficient distance, the fishing lines must be set in the water.
- » A small tuna (role card) takes the bait, and the old man hauls it in. Place the role card on the table or assign it directly to a player.

ROLES IN THE FIRST ACT

Place the following role cards on the table at the start of the act:

- » *The Old Man*
- » *The Sea*
- » *The Boy*
- » *Santiago*

The following role should be introduced later:

- » *Small Tuna* – either place it on the table or assign it directly to a player

SIT BACK AND GIVE SPACE – BUT ALSO HELP THE PLAYERS GETTING STARTED

In this first act, your role as Game Master is primarily to let the players take the lead and get started on their own. Give them space to hesitate and feel their way forward—and to sit in silence for a moment while the atmosphere develops.

But if needed, don't hesitate to help them along. You might, for example, look at the Sea-player and ask them to describe the sea that morning if they don't start on their own. You can also offer small prompts that the players can expand on and continue playing.

ROLES PRESENTED FROM START IN THE FIRST ACT

THE OLD MAN

You hope for a good, strong current. The sail must be set. Out to sea, into the Gulf Stream, out where the big fish are.

Bait on the hooks, cords in the water. All the things these old hands have done so many times.

If only the boy were here. He helped you get on your way. But now you are alone, surrounded by the sea. Stay focused! Be present!

THE SEA

La Mar, the break of dawn. Glowing algae. A light breeze away from the coast. Gentle, calm, rocking. Schools of flying fish, shimmering in the sun. Soft waves.

Help the old man on his way. Speak of your bond. The clouds and the sky, filling everything. The rising sun – pain in the eyes. Reflections on the water.

But you are also *El Mar*, the thought of all what the sea can be. Tremendous forces, a brutal opponent. All the stories to be told back on land.

THE BOY

You wish you were with the old man. But that is not how it is. You must stay behind, let him be alone at the sea.

But you help him set off. Show your respect. Prepare the skiff in the early morning. Carry the mast, get the skiff into the water. Fetch beer and coffee in a rusty can. Roll up heavy lines. You work together, intensely and intimately. Like men. Like a father and his son.

Even though you are not in the skiff, speak to the man at sea. Advice and encouragement. About how you used to help him. Memories. Maybe a bit about baseball too.

SANTIAGO

You are the voice of youth. Of past achievements and all that you caught. Of good times. Of when the man was not old. Turtle hunting, eating their egg – shark liver oil in your belly every single day.

But also of how quiet it is now. Of missing the waves, the wind, and the great fish. Of dreams and journeys to the coast of Africa. Lions on the beach. Battles, man against man.

TO BE INTRODUCED LATER

A SMALL TUNA,

You are a small tuna, an albacore, maybe five kilos. Silvery skin in the sun, a blue colored back, also golden. Big, foolish eyes. You will make good bait.

Jumping with the other tuna. You bite, the line goes taut. The man can catch you quite easily.

SECOND ACT:

BITE

In the second act, a large fish finally bites and begins to pull the skiff along with the old man. It is grueling and exhausting as the fish drags the boat, taking many, many hours before it starts to approach the surface.

The act is meant to show how demanding this struggle is for the old man—especially when the lines tear and the old man's hand eventually cramps from holding on. The act also establishes the old man's relationship with the fish in the depths.

EXPLAIN TO THE PLAYERS

Out in the Gulf Stream, at midday, the sun is high. Sweat stings the eyes.

Something large bites but stays deep. The old man must carefully manage the line so it doesn't break, while the great fish begins to pull the boat farther and farther out to sea. It becomes a battle of patience and exhaustion.

The act begins with the fish biting and spans many, many exhausting hours.

The act ends the next morning, when the fish begins to rise toward the surface.

KEY POINTS

The role descriptions suggest that the following can happen:

- » A huge fish in the depths begins nibbling at the bait. Purely from the small tugs and movements in the line, the old man can sense the fish to be a mighty swordfish.
- » The fish takes hold and starts pulling the boat out to sea. The man must hold on and not pull too hard. The fish must be worn out.
- » The fish and the old man form a bond with each other.
- » The boy can help the old man with advice and encouragement.
- » Santiago can encourage the old man to be more direct, to pull harder.
- » Time passes; it becomes hard and exhausting—the fish keeps swimming farther out to sea.

Use the roles that are not on the table from the start to strengthen the drama:

- » If you want the more brutal aspects of the fish and its unpredictability to come into play, introduce the *El Mar* version of the fish.
- » Introduce the *Line in Hand* role to emphasize how hard it is to hold the line.
- » Introduce the *Hand Cramp* role toward the end of the act. The cramp lasts for hours—even as the old man suddenly sees that the fish is finally approaching the surface, and you move on to the third act.

ROLES IN THE SECOND ACT

Place the following role cards on the table at the start of the act:

- » *The Old Man*
 - » *The Noble Fish in the Depths, La Mar*
 - » *The Boy*
 - » *Santiago*
- The following roles can be introduced later:
- » *The Fierce Fish in the Depths, El Mar*
 - » *Line in Hand*
 - » *Hand Cramp*

EMPHASIZE THE PASSAGE OF TIME AND EXHAUSTION

In this second act you can as Game Master successfully emphasize the passage of time and how exhausting it all is.

You may choose to skip forward in time several times, giving the players a sense that this takes a long while—that night falls and the next morning dawns before the fish begins to approach the surface.

Toward the end, you can also highlight to one of the fish-players that the fish is becoming so tired that it starts to slow down and rise closer to the surface.

ROLES PRESENTED FROM START IN SECOND ACT

THE OLD MAN

The sun is burning. Everything is still. Soon The Fish will come—you know it. Your brother in the sea. You love him, but in the end, you must kill him. Otherwise, you will be killed yourself.

It will be a long struggle. Stubborn, patient, exhausting. Stay calm, give line slowly, but test him too. Feel the pull, reel in only little by little.

Let the hours, the days pass. Let him tire slowly. Watch the cord – it must not break. If it does, all is lost.

THE NOBLE FISH IN THE DEEP, LA MAR

You nibble at the hook and its bait, not taking it at first. You are deep below, 100 fathoms down.

He can feel you, you enormous swordfish. He might sense what you are, only from the dance of the cord. Small tugs, pauses, then tugs again. His experience from a long life at sea. Let him realise that you share a connection, that you are brothers. He knows you in a way – and yet he has no idea how truly mighty you are.

Later, you strike, swallowing the hook and pulling the cord and the boat with you – farther and farther out to sea. You stay in the depths, refusing to be pulled up. You are stubborn and proud. Just like the old man.

THE BOY

You wish you were here to help. Hold the lines, change the coils. Keep a cool head and the lines wet. Do all the things you have always done. Show that you belong together.

Speak to the old man, remind him of everything he does best. Show him that he is not a single day too old. Encouragement, pride.

SANTIAGO

It should be you who were out here today. You could show the fish who its master is. Show it the way it should be, the right order.

Give the advice that is needed. Show what man you once were. Strength, control, and determination. Show how a fish should be handled. Pull hard, reel him in, do not let him control you.

TO BE INTRODUCED LATER

THE FIERCE FISH IN THE DEEP, EL MAR

You want to pull and tear, drag the old man down, fight against him.

Make sudden jerks, surprises – indications of your strength and power.

You want to show him who you are – how mighty, dangerous, and unpredictable you are. But you cannot fully do so yet. For now, you can only give small indications. You cannot yet reveal yourself in full form.

THE CORD IN THE HAND

You are the line that connects the fish to the old man. You are wet, glistening, and yet sharp. Later, the sun may dry you completely.

You can be both loose and taut – you slip easily through fingers unless you cut. It hurts to hold you for so long. You can tear and shred. Blood may flow. You might suddenly jolt, make the man fall.

CRAMPING HAND

You are the man's left hand, cramping up. You have held the line for too long. You cannot do what you are supposed to. It hurts, hard to keep hold. You are failing the man.

And you will not go away. It will take all his strength to ignore you. You can last for hours – and he must not let go of the line. Even as the fish nears its final battle, you are still there.

THIRD ACT:

FIGHT

In the third act, the great fish finally rises to the surface, and the battle can begin for real.

The fish circles around the boat while the old man pulls it closer and closer, until he at last can thrust his harpoon into it—and then finally can collapse in the boat of exhaustion.

EXPLAIN TO THE PLAYERS

The fish finally comes to the surface, and the intense struggle to draw it near the boat can begin. His hand is still cramped, and it is a very weary old man who must fight this battle.

The act begins when the old man senses that the fish is on its way up.

It ends when the fish is dead.

KEY POINTS

The role descriptions suggest that the following can happen:

- » The fish approaches the surface. It breaks the water's surface and reveals itself. For the first time, the old man can see how enormous it truly is.
- » The fish resists and fights back. It becomes a struggle between dignity and ferocity, between composure and bloodlust.
- » The old man grows more and more exhausted, and his thoughts begin to wander. Hard to keep focus.
- » The Boy may try to help the old man keep a cool head—perhaps recalling a time when they fought against not just one, but two swordfish at once.
- » Santiago may instead praise ferocity, urging that the fish be humiliated and killed brutally. He calls for bloodlust, an overwhelming victory, and all the honor the old man will feel when he returns home.
- » At last, the fish comes close to the boat, and the old man can drive the harpoon into its heart. Finally, it is dead.

ROLES IN THE THIRD ACT

Place the following role cards on the table at the beginning of the act. Note that two players can easily play the fish at the same time. This way, they can complement each other and make the struggle even more intense:

- » *The Old Man*
- » *The Fish, proud and noble, La Mar*
- » *The Fish, fierce and angry, El Mar*
- » *The Boy*
- » *Santiago*

PUSH THE INTENSITY

As game master, your task in the third act is especially to push the fierceness, violence and the intensity. Ask questions about exhaustion and brutality, and encourage the different players to turn up the drama if needed. You can also ask for details to be elaborated, so that the pace slows down and everything feels almost in slow motion.

If the players are unsure about when the old man is actually allowed to kill the fish, help them make it clear.

ROLES PRESENTED FROM START IN THIRD ACT

THE OLD MAN

Tired, exhausted, everything hurts. The cramp still lingers. Nevertheless, time has come to show who you are. He is coming. You can feel it by his pull, small changes.

Now it's time to pull in the fis – your brother, your equal – slowly, deliberately, one foot at a time. Keep the harpoon ready.

But the sun is also burning, and you want to sleep. Hunger, thirst. Your thoughts are drifting – stay focused! Do not be swept away by anger or blood-lust. A fair fight. Show that you have earned the right to kill your brother – just as he would have earned the right to kill you.

THE FISH, PROUD AND NOBLE, LA MAR

You are the big, beautiful fish, soon to die. Ready to break the surface, show your grace and beauty. Show who you are.

You are enormous, two feet longer than the skiff – the largest fish he has ever seen. A massive sword, gleaming in the sun. Silver and gold, tinged with blue. Like a rainbow.

Reveal yourself, then return to the water. Let yourself be pulled in slowly, circle by circle. And then leap – high and magnificent. Again and again. Show your strength, your greatness. Give the man the fight he deserves. Fight until, at last, you are dead.

THE FISH, FIERCE AND FURIOUS, EL MAR

You are the weary, wrathful, violent beast from the deep. Ready to show what you are.

You circle and circle, getting pulled in. Against your will. You want to fight, win, take revenge. For even though you are tired, you are mighty. Way too mighty for an old man.

You will not be easily defeated – not until every ounce of strength has been drained from you. You shake, leap, splash. And even with the harpoon in your heart, you fight. Lashing, twisting, pulling. Let all dignity be torn from you. Until, at last, you are left with nothing. Humiliated. Dead.

THE BOY

You have tried this before—though never against a fish as mighty as this one. But there was a time with two swordfish, a male and a female. Their sharp tails nearly cut the lines. You remember it all too well. Once, you were almost killed.

Preach for self control and reason, even when everything is chaos. Try to endure clarity and that dignity you admire so much.

SANTIAGO

It should be you who was at sea ready to fight. It is not something for an old man. It needs you instead – your strength, your control. Youth, determination, endurance. Just like that time in Havana, with the big man who, in the end, had to let his arm be defeated.

You have done this before. Maybe not quite as fierce. But almost. And you knew what to do. And you can do it again. You must rip all life from the fish, shatter its beastly heart with the harpoon. Prepare for all the glory that will soon be yours.

FOURTH ACT:

HOMeward

The fish is dead, and the long journey home can begin. Everything is calm, but then the sharks arrive. The old man must do everything he can to save the fish and himself, but the sharks just keep coming.

EXPLAIN TO THE PLAYERS

All is peaceful, and the old man begins his journey back toward land with the fish tied to the side of the skiff. But after an hour, the sharks appear, ready to tear into the great fish, devouring it piece by piece.

The act begins with the man in the boat, while there is still calm.

The act ends when the man crawls ashore, nearly at death's door. A short epilogue follows.

MAIN POINTS

In this act, the following is set up. Most of it is presented in the role descriptions, but some elements you will also need to introduce along the way.

- » Peace and calm at the beginning. The fish is tied to the skiff, and both the sea and the dead fish may perhaps speak with the old man.
- » Blood in the water. Blood seeps from the fish.
- » A great mako shark is the first to appear. Introduce this role as soon as the calm is broken. An intense struggle plays out before the shark is finally killed.
- » Two galanos sharks are next. Another fierce battle follows. In the heat of the fight, the old man loses more and more of his belongings from the boat.
- » More shark attacks follow, and more and more of the fish is eaten.
- » At last, night falls, and it becomes impossible to see how bad things have gotten.
- » The old man may speak with the dead fish about all that has gone wrong.
- » Finally, the man reaches the shore, and in the darkness of night he crawls ashore and into his hut. Left behind at the water's edge lies the skiff with the skeleton of the enormous fish, glowing almost white in the night.

ROLES IN ACT FOUR

Place the following role cards on the table at the start of the act:

- » *The Old Man*
- » *The Sea*
- » *The Dead Fish*
- » *The Boy*
- » *Santiago*

The following roles should be introduced later:

- » *A Great Mako Shark*
- » *Two Galanos Sharks* (two role cards, so two players can work together)

ENCOURAGE BOTH STUBBORNNESS AND FRUSTRATION

Your focus here in Act Four is much like in the previous act. However, you should also encourage both the old man's stubbornness and the frustration that sets in. You can also highlight the grief he may feel as the fish disappears, bite by bite.

**FIND THE EPILOGUE ON »
THE NEXT PAGE**



EPILOGUE: THE BOY AND THE OLD MAN

End the scenario with a short epilogue, where we return to land and the old man wakes up in his shack.

You don't need to lay out any new role cards here—just let the players keep their current roles, or assign one by pointing to a player if needed.

In this epilogue, the non-human roles such as the sea and the fish cannot speak; they can only describe. The boy, however, is physically present in this scene and can therefore speak to the old man.

Ask the players to describe the sunrise and the boat with the enormous fish skeleton still tied to it. What do people at the harbor say?

The boy is sitting in the old man's shack, watching over him. Let the boy and the old man play a short scene together as the old man wakes. What do they say to each other?

ROLES PRESENTED FROM START IN FOURTH ACT

THE OLD MAN,

You finally got each other, you and the fish, you and your brother – and nevertheless, you are still alive. Ready to get back to shore. Let the wind carry you, allow yourself a moment of peace.

You are more tired than ever before. And hungry – almost painful. The blood has dried in the sun. But you must reach the shore, return to life, return to the boy. He must be worried.

Give the sharks the fight they need. Do everything to save your all-too-beautiful catch. You may sacrifice everything in the boat – oars, tiller, knife, perhaps even your mast – to keep them away.

THE SEA

You are everywhere around the boat. The deep, the sky, the wind. The towering clouds and the glow from Havana's lights, not yet visible. You must carry the old man and the fish towards land. Towards life.

But you are also the after the battle, the blood in the water, seeping from the fish's heart. You are the scent in the green sea, slowly drawing in all the hungry ones who now come to feed, so they too may live.

THE DEAD FISH

You lie in the water, tied to the skiff, dead. Had become one with eternity. But soon, the sharks will devour you, bite by bite.

Even in death, you can still speak to the old man. For what are you now? A trophy? An honorable fallen? A great beast that met its end?

And when it comes to the sharks, who will brutally consume you until only your bones remain? Is this what you deserve? And is it what the old man deserves?

THE BOY

He has been at sea for so long. He must get home, just this last stretch. You must help him, guide him across the sea, he must not fall asleep now.

You have done this before, and you know he will make it. Even against the sharks. You two have fought them before and won. You know that he can do it. That you can do it. Never give up. Always keep the head clear.

SANTIAGO

So long at sea, and now just the journey home. But never trust the sea. He never stands still. Always trying to deceive. Always trying new tricks so he, in the end, can claim victory.

But the sea – he will not have you. Never. Not this time either. Fight, strike, tear, rip, kill! Blood in the water, foam and salt in your wounds. Keep going, strike again and again. Give everything you have until he finally gives up! Until you finally reach home!

MORE ROLES ON NEXT PAGE >>

ROLES TO BE INTRODUCED LATER IN FOURTH ACT

A HUGE MAKO SHARK

You have caught the scent of blood in the water. For a long time, you follow the trail through the water.

You are a massive mako shark, *dentuso*. Several meters long, fast like few others. Everything about you is beautiful – except your jaws. Eight rows of teeth, shaped like fingers.

Feast upon the great fish. Tear and rip. Your jaws click as you bite. You do not care about the old man – even as he fights against you. You just keep going until you are dead.

When the first sharks are dead, more will come. Speak of them too – they will never stop.

TWO GALANOS SHARKS (2 ROLE CARDS)

Your fins slice through the water – the first thing to be seen. You are hungry, that is all that drives you. Dumb and hungry.

Your heads are shaped like shovels, and you work together. You smell so foul, filled with hatred, unstoppable. You bite into anything – flesh, oars, skiffs, perhaps even a rudder.

Push the old man to his limits. You are enemies, not noble ones. Can he remain himself when you strike? Describe your attacks and how you take him by surprise.

And when these sharks are dead, even more will come. Speak of them too – they will never stop.

THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA

PLAYER SHEET

THE OLD MAN

84 days without a fish. You are *salao* – the worst kind of unlucky, the kind to be avoided. Yet you go out to see day after day, out onto *La Mar*.

Thin, gaunt, deep wrinkles in your neck. Brown blotches on your cheeks, thanks to the relentless reflections of the tropical sun on the water. Deep scars on your hands. A whole life of cords and heavy fish carved into them.

Everything about you is old. Everything except your eyes. They remain undefeated, cheerful and vital. The same color as the sea.

THE BOY

You used to fish with the old man. He taught you everything.

For the first 40 days without a fish, you went with him every day. But not anymore. Your father found you a lucky boat.

You wish you could still go out to sea with the old man. But every day though, you still help him on land. Prepare the boat in the early morning. You owe him that. Together, you are *hombres*, men...

You are not with him in his skiff.. But you can speak to the old man in his mind. Give him advice, encourage him. You look up to him endlessly.

SANTIAGO

You are the man the old man used to be. You were young and bold, and you saw the sea as a great opponent. You had to conquer it—to show who you were. Like all the other men. They had to notice you.

You were handsome and strong. You used to fight fish, men, and the sea itself. You could do almost anything—even when it came to arm wrestling in the darkest *taberna*. Unbroken eye contact, cigars, and sugar-sweetened rum. You endured and defeated even the biggest man—even if it took all night before his hand finally hit the flame of the candle.

You are not at the skiff either. But you too can speak to the old man. Scold him, awaken memories of the old days, stir his strength and manhood.

THE SEA – LA MAR AND EL MAR

You are vast and wide and all-important. Without you, there is no life. You are kind and very beautiful. But also cruel, and you can change totally in an instant.

You offer great gifts – but you also withhold them. And if you do wild or wicked things, it is only because you cannot help it.

Some know you as *La Mar*—as feminine. That is what you are called by those who love you. They may speak ill of you, but always as if you are a woman. Something unruly, fierce, and yet all-embracing.

The younger fishermen, however, often speak of you as *El Mar*—as something masculine. As an opponent, something brutal, perhaps even an enemy. You must be conquered, tamed, and controlled.

You are all around the old man and his skiff. You are the water, the light, the sky high above. You can rock his boat, fill his sail, pull fiercely at his cords. And you can speak to him, just as he can speak to you.

THE SKIFF

3-4 meters. A worn mast and a patched sail. No shelter or cover.

Things in the boat:

- » A box with tightly braided cords
- » Fishing hooks
- » A throwing harpoon, tied to a cord
- » A box with two sardines, given to the man by the boy, wrapped in paper, ready for bait
- » A club for killing fish
- » A knife
- » Oars
- » A tiller for the rudder
- » A bottle of water
- » No food

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THE OLD MAN

ACT ONE

THE OLD MAN, ACT ONE

You hope for a good, strong current. The sail must be set. Out to sea, into the Gulf Stream, out where the big fish are.

Bait on the hooks, cords in the water. All the things these old hands have done so many times.

If only the boy were here. He helped you get on your way. But now you are alone, surrounded by the sea. Stay focused! Be present!

THE SEA

ACT ONE

THE SEA, ACT ONE

La Mar, the break of dawn. Glowing algae. A light breeze away from the coast. Gentle, calm, rocking. Schools of flying fish, shimmering in the sun. Soft waves.

Help the old man on his way. Speak of your bond. The clouds and the sky, filling everything. The rising sun – pain in the eyes. Reflections on the water.

But you are also *El Mar*, the thought of all what the sea can be. Tremendous forces, a brutal opponent. All the stories to be told back on land.

THE BOY

ACT ONE

THE BOY, ACT ONE

You wish you were with the old man. But that is not how it is. You must stay behind, let him be alone at the sea.

But you help him set off. Show your respect. Prepare the skiff in the early morning. Carry the mast, get the skiff into the water. Fetch beer and coffee in a rusty can. Roll up heavy lines. You work together, intensely and intimately. Like men. Like a father and his son.

Even though you are not in the skiff, speak to the man at sea. Advice and encouragement. About how you used to help him. Memories. Maybe a bit about baseball too.

SANTIAGO

ACT ONE

SANTIAGO, ACT ONE

You are the voice of youth. Of past achievements and all that you caught. Of good times. Of when the man was not old. Turtle hunting, eating their egg – shark liver oil in your belly every single day.

But also of how quiet it is now. Of missing the waves, the wind, and the great fish. Of dreams and journeys to the coast of Africa. Lions on the beach. Battles, man against man.

ACT ONE
A SMALL TUNA

A SMALL TUNA, ACT ONE

You are a small tuna, an albacore, maybe five kilos. Silvery skin in the sun, a blue colored back, also golden. Big, foolish eyes. You will make good bait.

Jumping with the other tuna. You bite, the line goes taut. The man can catch you quite easily.

ACT TWO
THE OLD MAN

THE OLD MAN, ACT TWO

The sun is burning. Everything is still. Soon The Fish will come - you know it. Your brother in the sea. You love him, but in the end, you must kill him. Otherwise, you will be killed yourself.

It will be a long struggle. Stubborn, patient, exhausting. Stay calm, give line slowly, but test him too. Feel the pull, reel in only little by little.

Let the hours, the days pass. Let him tire slowly. Watch the cord – it must not break. If it does, all is lost.

ACT TWO
THE NOBLE FISH IN THE DEEP, LA MAR

THE NOBLE FISH IN THE DEEP, LA MAR, ACT TWO

You nibble at the hook and its bait, not taking it at first. You are deep below, 100 fathoms down.

He can feel you, you enormous swordfish. He might sense what you are, only from the dance of the cord. Small tugs, pauses, then tugs again. His experience from a long life at sea. Let him realise that you share a connection, that you are brothers. He knows you in a way – and yet he has no idea how truly mighty you are.

Later, you strike, swallowing the hook and pulling the cord and the boat with you – farther and farther out to sea. You stay in the depths, refusing to be pulled up. You are stubborn and proud. Just like the old man.

ACT TWO
THE BOY

THE BOY, ACT TWO

You wish you were here to help. Hold the lines, change the coils. Keep a cool head and the lines wet. Do all the things you have always done. Show that you belong together.

Speak to the old man, remind him of everything he does best. Show him that he is not a single day too old. Encouragement, pride.

SANTIAGO
ACT TWO

SANTIAGO, ACT TWO

It should be you who were out here today. You could show the fish who its master is. Show it the way it should be, the right order.

Give the advice that is needed. Show what man you once were. Strength, control, and determination. Show how a fish should be handled. Pull hard, reel him in, do not let him control you.

THE FIERCE FISH IN THE DEEP, EL MAR
ACT TWO

THE FIERCE FISH IN THE DEEP, EL MAR, ACT TWO

You want to pull and tear, drag the old man down, fight against him.

Make sudden jerks, surprises – indications of your strength and power.

You want to show him who you are – how mighty, dangerous, and unpredictable you are. But you cannot fully do so yet. For now, you can only give small indications. You cannot yet reveal yourself in full form.

THE CORD IN THE HAND
ACT TWO

THE CORD IN THE HAND, ACT TWO

You are the line that connects the fish to the old man. You are wet, glistening, and yet sharp. Later, the sun may dry you completely.

You can be both loose and taut – you slip easily through fingers unless you cut. It hurts to hold you for so long. You can tear and shred. Blood may flow. You might suddenly jolt, make the man fall.

CRAMPING HAND
ACT TWO

CRAMPING HAND, ACT TWO

You are the man's left hand, cramping up. You have held the line for too long. You cannot do what you are supposed to. It hurts, hard to keep hold. You are failing the man.

And you will not go away. It will take all his strength to ignore you. You can last for hours – and he must not let go of the line. Even as the fish nears its final battle, you are still there.

THE OLD MAN
ACT THREE

THE OLD MAN, ACT THREE

Tired, exhausted, everything hurts. The cramp still lingers. Nevertheless, time has come to show who you are. He is coming. You can feel it by his pull, small changes.

Now it's time to pull in the fish – your brother, your equal – slowly, deliberately, one foot at a time. Keep the harpoon ready.

But the sun is also burning, and you want to sleep. Hunger, thirst. Your thoughts are drifting – stay focused! Do not be swept away by anger or bloodlust. A fair fight. Show that you have earned the right to kill your brother – just as he would have earned the right to kill you.

THE FISH, PROUD AND NOBLE, LA MAR
ACT THREE

THE FISH, PROUD AND NOBLE, LA MAR, ACT THREE

You are the big, beautiful fish, soon to die. Ready to break the surface, show your grace and beauty. Show who you are.

You are enormous, two feet longer than the skiff – the largest fish he has ever seen. A massive sword, gleaming in the sun. Silver and gold, tinged with blue. Like a rainbow.

Reveal yourself, then return to the water. Let yourself be pulled in slowly, circle by circle. And then leap – high and magnificent. Again and again. Show your strength, your greatness. Give the man the fight he deserves. Fight until, at last, you are dead.

THE FISH, FIERCE AND FURIOUS, EL MAR
ACT THREE

THE FISH, FIERCE AND FURIOUS, EL MAR, ACT THREE

You are the weary, wrathful, violent beast from the deep. Ready to show what you are.

You circle and circle, getting pulled in. Against your will. You want to fight, win, take revenge. For even though you are tired, you are mighty. Way too mighty for an old man.

You will not be easily defeated – not until every ounce of strength has been drained from you. You shake, leap, splash. And even with the harpoon in your heart, you fight. Lashing, twisting, pulling. Let all dignity be torn from you. Until, at last, you are left with nothing. Humiliated. Dead.

THE BOY
ACT THREE

THE BOY, ACT THREE

You have tried this before - though never against a fish as mighty as this one. But there was a time with two swordfish, a male and a female. Their sharp tails nearly cut the lines. You remember it all too well. Once, you were almost killed.

Preach for self control and reason, even when everything is chaos. Try to endure clarity and that dignity you admire so much.

ACT THREE
SANTIAGO

SANTIAGO, ACT THREE

It should be you who was at sea ready to fight. It is not something for an old man. It needs you instead – your strength, your control. Youth, determination, endurance. Just like that time in Havana, with the big man who, in the end, had to let his arm be defeated.

You have done this before. Maybe not quite as fierce. But almost. And you knew what to do. And you can do it again. You must rip all life from the fish, shatter its beastly heart with the harpoon. Prepare for all the glory that will soon be yours.

ACT FOUR
THE OLD MAN

THE OLD MAN, ACT FOUR

You finally got each other, you and the fish, you and your brother – and nevertheless, you are still alive. Ready to get back to shore. Let the wind carry you, allow yourself a moment of peace.

You are more tired than ever before. And hungry – almost painful. The blood has dried in the sun. But you must reach the shore, return to life, return to the boy. He must be worried.

Give the sharks the fight they need. Do everything to save your all-too-beautiful catch. You may sacrifice everything in the boat – oars, tiller, knife, perhaps even your mast – to keep them away.

ACT FOUR
THE SEA

THE SEA, ACT FOUR

You are everywhere around the boat. The deep, the sky, the wind. The towering clouds and the glow from Havana's lights, not yet visible. You must carry the old man and the fish towards land. Towards life.

But you are also the after the battle, the blood in the water, seeping from the fish's heart. You are the scent in the green sea, slowly drawing in all the hungry ones who now come to feed, so they too may live.

ACT FOUR
THE DEAD FISH

THE DEAD FISH, ACT FOUR

You lie in the water, tied to the skiff, dead. Had become one with eternity. But soon, the sharks will devour you, bite by bite.

Even in death, you can still speak to the old man. For what are you now? A trophy? An honorable fallen? A great beast that met its end?

And when it comes to the sharks, who will brutally consume you until only your bones remain? Is this what you deserve? And is it what the old man deserves?

ACT FOUR
THE BOY

THE BOY, ACT FOUR

He has been at sea for so long. He must get home, just this last stretch. You must help him, guide him across the sea, he must not fall asleep now.

You have done this before, and you know he will make it. Even against the sharks. You two have fought them before and won. You know that he can do it. That you can do it. Never give up. Always keep the head clear.

ACT FOUR
SANTIAGO

SANTIAGO, ACT FOUR

So long at sea, and now just the journey home. But never trust the sea. He never stands still. Always trying to deceive. Always trying new tricks so he, in the end, can claim victory.

But the sea – he will not have you. Never. Not this time either. Fight, strike, tear, rip, kill! Blood in the water, foam and salt in your wounds. Keep going, strike again and again. Give everything you have until he finally gives up! Until you finally reach home!

ACT FOUR
A HUGE MAKO SHARK

A HUGE MAKO SHARK, ACT FOUR

You have caught the scent of blood in the water. For a long time, you follow the trail through the water.

You are a massive mako shark, *dentuso*. Several meters long, fast like few others. Everything about you is beautiful – except your jaws. Eight rows of teeth, shaped like fingers.

Feast upon the great fish. Tear and rip. Your jaws click as you bite. You do not care about the old man – even as he fights against you. You just keep going until you are dead.

When the first sharks are dead, more will come. Speak of them too – they will never stop.

ACT FOUR
TWO GALANOS SHARKS

TWO GALANOS SHARKS, ACT FOUR

Your fins slice through the water – the first thing to be seen. You are hungry, that is all that drives you. Dumb and hungry.

Your heads are shaped like shovels, and you work together. You smell so foul, filled with hatred, unstoppable. You bite into anything – flesh, oars, skiffs, perhaps even a rudder.

Push the old man to his limits. You are enemies, not noble ones. Can he remain himself when you strike? Describe your attacks and how you take him by surprise.

And when these sharks are dead, even more will come. Speak of them too – they will never stop.

TWO GALANOS SHARKS

ACT FOUR

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