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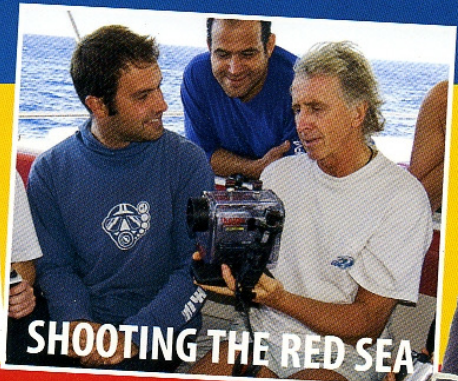
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# GOOD MAN TO HAVE AROUND

You're a budding underwater film-maker on a Red Sea liveboard, with fine dive sites at your disposal, a camera and one of the best guys in the business to show you how it's done. Lesson 1: Less is more. JOHN BANTIN is the fly on the wall

**F**EW OF US ARE AWARE OF those people who are responsible for the imagery we see on our television screens.

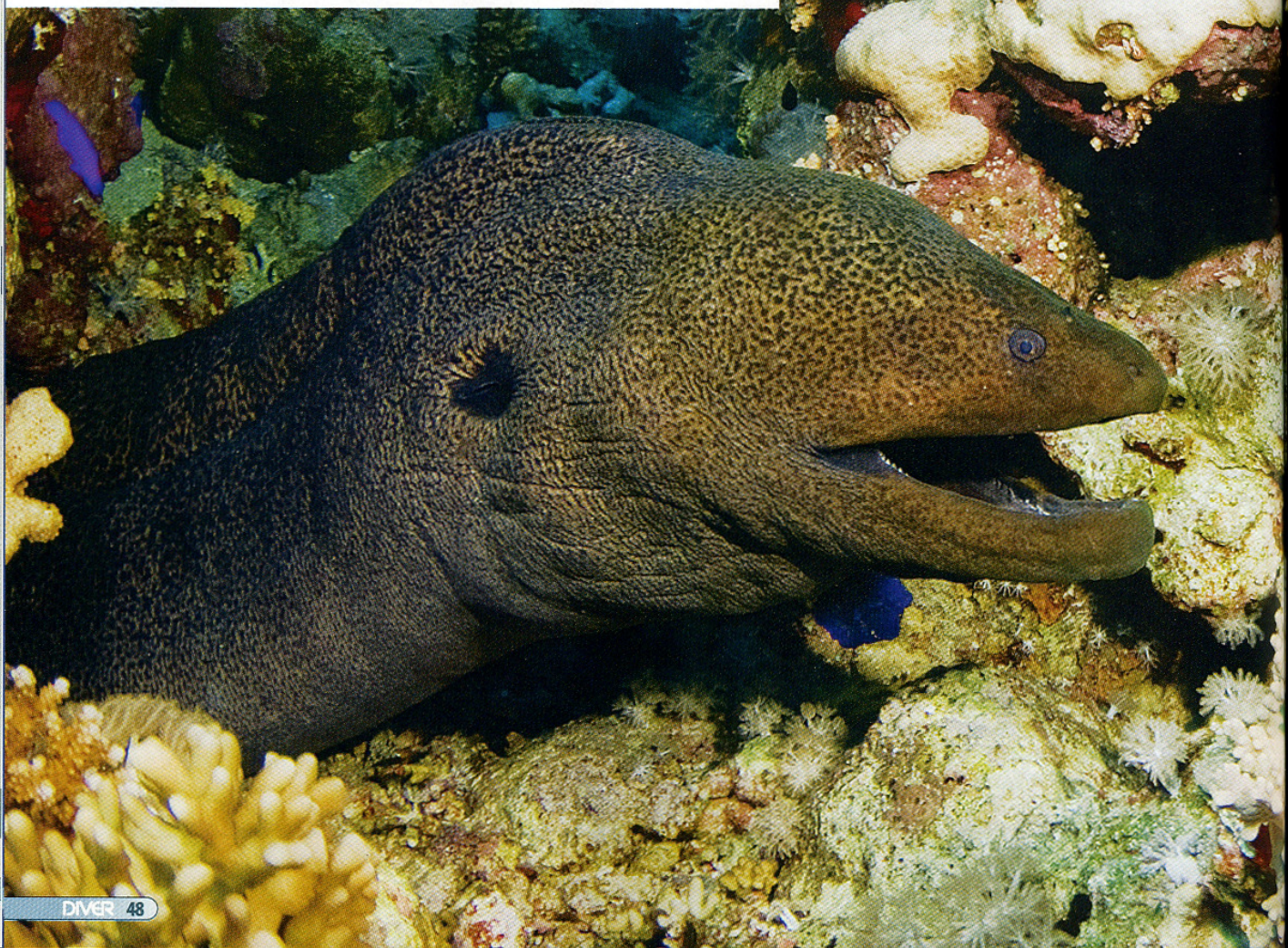
For example, everyone knows that Peter O'Toole and Omar Sharif were the stars of the iconic *Lawrence of Arabia*. Fewer will know that David Lean directed the film. Almost nobody outside the industry knows that the beautiful cinematography was by that master with a camera, Freddie Young.

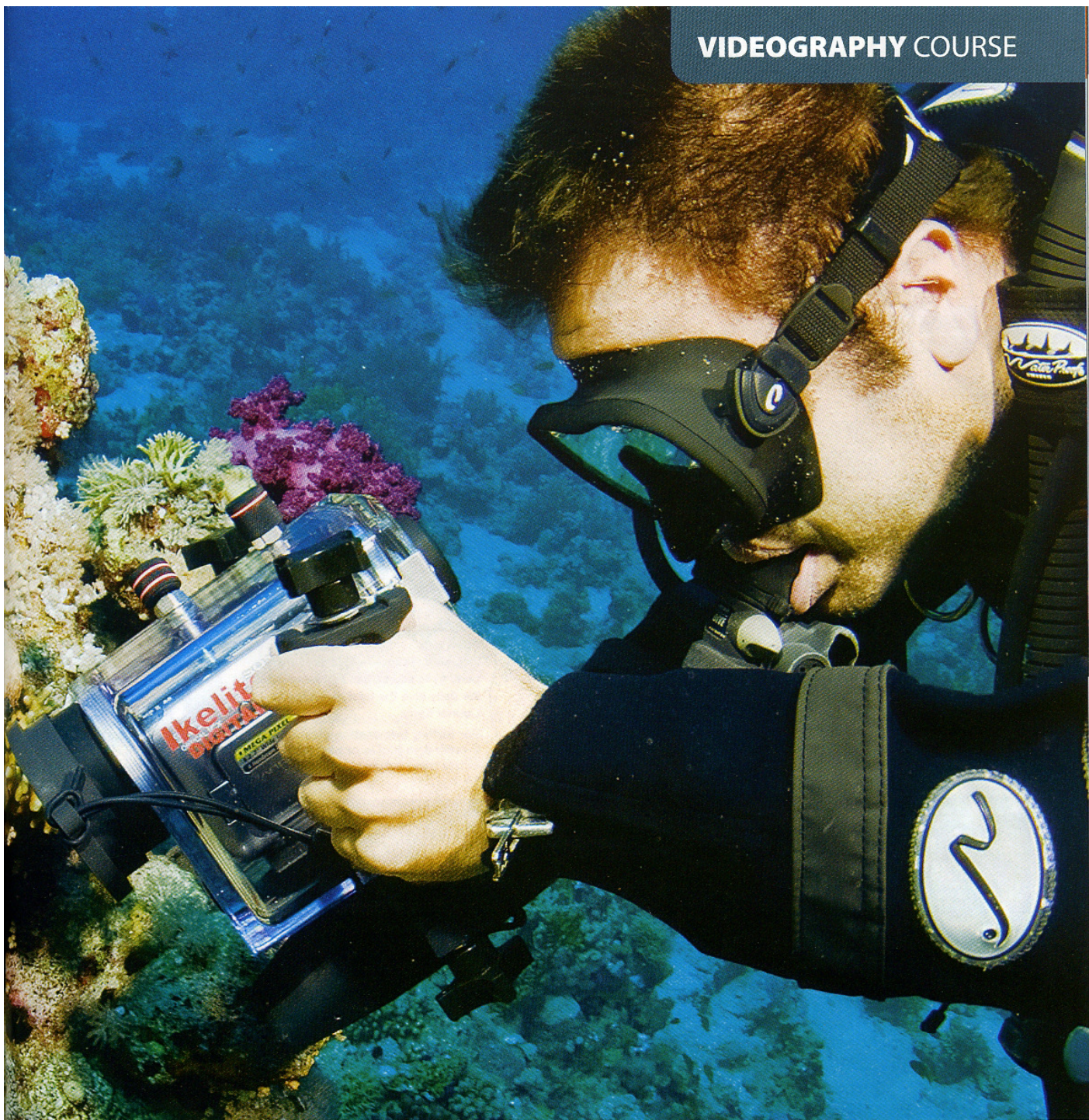
Only a few divers who use video both

above and below the surface know what it takes to make a watchable programme, and this is very evident on most of the liveboard trips I go on.

I've paid my dues, with evenings watching endless sequences of "blue" fish. Nowadays I make my excuses and leave. I've got better things to do in my cabin!

A properly finished film has architecture. It's a number of sequences joined together so that it flows into one event that probably never happened.





Just as a building is made of individual bricks, these sequences have to be made so that they can be joined seamlessly together, otherwise you're left with nothing but a pile of rubble.

Jeff Goodman, as an experienced professional wildlife cameraman, knows how to make these sequences so that they can be successfully stitched together.

I first met Jeff on a Discovery Channel production with Nigel Marven. Nigel came to public prominence only after he left his job at the BBC as David Attenborough's producer and took to standing in front of the camera for independent television.

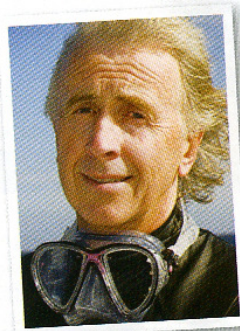
Jeff has been twice nominated for BAFTA Awards as a cameraman, won an award at the Montana Festival and twice collected awards at the prestigious Wildscreen.

He's been credited for work with companies as wide-ranging as the BBC and Discovery Channel, National Geographic Goldhawk Films, CBS and Ch4 Bio Vision.

You may remember United Productions programmes such as *Giants*, *Vampire Hunter* and *Giant Creepy Crawlies*, screened on BBC1 and presented by Nigel Marven. Jeff has also worked on *Coast* with Miranda Krestovnikoff.

**Main image:** Moving in for the close-up of a moray.

**Below:** Jeff Goodman.



While Steve Irwin was toying with lethal spiders and snakes, and telling us "the blighter nearly got me", Jeff Goodman was thinking along similar lines as he recorded the close-ups on his camera. He certainly knows how to get good natural history footage, but because he is always behind the camera, we don't know him.

Now he is sharing his knowledge, and I went on a trip on *Emperor Elite* in the Red Sea to watch him conduct a course on making underwater videos.

It is planning that separates the talented amateur from the professional. This soon became evident as Jeff told his students that



during the week they would have to try to make a three-minute programme that would be interesting to almost any audience.

By contrast, the boat's resident videographer was expecting to make a final cut of around an hour for a film that would really appeal only to those who appeared in it.

**Above:** An old container covered in soft corals at Jolanda Reef adds lots of bright colour.

**Below:** Buoyancy control is essential for steady video camerawork.



Jeff is a gentle character who speaks with a Devon burr to his voice. During his workshops he never condescended, or was destructively critical either.

He started off by talking about white balance, and surprised everyone by suggesting that filters were usually less than useful.

He suggested that his students should set the white balance of their cameras by taking a reading from the surface of the ocean even before diving. He told them that this gave a consistency of "feel" as they went deeper.

On exposure control, he suggested it was better to go for a negative value, adjusting later in post-production.

Unfortunately, the housings and camcorders owned by the students did not cater for manual-exposure settings.

There was also a slight language problem, exemplified by Ophelie, the French student, who needed the English word "focus" explained to her. As you can imagine, focus is quite important!

#### COMPOSITION IS OF COURSE

important too, as is making sequences that fit together. Jeff suggested that his students should concentrate on the discipline of keeping the camera still and allowing subjects to move within the frame, and to make natural exits.

He also discussed letting the camera follow a moving subject, and filling the frame with something interesting, rather than simply viewing the dive through the monitor, with a consequent hard-to-watch outcome.

Short shots can tell a story, but he explained that the divers needed to make an establishing wide shot, a mid-shot, a close-up and an extreme close-up (not necessarily in that order) so that they were well armed with possibilities when it came to editing.

Planning what comes next should always be uppermost in the videographer's mind. Jeff continually reminded his students to consider the story of the final video.

He talked about short camera moves between stories, and avoidance of "crossing the line" – an arbitrary boundary through the middle of the action that, when considered, keeps everything moving in the same direction.

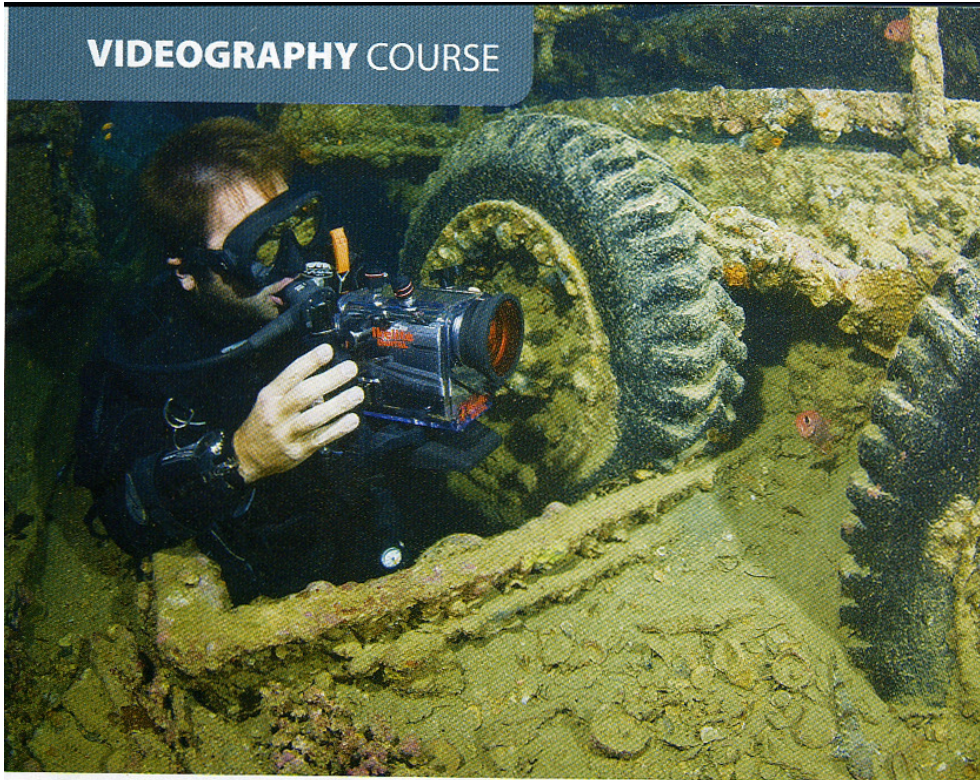
He would remind everyone to think about sequences and the continuity of the action, and knowing when things were not going to work.

Good sequence-making seems to be the key to successful video productions. To keep your audience interested, it is not sufficient simply to string together a few nice shots.

Students took their camcorders into the water at every opportunity to try to capitalise on what they had learned.

Instead of trying to record everything they saw, they became more selective about what was in front of their lenses, collecting material that would cut seamlessly together.

At Ras Mohammed's Jolanda Reef, one diver concentrated on a sequence with a moray eel, recording the wide



shots as it hunted among the corals, and ending up with the close-ups of it with two cleaner wrasse.

Another focused on a short sequence with a blue-spotted ray. It was the same when building sequences of shots in wrecks such as the *Giannis D*, the *Ulysses* or the *Thistlegorm*.

A hawksbill turtle provided an action sequence that gave plenty of opportunity to build the action without crossing that notional line that would otherwise cause the animal to seem to be swimming in the opposite direction in the footage.

After every dive, shots had to be viewed and logged so that they would be easy to find later. When it came to constructing the final edit (using Adobe Premier), each cut had to become unnoticeable to the eye. "A good edit is like a good wig – no one sees it," said Jeff. The finished result should follow a

continuous movement and regular pace.

I asked a couple of the students what they thought about the course. Chris Gooda, from Tunbridge Wells in Kent, felt that the most interesting aspect was understanding Jeff's eye for the way shots fitted together.

For example, one of his shots worked much better when it was flipped, so that the fish swam in the same direction as those in shots placed either side of it.

Chris told me that he felt a little let down by his equipment. His camera had a large monitor, but he didn't have the facility to change any settings once it was in its housing and under water.

Ophelie Marié from La Mure near Grenoble in France said that she had learned how to get nice shots and how to be organised. She said she now knew where to start.

**Above left:** The *Thistlegorm* wreck offers plenty of subjects.

**Above right:** Light streaming through the wreck of the *Ulysses* adds mood.

**Below:** Jeff Goodman and students on board *Emperor Elite*. Even the vessel's videographer (third from left) was keen to learn from him.

"You have to have a story in your mind. I only have a simple camera to start with but for sure I would want a better one now, with maybe a wide-angle lens and some lights. We learned both how to record well and how to edit."

**AFTER NEARLY EVERY LIVEBOARD** trip I go on, the vessel's videographer presents me with a copy of the DVD of the trip. I have quite a collection, but they are rarely watched, even though they usually include some remarkable footage. This is because they are intended to be seen only by those who appear in them and anyone else would find their eyes beginning to roll after a few minutes.

I believe that this Jeff Goodman course is suitable for those who think they are already proficient with their video camera but have difficulty recruiting a repeat audience. Divers who will benefit most are those who want to produce a short programme that has their viewers asking for more.

It is not really for those who have just started, in the way that many still photography courses concentrate on the basics. It's the difference in point of view between the talented amateur and the true professional. █

\* The five-day liveboard film and edit course for up to 10 people costs £280. The next is aboard *Emperor Infinity* on the week-long *Classic Wrecks* from Hurghada trip from 7 May (£1143), followed by two in November aboard *Emperor Superior* on its *Simply the Best* from Safaga itinerary, a 10-day trip that costs £1121. Full details can be found at [www.emperordivers.com](http://www.emperordivers.com)

