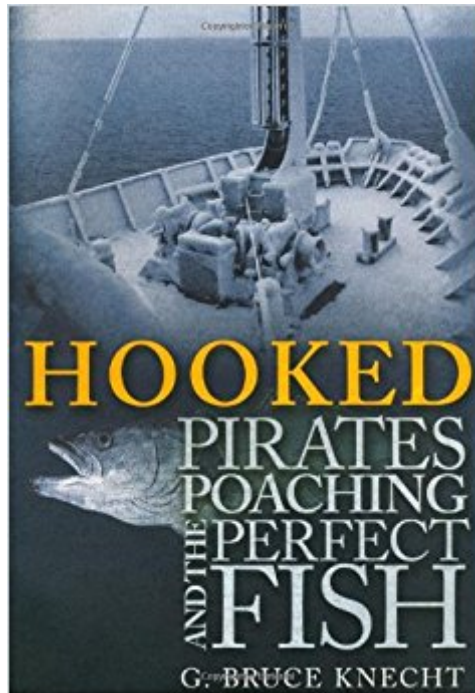


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# Hooked: Pirates, Poaching, And The Perfect Fish



## Synopsis

This modern pirate yarn has all the makings of a great true adventure tale and is also an exploration of the ways our culinary tastes have all manner of unintended consequences for the world around us. *Hooked* is a story about the poaching of the Patagonian toothfish (known to gourmands as Chilean Sea Bass) and is built around the pursuit of the illegal fishing vessel *Viarsa* by an Australian patrol boat, *Southern Supporter*, in one of the longest pursuits in maritime history. Author G. Bruce Knecht chronicles how an obscure fish merchant in California "discovered" and renamed the fish, kicking off a worldwide craze for a fish no one had ever heard of - and everyone had to have. And with demand exploding, pirates were only too happy to satisfy our taste for Chilean Sea Bass. Knecht - whose previous book *The Proving Ground* was hailed by Walter Cronkite as "a sailing masterpiece...a tale more thrilling than fiction" - captivates readers by deftly shifting among the story's nail-biting elements: The perilous chase at sea through frenzied winds, punishing waves, and an obstacle course of icebergs; the high-stakes environmental battle and courtroom drama; and the competitive battle among the world's restaurants to serve the perfect, flaky, white-fleshed fish. From the world's most treacherous waters to its most fabulous kitchens, *Hooked* is at once a thrilling tale and a revelatory popular history that will appeal to a diverse group of readers. Think *Kitchen Confidential* meets *The Hungry Ocean*.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 328 pages

Publisher: Rodale Books; First Edition edition (May 2, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1594861102

ISBN-13: 978-1594861109

Product Dimensions: 6.2 x 1 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 47 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #849,839 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #39 in [Books > Law >](#)

[Specialties > Maritime](#) #228 in [Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Endangered](#)

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. The Patagonian toothfish - which can live up to 50 years and grow to six feet long - is an ugly creature considered too bland for eating by most South Americans. Its high

fat content, codlike texture and lack of a fishy taste convinced a Los Angeles fish merchant who found the toothfish in Chile in 1977 that, given an exotic new name, it would do quite well in America. By 1998, "Chilean sea bass" had become the hottest restaurant craze: "[e]veryone had to have it." Knecht (*The Proving Ground*) weaves a parallel plot, which takes place in the South Indian Ocean in 2003, where an Australian patrol boat is hunting down a pirate vessel for stealing toothfish. The chase takes them thousands of nautical miles away to dangerous Antarctic waters and involves South African mercenaries and a dramatic boarding in dangerous seas. Knecht's gripping book flips between the commercial history of the toothfish—just the latest of many culinary fads that end up threatening an ocean species—and the chase, which illuminates the practically lawless world of commercial fishing, where factory boats with vast dragnets can devastate a population in just a couple of years, a practice the author calls "the marine equivalent of strip mining." First serial in the *Wall Street Journal*. (May) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

“Hooked is a fish story, a global whodunit, a courtroom drama--and a critically important ecological message all rolled into one.”--Tom Brokaw  
“It’s one of the best ones I’ve read in years.”--Tom Brokaw  
Today (NBC) 05/24/06  
Review by John Balzar, LA Times  
A high-seas adventure with enough action and suspense to have you holding your breath. A mystery that untangles the roots of a culinary fad fitfully hatched in and marketed from Los Angeles. A courtroom thriller. Proof positive that an objective eye is the most persuasive of all. Mr. G. Bruce Knecht, take a bow. Not only is “Hooked: Pirates, Poaching and the Perfect Fish” a rollicking read, it is a relief. And a wonder. For wrapped up in these red-blooded storytelling ingredients is the account of another assault on our planet’s troubled environment. And let’s face it, conservation writing has become one of our dreariest forms: The sky is falling, oh dear—fill in the blanks. In these taut pages, Knecht takes livelier aim at the plundering of a limited resource for the sake of growing appetites. He delivers us, straight ahead and close-in, to an epic sea chase across the fearsome Southern Ocean. In one boat, righteous men are out to get what they want, what they regard as theirs, in this seascape of ice and storm. In the other, righteous men are out to stop them in the name of the law. The story about the demise of the Patagonian toothfish, an ugly, tasteless creature with an unappealing name, is not so heartening. But the fact that Knecht tells it with such crackling drive and with complete confidence in the good judgment of his readers is. The Patagonian toothfish is large, dark-skinned and cod-like in appearance. The name comes from its undershot mouth and needle-sharp fangs. It dwells in deep,

cold waters -- for purposes of Knecht's story, in the waters of the far Southern Hemisphere. Back in the late 1970s, it was a trash fish caught only incidentally by the commercial fleet that worked out of Valparaíso, Chile. It was thought too oily to be desirable. But a decline in the catch of other more salable fish, along with some desperate determination by global fish brokers who work the Chile-to-Los Angeles circuit, a dash of ingenuity by seafood marketers and a splash of savory miso glaze in a fancy New York restaurant, and voilà, you have the highly desirable, evermore expensive and, of course, deliciously trendy Chilean sea bass. You can guess what this newfound glamour has meant for the toothfish. Late in the game, as usual, fishery experts have weighed in with the news that this long-lived, slow-growing animal cannot endure the strip-mining of modern commercial fishing. By now, though, the fish has become the rage, commanding exorbitant prices; for fisherman, this is irresistible. Although their reach and budgets are limited, governments have made efforts to "save" the toothfish, joined in the effort by environmental activists and, here and there, responsible chefs too. But enough. I said that Knecht had confidence in his readers. This book contains no sermon. All the essential elements are there, yes. But if someone is going to take to the soapbox and wag a stern finger, it will have to be you. Tearing through this page turner is enough to trigger a pinch-me sensation. Wait a minute, am I reading a book about exploitation of our fragile planet in which the writer isn't bashing me over the head with the obvious? Am I learning about the sensibilities of those who fish where they please along with the struggles of those who try to stop them? Am I getting both a story and the story? You are. We can wish Knecht good fortune in the hope that others will follow his cue. True enough, not all conservation issues yield the plot and rugged characters of a Jack London high-seas adventure. And it's plain that the most pressing conservation stories, like global warming, don't arrive at easy answers. But there is something to the notion of casting one's net wider than the didactic, and Knecht proves it. Conservationists will be with him, and who knows who else he will reel in for the sake of an oh-my-goodness tale. A reporter for the Wall Street Journal as well as an experienced sailor, Knecht's last book was the harrowing adventure "The Proving Ground," the story of the tragic Sydney-to-Hobart yacht race in 1998, in which a surprise storm took out more than half the fleet and killed six mariners. His feel for the wild wonder of the sea goes without saying. But what about the courtroom thriller part of this book? We'll leave that to the author and his compelling narrative. The outlines of the story have the Australian patrol boat Southern Supporter in territorial waters north of Antarctica, prime habitat for the shrinking population of Patagonian toothfish. The under-gunned patrol encounters a shadowy 175-foot, Uruguayan-flagged ship, the Viarsa-1. Fishing pirates? Probably. Before the tale

is over, these ships have traversed 4,000 miles of some of the most inhospitable and terrifying waters on the planet, and two years have lapsed. Australia, which is not alone among nations with an imperfect record of managing fisheries, has its laws tested by the tradition of lawlessness that has long ruled the high seas. All the while, by the heavy ton, by the container load, by the merciless rule of supply and demand, Patagonian toothfish are drawn from the deep, grilled, poached, broiled and sauced in another maritime gold rush. Then a jury speaks. It gives away nothing to say that when you next find yourself at a restaurant looking at the seafood offerings, you'll know what you should do. John Balzar is a Times staff writer and the author of "Yukon Alone: The World's Toughest Adventure Race." The New York Times - 6/15/06 In 1977 Lee Lantz, a Los Angeles fish wholesaler, came across something new in the Chilean fishing port of Valparaiso. The enormous "fearsome-looking gray-black fish" was called "bacalao de profundidad," or "cod of the deep" by the local fisherman, and nobody wanted it. In "Hooked," G. Bruce Knecht, a writer for The Wall Street Journal, tells how the fish nobody wanted became the trendy Chilean sea bass, and how over the last 30 years it has been fished almost to the point of extinction. In chapters that move from places like the South Indian Ocean to Bridgehampton, N.Y., to Vancouver to Perth, Australia, Mr. Knecht tells of the rise and fall of a fish, as well as of a 4,000-mile chase to seize a pirate fishing boat.

I wanted to like it, really. I come from a long line of English mariners going back to the 1500's, I love maritime/nautical non-fiction, it's sort of a vice for me in the summer at the pool or the beach. After the reviews and description, I was very much expecting much more. I know, we can't all be Nat Philbrick, but this book was just ok. The author took a LOT of liberty in his descriptions of what machinery, boats, technology was being used...the liberty lies in that he only fully described SOME of the picture, and I was often left having to read a passage a couple of times to make sure I didn't miss something...nope, not there, he left that part out. And then at other times, he went into way more detail than necessary with the conversations between the people..especially during actions scenes, when I don't really need or want to know what they were saying to each other, I just want the action. I really loved the reason the story is told. I love the story. I love the idea of the history and knowing the birth of the name Chilean Sea Bass, that was super cool. I won't be reading this author any farther though. Sorry. :(

I couldn't put Hooked down. It's an exciting adventure, a history of fishing and the Patagonian

Toothfish (Chilean Sea Bass) in particular, a chase scene reminiscent of Shackleton's crew, communication logistics on the oceans, international law enforcement, and restaurant practices. You won't be disappointed, though you might not want to eat toothfish afterward.

The story in this book is multi-faceted, but all of the intertwined stories revolve around a deep sea monster known, in restaurants and fish stores, as "Chilean sea bass". The fish is, in reality, the Patagonian toothfish, which is a deep water, slow growing fish found in the southern oceans of the world. And in a little more than 2 decades, it has gone from being a species no one would eat to being one of the most expensive fish that can be ordered in any establishment. The author weaves together the tale of an Australian fisheries enforcement vessel's attempt to stop a ship believe to have been fishing for toothfish illegally in Australian waters, the story of how the fish went from junk to gold in a short period of time and the problems of over fishing in our oceans. In addition, the author highlights what chefs are doing to aid in reducing the consumption of over fished species and what some countries are doing to stop poaching in waters around the world. The book is extremely well written and the stories are really quite riveting. It is a book that is hard to put down and should be read by all who order or buy seafood. It will really make you think about what you are really getting before you order. And, that is a very important process that could help save the world's fisheries.

I had to read this book for my Marine Biodiversity class, but I would recommend it for anyone. We as a culture are desperately ignorant of the issues concerning seafood and the fishing industry, and it will really open your eyes to the ecological, cultural, legal, and human aspects of this system of overexploitation. As the book says, "we're fishing our way down the food web," and we need to start reconsidering the effects overfishing is having on many ecosystems around the ocean. I would call it a "docu-novel," as it presents in a story format the historic chase of an Australian fisheries enforcement boat and a vessel suspected of illegally fishing their waters, using personal accounts and legal records of the events, and all quotes were actually remembered, written, or recorded by one of the people or vessels involved. It is easy reading, and gives well-thought out scientific and cultural background information along the way to make it understandable even for people who have no background in the subjects being addressed.

Having just returned from a fishing adventure driving all over Canada, Alaska and Prince of Wales Island this book really hit home. The SAD truth is there are too many mouths to be fed and plenty of

"pirates" willing to risk life and limb (and jail time) to rape the ocean to bring the fish to market. Incredible true story. Should be required reading in all high schools.

This is an excellent book detailing an illegal fishing expedition in Australian water resulting in a forced boarding after a lengthy chase to north of South Africa, as well as the resulting trial. But that is not the most interesting story of the book. The author details the discovery of Chilean Sea Bass (bass? what a joke), the marketing angle, and the subsequent ecological tragedy as the sea beds are over fished in 15 years. The author did excellent research and tells this compelling tale while teaching the reader about the fishing industry, legal and illegal, and the current state of our fishing beds. One concern I have about the book is it is somewhat disjointed as he jumps from country to country at one point adding in a story of a fishing company owner living in America who is arrested for importing fish illegally caught. Also, in many respects the trial at the end of the book is very anti-climatic. Overall though, this is a very interesting book where you will learn quite a bit about the fishing industry and problems with our supplies of fish.

Wonderful adventure and true story. It starts out a bit slow but revs into high gear for an amazing chase. If you cook, eat out and or love fish this book will be a fun and educational read about our oceans and fishing industry.

A lot of detail for this event, lot of history too. Well done, but maybe overdone when considering the unsatisfactory ending.

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