

Men's Journal

SICILY



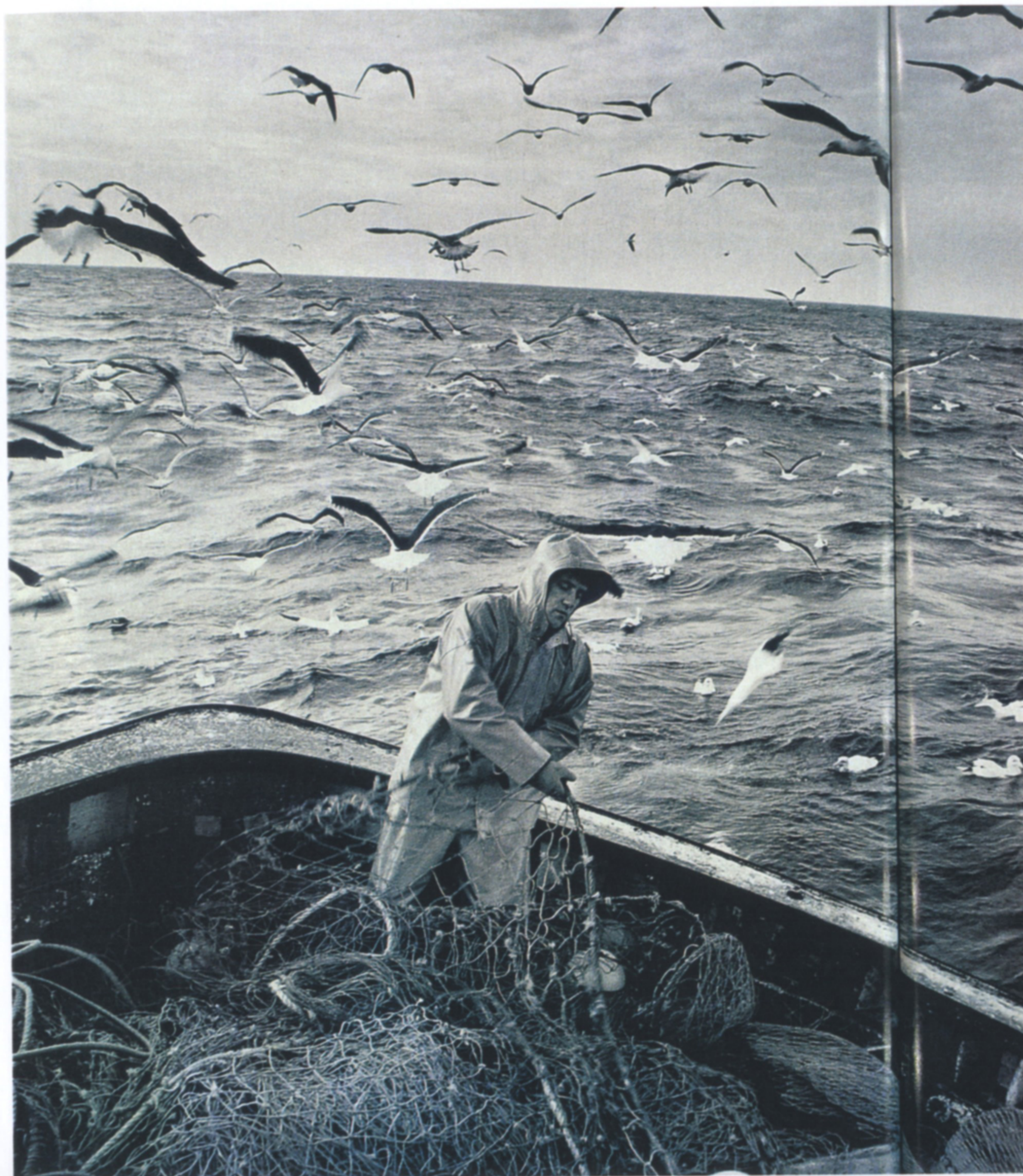
The Hunters

IN PORTOPALO di Capo Passero, on the southeastern tip of Sicily, a handful of men still adhere to a fishing style called *tonnara*, which involves a maze of nets, schools of bluefin tuna, and a tradition that stretches back to the Bronze Age. Here's how it works: The nets, sewn into ever-tightening "rooms," are anchored to the seafloor. The tuna enter and swim from room to room, seeking an exit, until they reach the final, narrow chamber — the death room. As the fishermen laboriously pull in the nets, they beat the tuna with barbed gaffs in the small pool of the net, and with the fish thrashing about, the water bubbles red. "It's a violent thing to look at," says Fiorio. "Like a bullfight of the sea."

Sicily harbors another ancient species of fisherman: the swordfish hunter. These fishermen search for days in their small boats, trying to spot swordfish as they skate across the shallow sills of the Strait of Messina, then spear them with hand-thrown harpoons. The strikes are fewer and fewer these days, due to commercial overfishing, and because catches are rare, only sixteen boats still operate between Sicily and Calabria. The *tonnaroti*, too, face extinction; Atlantic purse seiners have all but emptied the Mediterranean of its tuna stocks. "I wasn't necessarily seeking disappearing men," Fiorio says. "But wherever I went, things seemed to be ending."

A harpooner takes aim at a swordfish off the Lipari Islands; right, a big catch.





RUSSIA

NO HARBOR MASTER in Europe will let them ashore. True, they are only fishermen, but they are considered to be in some ways the pirates of today's high seas, men of a dangerously gluttonous and maverick breed. On their fleet of unregulated Russian Klondykers — "huge, haggard, old-equipped maxi-trawlers," as Fiorio puts it — they catch and process thousands of tons of haddock a week, hitting fishery stocks with the wallop of an atom bomb. For months at a time, these outcasts never set foot on land and smell nothing but dead and dying haddock. Fiorio found them working the waters near the Shetland Islands of Scotland, at the fish-streaked juncture of the Atlantic Ocean, the Norwegian Sea, and the North Sea; she had to hire a boatman to take her out to a trawler for her two days aboard. For all their ruinous work, Fiorio found herself "completely charmed" by the pariahs she encountered. "There were potted plants everywhere," she says, "filled with earth. This was the mud of Russia carried out to sea. These were men who couldn't get ashore anywhere but who carried their motherland with them in small pots."

The Pirates

Men of the Russian Klondyker Radiant Star, Sea of the Hebrides.



The Warriors

GERMANY

THEIR MOTTO IS, Learn to suffer without complaining. And suffer they do: The combat divers of the Kampfschwimmerkompanie — Germany's counterpart to the U.S. Navy's SEALs — undergo some of the most merciless training of any military unit in the world. "They have to learn to walk, run, sit, and live underwater," says Fiorio. To that end, high-diving practice, for instance, is done blindfolded to erase the distinction between air and water; a related exercise has the divers leap into a pool from a thirty-foot tower, wearing lead-weighted belts. When they reach the pool's bottom, they are required to "walk" its fifty-meter length — an airless, two-minute hike. A more treacherous exercise involves entering and exiting deep-sea submarines through the sub's torpedo tube. The divers wedge themselves in, two at a time; once the hatch is closed, the cramped tube is flooded and the divers wait, sealed in the claustrophobic, cold pitch black, for the pressure to slowly stabilize. "It's a nightmare of a thing to do," says Fiorio. But you won't get any complaints from the divers.

A diver performs a landing exercise; right, entering the torpedo tube of a U-18 submarine.

