

Time Magazine

Books

By MICHAEL DEMAREST

THE SHIPKILLER

by Justin Scott; Dial/James Wade

341 pages; \$9.95

Bursting out of a squall at 16 knots, a vast wall of steel pulverizes a small sailboat and steams blithely on. The million-ton megatanker Leviathan, biggest moving object on the face of the earth, leaves Peter and Carolyn Hardin floundering in the chill Atlantic. He survives; she does not. Dr. Hardin is ravaged by the death of his wife and half crazed over his inability to win redress or even acknowledgment of what he regards as murder. But he is rich, a skillful sailor and a brilliant technician. In another boat, a 38-ft. sloop he renames Carolyn, equipped with radar of his own invention and a purloined U.S. antitank TOW missile, Hardin sails off to stalk and destroy the black Moby Dick. Symbolically, his shipmate is also black, a physician, as was his wife, a young woman who had pulled him from an English beach and back to health, if not sanity.

The hunt takes them through a savage South Atlantic storm that dismasts the sloop and defuses the kill; even Leviathan barely survives the battering. Elegant Ajaratu Akanke, by now both sleeping and sailing mate, is spirited from Capetown to her native Nigeria while Hardin lays a solo course for the Persian Gulf, where Leviathan will take on a million tons of oil...

New Yorker Justin Scott spent two years researching and writing *The Shipkiller*. It shows. His saga of the battered, unyielding Carolyn is as heady as Francis Chichester's narrative, with a draught of Melville and a slosh of Josh Slocum. His choice of villain is a shrewd one. Leviathan is even more dangerous and ungovernable than any vessel described in Noël Mostert's *Supership*. Scott, who has published five previous novels, limns his driven people as stylishly as his boats. As for Peter Hardin, he will surely name his next sloop Ajaratu.