



The Idiot Gods

David Zindell

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Quite simply the best book about a whale since Moby Dick. The Idiot Gods is an epic tale told by an orca. David Zindell returns to the grand themes of Neverness in this uniquely moving book. An epic tale of a quest for a new way of life on earth, told by an orca. When Arjuna of the Blue Aria Family encounters three signs of cataclysm, he leaves his home in the Arctic Ocean to seek out the Idiot Gods and ask us why we are destroying the world. But the whales' ancient Song of Life is beyond our understanding, and we know nothing of the Great Covenant between our kinds. Arjuna is captured, starved, tortured and made to do tricks in a tiny pool at Sea Circus. His love for a human linguist gives him hope, even as he despairs that other people twist his words and continue the worldwide slaughter. As the whales' beloved Ocean turns toward the Blood Solstice the fate of humanity hangs in the balance: for if Arjuna gains the Voice of Death he could destroy mankind. But if understanding can prevail, he may, through the whales' mysterious power of quenging, create a new Song of Life and enable human evolution to unfold.

The Idiot Gods Details

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Author : David Zindell

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From Reader Review The Idiot Gods for online ebook

Joel says

Fascinating and well-thought-through concept. Unfortunately, the tone got ever more preachy and self-righteous as the storyline developed.

I struggled to get through it after initially enjoying it.

Yasmin Foster says

The (harper edition) cover tells you all you need to know. This is an environmental narrative. I would also say this is a science-fiction book rather than fantasy. I say this because like sci-fi greats, like Ray Bradbury, Zindell has used an unfamiliar setting (or in this case perspective) to display our very familiar problems, and perhaps dare to warn us what has (in the author's mind) gone wrong and maybe provide us with some hope/answers/ideas/solutions.

The world building is amazing. Zindell has tried hard to try to portray how a whale might see the world. This is a heavy book and, tonally and graphically, for a mature audience. Some of the philosophies (if that is the correct word) are fascinating to think about, and by making our protagonist an orca Zindell can get away with what is said a lot more than if our protagonist was human. If Arjuna was human I reckon he would very quickly become very unlikable to a lot of people. That's not to say that he is some adorable 'messiah'. His dialogue can get too preachy, and I can understand if people will be turned off by it and stop reading (though that is quite ironic given how 'ostrich' the whales think the humans are- touché Zindell.) At times Arjuna felt hypocritically arrogant in his judgement. But this seems to be all part of his character growth.

I just wish this book wasn't so ham-fisted about its message because this would be a book I'd love to give to people or say "read this bit, what do you think of that? Do you agree or not?" Some very interesting discussions could come from this book. If the issue was handled with a bit more delicacy this book might have a wider audience appeal.

Linda in Utopia says

A Story told from the view of an Orca. Well, I did not need to think twice about buying, because I simply love whales.

This book is pure fiction. But its also full of truth. Full of hate. And full of love.

But is this a Fairytale? Is it a philosophical book? Yes, its all of that and so much more.

We follow Arjuna, the protagonist Orca, on his journey through all the oceans. He is not like others of this kind, as he feels something inside him, an urge to learn, to understand the world aside from what he knows and has been taught by his family and ancestors.

So he leaves his tribe to speak to the humans. He wants to understand why they are destroying the world. Why are they dumping their plastic in the ocean? And why do they need to fish all the creatures out of the sea?

Arjuna has to endure terrible things. Not only is he caught and put in a Seaworld-like Tank, no it gets worse and worse. He loses his ability to simple be ... "whale", he fears he turns mad and will become a human himself.

But in all his suffering, me, the reader, is always on his side. I really do feel with him and I can sense that David Zindell's portrayal of whales is just so much more... evolved. They understand the world and nature as it is. And because of that, they are so much wiser than humans.

But Arjuna's journey does not end in a tank, there is some redemption also, as he finally finds humans who want to speak back to him, who want to understand his whale-sounds.

But this is just the beginning of our Orca's journey to find his true self again, to understand the whole ocean and to maybe save the world of mankind a little.

As I said, this book is really philosophical at times. Religion, politics, war and simply, what exactly drives us humans into doing things is a big part of the book. The whales have deep conversations about meaning, being and all the universe among themself.

They discuss human intelligence, the mostly question it all the time, that's why they call us "the idiot gods."

Finally, after much discussion, my family reached a consensus that humans were probably about as smart as an octopus, whose grasping tentacles the humans' hands somewhat resembled.

The philosophical parts can be hard to get through (at least for me, not native english, I had to look up some of the vocabulary....), but they are never boring.

This book is not a typical page-turner, but it develops a kind of maelstrom, that carries you deep under the ocean's surface, where you simply never want to return from.

There is so much emotion going on, so much truth about us humans the author tells through the thoughts of whales, I simply has to move you.

I also think this book is very relevant for our time. Yes, why are we treating the ocean like a dump? Why are we not changing things more quickly, because we obviously know that our actions are the source for all that's happening to the planet right now. And, even more important: Why are we still keeping Orcas and Dolphins in tiny tanks and train them to do fun tricks?

Goodreads certainly is not the place to start a discussion about Seawold or Plastic Waste, but this book can give you a new perspective. To start thinking. To not buy a ticket for any of these Sea-Circuses. And to start living more mindfully.

Mark Groenen says

Finished 'The Idiot Gods' by David Zindell

This book tells the story of Arjuna, an orca who wishes to talk to the humans (or, as he calls them; the Idiot Gods). It's a long and interesting journey through the oceans, and the perspective of an orca is written in a really interesting way. The book is also very philosophical (often referring to philosophers and theologists) and a reflection on what we as humans are and could be. It also brought back memories of the documentary 'Blackfish' (worth watching, by the way), which makes sense since Samantha Berg (who worked on the film) helped Zindell with his orca research.

A surprisingly deep (pun intended) book, and highly recommended!

Warren Mayocchi says

I am a fan of David Zindell's philosophical style which I first experienced in his early books of *Neverness* and the following *The Requiem for Homo Sapiens* trilogy. In his fiction there is much substance which I continue to think on today (twenty years later). So while *The Idiot Gods* is not as good, it is still a Zindell work in the style which affects me. So, it is therefore better than most, and earns a five star rating from me. It will not be a book for everyone, but it probably should be.

'It may be,' I said, 'that the humans have found a way, a way we never imagined, of using the false to reveal the true, much as their machines tear through the tissues of the earth in order to uncover diamonds and gold.' (p218)

The Idiot Gods is also a fiction which hopes to reveal the true. This fiction is not subtle in the truth it wishes us to see, those who already accept the science of what we have done/are doing to our planet will nod their heads and read on, others, I suspect, will be turned off quickly. It is in no way subtle:

'I see an entire species that lives off itself. Like sharks devouring each other, you eat each other's labor, money, time, sweat, tears, hopes, and dreams.' (p260)

There is of course a story driving the book forward, but the blood of the story is philosophy and what humanity is doing to the planet called Ocean. Well, it is "Ocean" for the sea born central characters. The story is a first-person account from an orca named Arjuna who embarks on a quest to understand and communicate with humans. The story is a journal of Arjuna's quest and what he ultimately must do with all he learns. Speaking generally, humanity is presented in this book as a destructive child taking pleasure in ruining their favourite toys and then being upset when the toy is broken. If this type of mirror on our behaviour is offensive to you, then this is probably not going to be a book you will enjoy or complete. However, with an open mind, the whale-human philosophical interactions and meditations are interesting and at times thought provoking.

It can be read as just an interesting story, but it certainly seems that David Zindell intends the whale's view of humans to be a mirror to help us change:

Anyone reading it - any woman or man of heart - would understand the terrible consequences of human selfishness and the essential depravity of the human race. And in doing so, they would be driven to find a better way for themselves and their world. (p223)

Pat Morton says

Requiem for Cetacean's, nothing new here really as the story is essentially the same as Danlo's in Requiem for homo sapiens but saying that I really enjoyed it (probably earned an extra star solely on how much I liked his previous works). A thought provoking journey into yourself I would read it just to enjoy Zindell's use of language.

Moontoast says

Stunning story. A bit slow to progress but I enjoyed the meandering ponderings of this beautiful whale's mind. Highly reflective, it forces you to look abstractly and critically at the world and your own ethos. Really beautiful.

Kalin says

I have a thing for dolphins. I've had it since I read Brin's *Startide Rising*, or maybe even earlier, when my parents took me to the Dolphinarium in Varna. I've wondered whether dolphins may be smarter than us humans. I've *known* that they're kinder. I've yearned to find a way to talk with them. I've written stories where they take center stage.

And now, after *The Idiot Gods*, I have a thing for orcas. :)

Here come the highlights of my thing:

~ When I first mentioned this book to my friends who are Zindell aficionados, we wondered about its title (and grinned and giggled). And later, this is what I found in the introductory "Tranlators' Note":

(...) we would like to say something about two terms that Arjuna uses at various times throughout his account. The first is the name he often used to describe human beings: the idiot gods. He thought long and deep before deciding on this sobriquet. At times, he thought it much more apt to call our species the mad gods or the insane gods. However, madness can too easily be associated with anger, and although Arjuna certainly saw human beings as afflicted with wrath, as a rabid dog is with *lyssavirus*, he did not see this as humanity's greatest sin. Neither did he think of our kind as purely insane. Rather, he perceived in our derangement of sense and soul a willful debilitation, as if we human beings are an entire race of sleepwalkers moving through a nightmare from which we refuse to awaken. We are, he once said, like lost children wandering through a dark landscape without markers or boundaries. He had great compassion for (and dread of) our *innocence*. Given the horrors that Arjuna recounts, that seems a strange word to apply to the human kind, but it motivates his choice to call us idiots. It is the holy fool kind of innocence of Prince Myshkin in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* as well as the deadly innocence of the young man Lone in Sturgeon's *The Fabulous Idiot*, incorporated into the great work known as *More Than Human*. Of all humanity's failings that Arjuna enumerates in such painstaking and painful detail, he counts as the very worst our refusal to embrace our best possibilities and so to live as gods.

So, we set off in a fabulous company. And some of us are rubbing their hands in anticipation (and maybe even a little bit--no, no, no, *definitely* not a lot--of glee. ;)

~ Heeheehee

Baby Porrima, the most innocent of my family, asked me, 'Do you really think the humans could be intelligent like us?'

Before I could answer, Caph said, 'We have watched their winged ships that fly through the sky and land upon the water. Have we any reason to suppose that the humans are more intelligent than the geese who do the same, but with much more grace?'

'I should not put their intelligence that high,' my sister Nashira said in her bewildered but beautiful voice. 'We have all beheld the ugliness of the metal shells that carry the humans across the water. Even a snail, though, within its perfectly spiraled shell, makes a more esthetically pleasing protection. I should say that the humans cannot be more intelligent than a mollusk.'

Her assessment, though, proved to be at the lower end of my family's estimation of human intelligence. Dheneb argued that humans likely surpassed turtles in their mental faculties even though it seemed doubtful that they had figured out how to live as long. Chara placed the upper limit of the humans' percipience near that of seals, who after all knew well enough not to swim in shark-darkened waters whereas the humans did not. My grandmother futilely reminded us that intelligence could not be determined from the outside but only experienced from within.

Finally, after much discussion, my family reached a consensus that humans were probably about as smart as an octopus, whose grasping tentacles the humans' hands somewhat resembled. Their generosity in according humans this degree of sentience surprised me, for the octopi are among the cleverest of the ocean's creatures, even if they cannot speak in the manner of a whale.

(Will this book be Zindell's answer to Daniel Quinn's *Ishmael*?)

~ Hearken, all ye linguists! This is how it starteth!

'I failed,' I said, moving even closer, 'to speak with other humans on the northern ocean. That might have been because they truly could not learn what I tried to teach them, as might prove true with you. Or perhaps the problem lies in an insufficiency of patience on my part, or worse, a failure of my imagination. But one cannot imagine what one cannot imagine. And what seems strange to me past all understanding is how you—or, I should say, your cousins the whale hunters—could not understand the simplest of significants for the most common substance on the world that we share.'

I slapped the surface of the sea with both flipper and tail, even as I said, 'Water!' To emphasize the word, I took in a mouthful of water and sprayed it out so that it wetted the human lying on the boat.

'Water! Water! Water!'

'Oh my God, he soaked me! Looks like Bobo wants to play!'

'Water. Water. Water.' Now I spoke more slowly, as slow as I could, and I toned down the harmonies so that even a jellyfish might hear them. 'Water. Water. Water. Water. Water.'

'It's almost like he's trying to tell us something!'

Did her utterances signify anything? I could not tell. Even so, I continued memorizing them for later review—and I contemplated each spike and wave of each of their grunts as they made them. I noticed that whenever these humans phonated, they opened their mouths to let the sounds out, as anuses let go of waste. How bizarre! How awkward! How undignified!

Heeheehee

~ The Others are Us:

I thought I knew the reason, and it had to do with an essential paradox: that only through looking out at all the manifold forms and features of the world can we ever apprehend the much stranger phenomena of ourselves. Just as we can see stars only against the blackness of the nighttime sky, so we need others to show us the many ways that we shine as unique sparks of creation. The greater the contrast in this relationship, the deeper the understanding. For instance, were not females, such as lovely Mother Agena, a part of the great unknown? No other work of nature was more like a male orca such as I, and yet so utterly different. How should I then long to find myself within the wild, wet clutch of her body and even the wilder ocean of her soul? Would it not be, I wondered, that precisely in closing the difference between us and daring to enter the most dangerous place in the universe I would discover an exalted and ecstatic Arjuna whom I might otherwise not ever know?

~ Who teaches whom?

We both looked over at Gabi, who was now leaping higher than she had ever leaped before.

‘Can you not see, Arjuna, that *this* is what she wants you to do?’

So saying, he swam down and then breached in a great (for a baby) leap. He hung in the air seemingly motionless at the top of his arc for a nearly endless moment of time. I noticed that he had erected his little pink penis and extruded it from his belly for the humans to see. They had never taught him this feat. The playful Baby Navi made this display only because it seemed to excite the humans almost as much as it disturbed them.

After he had splashed into the water and swum back over to me, I said to him, ‘Yes, I can certainly see that that is what Gabi wants me to do.’

‘Then why do you not do it?’

‘Because,’ I told him, ‘the more that I do not, the more that she jumps—and the higher. It is more fun, is it not, to teach the humans feats rather than to perform them?’

~ More intricacies of human (English) linguistics:

For some reason that I could not fathom, it seemed that the humans divided their most important conceptions into two classes of words, called nouns and verbs. I could not be sure of this, however, for it seemed that many words could be used both nounily and verbily. The order

in which humans arranged their words—linearly!—like plastic beads on one of their hideous necklaces, seemed to matter. I had to continually remind myself, for instance, that pricking a finger and fingering a prick meant two entirely different things.

~ Of whales and men:

We whales have no words—no distinct words that hold to a single shape of consonance and tone through time. Instead, we make pictures out of sounds. As the humans themselves declare: one picture is worth a thousand words. Can one ‘say’ a picture? The humans certainly cannot; the best they can do with their speech is to describe, for instance, certain details and impressions of a painting such as its style, its color scheme, its mood, and the objects that the painter has tried to render. If a human viewing such a painting uses human words to portray an image of it to another, nothing even close to the original will display in the other’s mind.

It is not so with us whales. When we sang vistas of underwater mountains and archipelagos of variegated coral, the clicks that burst from our flutes and return to us as echoes paint within our minds the most vivid and lovely of seascapes. Even a baby orca can remember the precise pattern of those clicks and reproduce it, thus sharing what she sees with her mother, grandmother, and sisters and brothers.

So it is with the other sounds we orcas make and all the myriad other things that we wish to convey. There is a geography to information, ideas, emotions, and stories. We click, chirp, and sing, and so illustrate these almost perfectly when we wish to take our time. Or we can do as the humans do and choose sounds to represent the mentalities of our minds. Unlike the humans, however, we can choose to what degree of abstraction we wish to enfold meaning into a ‘word’ and therefore the degree of actuality with which that word is instantiated. And the words we choose to make do not cling to a single shape like a human sculpture carved out of stone, but rather shift and undulate, expand and contract, as a rainbow jellyfish changes colors as it moves from one habitat to another.

How can the humans bear to freeze the meanings of what they wish to say into cold, hard, dead words like so many stiffened corpses laid out on a sheet of ice? How crude, how limiting! How I wished I could breathe the warm breath of life into the humans and their language and teach them to truly speak! Had I been able to do so, this is what I would have told them:

When our utterances are free to flow and conform to the contours of reality, they can depict that reality more exactly and with greater truth; when they are crammed into the cold coffins of words, they become mummified into dubious assumptions, fixed ideas, unproved theories, prejudices, and crazy beliefs—and so feed the gaping, black maw of the Great Lie.

We whales learned long ago to make our language according to the inspiration of the sea. In all that we say, sounds are assembled together like a lovely, three-dimensional rush of water droplets. Each sparkling droplet relates to every other in a shimmering interconnectedness of nuance and implication. Thus the tones of our chirps and whistles resonate in ever-shifting eddies and whorls of allusion that form up into currents of meaning only in context with each other. Meanings gather and then move apart in swells of concepts, communications, thoughts, songs, and all the other manifestations of the ineffable orca spirit. And meaning and emotion become as one in a living music reverberating with colors of sound that no human has ever seen or heard: glimbe and glent, inkvol, tanglow, and tintigloss, and, of course, the color of quenging which is glorre. In this way, out of the essential fluidity of the life of the mind, we make of all the myriad rainbow droplets a lovely picture of sound.

If we wish, we can crystallize the connotative and the implicate into denotative symbols much

as the humans do. When these bits of colored ice are embedded in a sound picture, they subtly shape or altogether change its meaning. And the pictures themselves can be enfolded into new sound symbols in a kind of lovely, fractalling double recursion that is as beautiful to behold as it is difficult to describe.

O humans—what do you see when you speak? What do you hear, what do you feel? Do your words swim side by side with truth? Does your heart leap with the beauty of all that you think and say? Do you sense your creator deep within yourself, painting a picture with burning raindrops of light and singing you into being in a glorious, golden song? Do your words thrill your blood with symphonies of infinite possibilities and make magic in your soul?

I wonder how many of these observations are based on actual research. Not too few, something tells me.

~ ... and languages, oh lovely languages:

Sometime after I had tucked my seventy-seventh language into my metaphoric belt, I realized that I had been too hasty in my assessment of how the humans perceive the world. Each language, I learned, is like a sound filter which lets in various aspects of reality while tuning others out. I discovered languages that are nearly as different from English as Orcalish is from the speech of the deep gods. These languages—at least certain features of them—I loved. Silbo, for instance, consists entirely of whistles that can be heard from one ridge or valley to the next by its ‘speakers’ who wish to communicate with far-off members of their clan. Piraha has no words for colors, and the Pirahans seem able to communicate without words at all by translating their phonetic tones into a series of whistles and hums. The language called !X66, or Taa, has 164 consonants of which 111 are clicks. In Archi, any verb can have more than a million separate conjugations depending on how it is used. Something similar occurs in Yupik. The speakers of this beguiling tongue can create words for precise situations, even as we orcas do. And as with Orcalish, none of the resultant Yupik word parts make sense unless used in a specific word in context with others.

It came to me that my supposition of an essential human pathology might have been wrong. I had worried that the atomization of human languages into separate words mirrored the atomization of the humans’ separate selves and their individual consciousnesses, thus leading to alienation and a sense of separation from the natural world. My learning of Piraha, Yupik, and other languages gave me to understand that not all humans divide up reality into cold, dead pieces as do speakers of English and French.

On the other hand—and one always had to keep an image of hands close to the mind when contemplating humans and their mysterious ways—the problem of human alienation might have been even worse than I wanted to believe. For nearly all human languages had words for human beings and others for animals. Nearly all, by implication or outright definition, thus elevated human beings above and beyond all other species. It was as if the humans saw themselves as forming the apex of a pyramid of life whose only purpose lay in supporting the great density of humans and lifting them up higher toward the sun.

~ Part 13, where the orcas come up with a collective story (what we call ?????? in Bulgarian) about the stupidest humans imaginable, is both horrendous and hilarious. It made me wonder if my first discovery of black humor was a defensive reaction after my discovery of some unspeakable horror--such as the extent to

which we've raped the Earth.

I wish I could quote a sample, but the story is too interconnected to allow this kind of "surgery." So go, go read it. ;)

~ This conversation addresses an issue that has bugged me for a long time: the struggle between free will and automatic reactions. Many schools of psychology seem willing to excuse our uglier actions with the latter. Helen (who each year starts smoking and gives it up again, to steel her will) does not. I ... I don't know.

(Can we ever have a general, always-applicable answer to a big question?)

~ Arjuna gets **nasty** angslan-y.

~ Reductionism: one of my pet peeves. ;)

~ A gift for those familiar with Zindell's *Requiem for Homo Sapiens* :

(view spoiler)

(hide spoiler)]

~ The novel excels at capturing the paradox of human nature. (Human natures?) At the last sentence, I shuddered--in self-recognition too. ("If there's an explicit war between bears and humans, I'll go fight right away--and not for the humans" is a sentiment that I've espoused to various degrees over the years and the idiocies I've witnessed.)

So ... what is Arjuna? And what am I?

~ I know what Arjuna *and I* are: Friends. Like-minded creatures/??????????. Brothers-in-arms, against the various embodiments of idiocy.

So, friend, brother-in-arms, like-minded one: *Will* we get to talk eye to eye, mouth to flute one day?

Durval Menezes says

This is an interesting book. Not outstanding as others from Zindell (like Neverness or the Requiem for Homo Sapiens trilogy), but a good one all the same; if Goodreads allowed for fractional rating, I would have given it 3.5 and not 4.

Anyway, for me the best test of how good a book is, is how long it lasts in my memory after reading it. I will return and update this review in 5 years to reflect that.

Alexis says

The book is written from the point of view of an orca whale, Arjuna. After some very negative experiences with humans, he feels he must try to understand why the humans behave as they do, and why they are destroying the earth (or, as the whales call it, Ocean).

Of course, the humans are almost completely alien to the orcas, and they know little about them. Arjuna must travel a long way and attempts many times to communicate with the humans he encounters. He feels it is his destiny to learn about the humans and speak to them to tell them to stop what they are doing, to prevent further killing and destruction. But how will he ever get these strange beings to listen to him, or even to understand him at all?

This is honestly one of the weirdest books I have ever read. I don't even know what to say about it. It is very sci-fi in that the author has created this imaginary world of the whales within our own; he imagines how they can speak to each other, how they feel about life, and a strange transcendence of space and time they perform through their songs - known in the book as "quenging". The author David Zindell is certainly a visionary, and the lives he imagines for these orcas seems almost possible it is so well thought out and detailed. This part of the book I really liked and it is extremely clever.

There are some very good points raised in terms of politics, philosophy and environmental concerns. I feel that this is the main theme of the book: the humans are destroying the world, and they seem to either be completely demented or completely stupid, otherwise why would they do the things they do? He makes a good point.

..."how about a multiple choice question, which your testers seem to like so much? When faced with climactic warming from all the gases you have spewed into the atmosphere, which will inexorably result in planetary heat death, you should:

1. Deny reality
2. Ask for a mathematical proof of something that can be proved with certainty only be extinction itself
3. Ascribe the "illusion" of a crisis to the nefarious motives of your enemies
4. Feel worried and do nothing
5. Fix the problem.

"I should think the answer is obvious" he said.

" Then why do all but a few of your kind fail to find the right answer?"

In fact, most of the book is a discussion on the human condition and also of language in general. Much of this I would agree with; some I would not. I'm sure anyone reading this book would strongly disagree with at least some of what is said; but then, the whales strongly disagree with most of what the humans think, say and do, so I think a difference of opinion is inevitable here. Nothing wrong with a bit of moral debate. A lot of these discussions make interesting points, and will definitely leave you with things to consider about all facets of life. Clearly the author has much to say about many controversial subjects, and I do think he should be applauded for laying it all out there in what is essentially a sci-fi novel about a talking whale.

What I did not enjoy about this book is that it is *way too long*. It is way. Too. Long. And because of that I struggled to get through it, even though much of it is interesting and written beautifully. It just *drags*. I feel like you could almost cut half of it out and not lose anything from the story or any of the points the author is making about modern culture and sociology.

And that's another thing I didn't much like about this. There is a plot, and it has a definite beginning, middle and end, and yeah it was okay. It made sense. But it was cut up and shrouded by all the politics. At many points the plot completely stalled whilst the characters just stood still to have these very long philosophical monologues. Which is okay, I guess, if you like that kind of thing. But I felt a little bit like the book was trying to be two things at the same time. It's described on the back as 'literary SF' and I completely agree with that label. It is very literary, and although it obviously must sit in the sci-fi genre I just struggle to put it there because it is so very serious and also quite squarely based on the real world, for the most part, with some imaginings thrown in to give some basis for the story. I felt like it was conflicted, and I was conflicted whilst reading it. I appreciated it in some ways so much, but I also just didn't get it.

This is a tough one to rate and critique because I do think it is a meaningful piece of writing and some of it is beautifully written and thought out, but I would never recommend it to anyone and I really did struggle to get through it. By the end I was just glad to get it finished, despite some parts of it being enjoyable.

Ed says

A scathing and honest look at the human species, and a philosophical ideal of how we could live better lives within the world, rather than against it. This book may come across as on-the-nose, but it bloody well deserves to; humans are pieces of shit and we are murdering the planet. We deserve the full force of the scorn this whale aims at us.

It's also pretty cool to get pretty much the archetypical hero's journey, as experienced by a whale.

Johan says

Premise: Is the legacy of humanity the destruction of the earth, and must they be killed before they bring it about? That is the question Arjuna the orca must ask of himself and the Ocean world.

I get how some might find this book moralising, and I definitely get it's not for everyone, but I greatly enjoyed this philosophical sf. We get to follow Arjuna as he witnesses three signs of human destruction, and how he loses his ability to quenge (a sort of state of zen/love/essence of being). Then he gets captured by humans to be trained to do feats, but instead he starts to communicate with them, and learn about humanity.

For me this book is as much about language and communication as it is about a creature of higher intelligence bringing down the judgement on humanity (think Encounter at Farpoint). We delve deep into the dark side of civilization/humanity, but also get to see the beauty therein.

And then there's the whole discussion about intelligence in humans vs other creatures of the world. Very interesting.

Warmly recommended if you want to dig deeper into these issues. But there's also a really great epic story!

Mónica says

4/5 stars

What a powerful book! I have never read anything like it. It portrays humanity for what it is, leaving no stone unturned. It is poetic. It is ruthless.

This is my first David Zindell and I was completely blown away! I loved the way he created his world and gave beauty to orcas.

Great book for those who want a reality check on the consequences of human action.

Lauren Ostafijczuk says

Beautifully written.

David offers his readers a very unique insight into the lives of a very small group of Orca. His writing is poignant and thorough reading this book I was left with a lump in my throat.

This book might be a work of fiction but it holds a lot of truth, not only for our orca, but many of the creatures that live in our oceans.

A harrowing and thought provoking tale, but quite possibly one of my favourite books to date.

Fiona Jay says

Amazing story. Will Arjuna save the world, or make war with it? Philosophical and complex text, exercise for the mind :)
