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It all started with the dreams. But Cassie didn't pay much attention to them. She and her friends had all been having weird dreams since they'd first learned to morph. Maybe it was just some crazy side effect.

The Message Details

Date : Published October 1996 by Scholastic Paperbacks (first published January 1st 1996)

ISBN : 9780590629805

Author : K.A. Applegate , Katherine Applegate

Format : Paperback 151 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Young Adult, Fiction, Fantasy, Childrens

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From Reader Review The Message for online ebook

Fel says

First, foremost, I cannot talk about this book without immediately needing to address the giant whale in the room, namely, the magic whales. This is a direct quote, from the book, and it ripped me so firmly and entirely out of the narrative that all I could do was helplessly laugh at the sheer absurdity of it.

But at that moment the most incredible part of an incredible day happened.

My mind, human, dolphin, both minds, opened up like a flower opening to the sun.

And a silent, but somehow huge, voice filled my head, it spoke no words. It simply filled every corner of my mind with a simple emotion.

Gratitude.

The whale was telling me that it was grateful. We had saved it. Now it would ave our schoolmate.

and also

The whale called me to him.

Listen, little one, he commanded, in a silent voice that seemed to fill the universe.

I listened. I listened to his wordles voice in my head. I felt like it went on forever.

Tobias said later it was only ten minutes. But during that ten minutes, I was lost to the world. I was being shown a small part of the whale's thoughts.

and also

I wasn't sure what he was telling me. He spoke only in feelings, in a sort of poetry of emotion, without words. Part of it was in song. Part of it I could only sense the same way I could sense echolocation.

Look ya'll, I love whales. I love the sea. I love the ocean in a way Cassie is clearly very uncomfortable with throughout this book. I think they are some of the most incredible creatures on the planet, but even with all that, this entire scene with the Great Old Humpback Whale Who Can Miraculously Speak But In Feelings

entirely destroyed my immersion.

And the humpback shows up!!! With five spermwhales!!! And yes, sperm whales do travel in pods, but NOT WITH OTHER WHALES????????????????? Look, I put aside a lot of disbelief for these books, I love them, and I put aside a lot of mild inaccuracies about the animals because it's a cool story and they are not the focus but.

B. U. T.

I draw the line at magic whales, apparently.

And I've had a think about why this bothered me so much—I remember, vaguely, that Cassie's POV books tend to be the most egregious about the Magic and Mystical World of Animals. I mean, some of it is her naivety, but she's also only, what, 15? 16? If that. She's the team animal lover, so of course she has some wonder for animals. And the others also gush about how cool the animals are, and morphing—even just this book Rachel gushes about cats and using that to help her with her gymnastics.

So far, the books have been pretty good about being relatively believable in their portrayal of animal instincts and minds. And the problem here is, frankly, I find this absolute nonsense.

Are whales cool?

Yes, no question.

Are whales telepathic with dolphins magical mystical beings of the ocean who can Talk But With Feelings????

....

Probably not. Like. I don't want to say no, I'm no whale (except in the ass, badumtish), but like, understand I am almost without a doubt certain whales are not like this.

So. That out of the way, let's actually talk about this book.

I really do like it—minus the whale bullshit—but I don't like it as much as I have the others. It's a great breather after Tobias' book, which struck far too close to home with the dysphoria feels, and it's full of great characterization and character moments. We get Ax!!! Finally!!

But the reason I don't like it as much is I find Cassie a deeply difficult character to relate to. She is, just as I remember, vaguely mystical leaning in her view of the natural world; she seems to understand death and at the same time not at all. She's overly naive about how things work, and at the same time very deeply pacifistic. These are not bad things! But they are entirely at odds with how I viewed and view the world, so the entire book I felt almost at arm's length, if that makes sense.

She does have her moments—particularly that moment when she doubts her own visions. What person of faith hasn't had a moment where they doubt it? It was an unintentionally relatable polytheism moment. And she is brutally willing to do the difficult and morally grey thing—I still haven't forgot how she killed a man back on the beach when they spied on the Caring meeting. But then she.... just goes and comes off vaguely preachy with her moral questions about oh no but dolphins are smart is it RIGHT to morph such a smart animal!!

Like, sweetie, please, you didn't ask this about any other animal, who have different types of intelligences as well, a bit hypocritical, don't you think? YOU KILLED A MAN. Why this moral quandary now and where was it when you KILLED A MAN.

It just rubs me the wrong way.

That said, I do like that the book thoroughly explored that moral quandary she had. I like that she does come to realize that the stakes are incredibly high, and that in the kind of war they're going to be fighting, she's not going to be able to keep the moral high ground—that she's going to have to make compromises and do stuff she might not fully agree with so they can win. Actually, I like that it's driven home so early in the series that they are going to have to make plenty of moral compromises. The fact that this one is over such a low stakes thing, comparatively, is pretty great.

Speaking of stakes raising, I do love that Cassie—and the rest—get it really drilled home both how much they still don't know re: the Yeerks, as well as just how high the stakes are within a few minutes of meeting Ax. This isn't just saving humanity, this is saving the entire world!!!! And where another book this could have come off eye-rollingly bad, I think it was handled pretty well. Both the reader and the characters have so little idea what's going on, and the fact this is a series makes it easy for more and more world-building to be done.

The world-building this book was lovely—the Andalite dome where Ax was, and getting this tiny glimpse of their home world. The cool sea monster Viser 3 morphed!!!! Gotta get me one of them!!!! It was brief, but it whetted my appetite to learn ever more about the other worlds and such.

Plus meeting Ax, an actual alien!!! What a good. Already, we're seeing that he's both alien (yes, good) and also how much the kids have to learn about morphing when he creates his own morph. A+ I already love my favourite deer knife boy.

Rounding back towards the central conflict of the book, Cassie's obviously super uncomfortable with being responsible for other people's lives; that's not unreasonable at all. I absolutely love that as her introduction, that's exactly what gets thrust on her, since she's the one having these dreams who can actually go into the water, unlike Tobias. Her guilt over Marco getting injured, and not wanting that responsibility—but at the same time refusing to admit she doesn't want it—is great, and a really good conflict for her character to have. Hopefully we do get to come back to this again.

Marco, in turn, is fantastic this book. He really gets to shine, since he's the one who gets injured, and we got tons of little insights into his mindset this book. He's the one who least wants to go, but we see he's absolutely willing to throw his full efforts into the team when it comes to finding a way to repay Elfangor for his sacrifice. We get to see his fears—his line about his mom drowning when he's stuck in the water, unable to swim, is absolutely heartbreaking. More, we get another horrible glimpse of just how, well.... practical he is about death, compared to the others. He's had his brush with it, since his mom died, and he's most aware of all of them just what the stakes are because of it.

Plus, he's wicked insightful underneath all that snark—

“[...]It's this whole thing we're doing, this whole Animorph thin. I mean, it's been dangerous right from the start. It's insanely dangerous. What else is new?” [Marco says]

I shrugged. “What’s new, I guess, is that the other times it was always someone else’s idea.”

“Oh, I get it. You don’t like responsibility?”

Honestly, it was so refreshing to get a book with minimal Marco making sexist comments and maximum Marco being insightful and then hiding it again. I love when we get to see who he is under his exterior—so I’m double excited for next book.

Other notes:

--cassie and jake are fucking adorable together and i love them, what a good contrast with rachel and tobias; by comparison, the latter two seem pretty shallow in their affections, with tobias going to rachel because of her strength, and rachel loving tobias because??? ? ? ? he made such a big sacrifice and now he's a cool hawk???? ? ? and so looks as fierce as she thinks he is?? idk what her thing is tbh

--cassie's impressions of people are genuinely emphatic, and I do like that about her for all I find her hard to relate to otherwise

--jake valuing cassie's opinion!!!! jake trusting her to make the right call!!!!!!

--minimal fighting with the Yeerks, much more focus on the team: a+

--AX.

--that dome description was so brief but so freaking good, honestly, i want a million fanarts of it—it sounded beautiful

--cassie joking with tobias to try and make sure he knows she's not grossed out by his hawk stuff ;u;

--why wasn't there more good stuff to show us WHY rachel and cassie are so close???? so far it feels way more they're close because the author says so, i'm not buying it

Ben Babcock says

One of the highlights of re-reading this series is the intense 1990s nostalgia it's bringing back. These books have aged *so much*, and it's no one's fault but the march of time and technology. In *The Visitor*, Rachel talks in code by inviting Jake over to **listen to a new CD**. And here in *The Message*, Jake produces a **VCR tape** of a nightly news show—kids, I won't bother explaining what VCRs were, but let's just say the modern equivalent would be “pulling up a clip on YouTube.”

This technological ennui extends to wider plot points as well. Cassie describes how the Animorphs take different routes to their rendezvous at Rachel's house, and how they check if they're being followed. Like spies. And that's sufficient to thwart human Controllers, maybe—but this was written in a simpler, more innocent time, when we only *suspected* the NSA was spying on every American. Can you imagine what would happen if Visser Three had access to programs like PRISM? The conversation would go down like this:

Visser Three: CAPTURE THE ANDALITE WARRIORS.

Controller-Snowden: Actually, sir, the computer says there is a 96.3% probability the “Andalite warriors” are humans. Children, actually.

Visser Three: What? How?

Controller-Snowden: Well, we have access to petabytes of data, thanks to our infiltration of the human intelligence networks, as well as powerful algorithms that let us mine the data for trends. We've discovered a group of four pre-adolescents with a suspicious pattern of activity. They spend an inordinate amount of time in the presence of a red-tailed hawk, and they are often spotted on cameras wearing nothing but form-fitting clothing and no shoes.

Visser Three: Interesting. Well. This was less challenging than I thought it would be.

When I shared a (more condensed) version of this remark with my Animorphs-buddy Julie via Twitter, she wondered if this would be an obstacle to remaking an *Animorphs* TV show. If they wanted to set it in the present day, then yes, I think it would. But then it occurred to me: this is actually a golden opportunity in disguise. Wait another forty or fifty years, and we'll be the proper distance from the 1990s that shows set in it will be like shows set in the 1950s or 1960s for us. *Animorphs* could be adapted into **a period drama targeted at children**.

You'll be rich, Scholastic. If you're still around. If anyone reads books anymore.

I'll continue to discuss my nostalgia, particularly around the technology portrayed in the series, in later reviews. Now I'll move on to a second ongoing topic: morphing technology.

This is the kind of thing we can (and people have) spent years discussing and debating on the Internet, so I'm not going to pretend to settle anything here. Instead, I'm more interested in looking at how our understanding of morphing technology develops as the books progress.

The Message is really our first opportunity to explore some of the deeper questions about morphing. It's notable, firstly, for being the first time the Animorphs acquire multiple new morphs in quick succession. In the previous book, they acquired one, maybe two morphs—and these were a pretty big deal. Now they're acquiring dolphins and seagulls all nonchalantly like—if they aren't careful, they might start feeling normal about this whole “turning into animals” thing.

Secondly, the book introduces Ax, who you must all agree is the *coolest*. (Rachel is still my favourite, but even I will admit that Ax is *cooler*.) **Ax is an Andalite pre-teen, you guys!** I didn't clue into this at the time, because when I first read these I was a kid, so it was just naturally that Ax was a kid. And, in retrospect, the idea of Ax being any more mature than the other Animorphs would have been creepier, I guess. But it only now dawned on me, re-reading this book, how much less mature Ax is than all those other Andalites out there.

Anyway, Ax is a potential new source of information about morphing. He might not know much about the technology (it sounds like he doesn't pay much attention in Andalite school, alas), but he seems to know the rules. We learn here for the first time that more experienced morphers can acquire the DNA of multiple members of a species—including humans—and then synthesize an entirely new organism. That's actually really awesome.

And Applegate introduces an entirely too convenient plot device whereby Andalites all have the ability to track the passage of time. So no more worrying about making Tobias wear a watch from now on. Thank

God.

Because this is Cassie's book, however, the best part of the morphing discussion revolves around the animals themselves. She balks initially at the prospect of morphing into a dolphin, because dolphins are higher-order thinkers—intelligent, perhaps on a level close to human beings. Is it *right* to morph a sentient being? Applegate treads dangerously close to deep questions of the philosophy of mind, the nature of cognition, and embodiment. Are we our minds, or are we our brains? Can we separate our consciousness from our bodies? How, exactly, does morphing change us—we already know that when one morphs, one has to control the animal instincts of one's new form. So if one morphs a sentient being, will one feel another personality there?

That this is perilously close to what the Yeerks do to their hosts escapes neither Applegate nor the *Animorphs*. And while Cassie never receives a satisfactory answer one way or the other, eventually she accepts that even if what they do isn't the most ethical course of action, it is within an acceptable range as a result of necessity.

(I want to point out, however, that while Cassie's concern about the dolphins is well and good, she never once questioned the propriety of Marco morphing a *gorilla* in the first book. One wonders if Applegate, or a beta reader, stumbled on to this moral dilemma in between the writing/editing of books 1 and 4.)

The Toast has a pretty solid article on the cognitive philosophy of *Animorphs*, if that's the sort of thing you want to read during your break.

I really enjoyed the way they communicate with the whales. Applegate manages to make that seem ... well, not realistic—we *are* talking about people who morph into dolphins, after all—but at least not so fantastical. She essentially introduces children to the idea that there is more than one way to be conscious, more than one type of privileged sentience, and I think that's pretty powerful.

The last revelation about morphing seems obvious, particularly for those of us who read the series before: if you are injured in a morph, you can unmorph/remorph, and you'll be fine. The DNA you acquire is frozen, so you always morph into the animal in a fit state. Setting aside, finally, questions about *how* this works, we can at least all acknowledge that this is convenient for the story.

The Message, then, does a great deal to advance the overall series arc. It introduces a new main character—an alien, no less—and fleshes out a great deal of the morphing mythology. The *Animorphs* beat Visser Three *again*, acquire a few new morphs, and have some fun in the ocean. And we get our first adventure narrated by Cassie, whose compassion and attention to detail make her a strong member of the team, a perfect balance to the impulsive Rachel or the overwrought Marco. Even here, in the fourth book, there are blatant allusions Cassie/Jake. (Jassie? Cake? OMG. CAKE. YES. That's the one.)

Next up is the first Marco book, thus completing the “origin stories” of the five human *Animorphs*. I'll talk about comic relief, loyalty, and the abundance of hope that Applegate sows throughout this series. Also: Ax and food, man. Ax and food.

My reviews of *Animorphs*:

← #3: *The Encounter* | #5: *The Predator* →

Julie Decker says

Cassie and Tobias have been hearing a weird distress call coming from under the sea. It turns out that it's a stranded Andalite ship, and Cassie, in an unusual position of decision-making, has to figure out what to do. The Animorphs run a mission to investigate the submerged ship, morphed as dolphins, and though they successfully enter the ship and find an abandoned and scared teenaged Andalite, the Yeerks have found the ship too. The Animorphs and their new friend Ax face Visser Three briefly, and enlist the help of whales to defeat their foe. Ax the Andalite becomes a part of their team, accepting Jake as his "prince," and Cassie dedicates herself even more deeply to fighting the Yeerks for Mother Earth.

My favorite lines:

Cassie (having just morphed into a squirrel): Oh, wait. Was that a nut? I hopped over to the nut. YES! A chestnut! I seized it in my little front claws and began immediately to chew a hole in it. Excellent! Wonderful! Chestnut! And I had it! No one could take it away. Hah hah!

Marco: "Hey, Tobias, I've been meaning to ask you, are hawks like seagulls? I mean, do they poop while they're flying?"

Tobias: "Depends on who's down below. Let me just put it this way--if you get on my nerves, you'd better buy a hat."

Marco: "I was there at the construction site, same as all of you. I was there when Visser Three--What I mean is, if there's an Andalite who needs anything, I'm there."

Cassie: "I don't want to get my friends killed."

Marco: "And let me assure you your friends don't want to get killed, either. I am completely opposed to getting killed."

Cassie: "Marco, you know, for a guy who's always joking around and being annoying, you're awfully smart."

Marco: "Yeah, I know, but don't tell anyone. It would destroy my image."

Tobias: "Have our lives gotten really weird, or is it just me?"

Marco: "Weird? Weird? The talking bird wants to know if getting information on the location of an alien from a whale, that you've just saved from sharks, by turning into dolphins . . . You're suggesting that's weird?"

Rachel: "First we morph into something like a seagull."

Marco: "I hate plans that begin with the words 'first we morph.'"

Jake: "There's a ship up ahead."

Tobias: "You just now noticed it? Wow. Seagull eyes aren't exactly great, are they? It's a container ship called Newmar. It's from Monrovia. You want to know what color the captain's hair is?"

Jake: "Show-off."

Marchel says

It's the fourth story about Animorphs. It's Cassie turn to tell their story.

A nice description about sea, its creature (whale, shark, dolphin etc.), and it is very interesting to know about dolphin feeling.

K.A. Applegate description about sea's creature is great. It's not common to tell a story about sea's creature. What I mean is, we have less knowledge about dolphin and whale and its point of view.

Yes, we know that dolphin have sense, and have ability to think, and often to jump out from water.

But didn't you ever think why does dolphin often to jump out from water?

Applegate tells us that dolphin do it for fun!!! Dolphin love to jump out from water, dolphin love to play like a child jumping on giant trampolin. Dolphin love to swim deep and race up to jump in the air.

Thanks a lot Applegate, you give us -at least me- a great knowledge from animal world. I read Animorphs, i collect them all, and be sure I'll pass it to my children and everyone who want to know about the beauty of animal world.

Loyal says

The Animorphs series was a huge part of my childhood! Overall, all of these books were excellently written, and a fantastic book series to share with kids. They dealt with a lot of important themes, often dark, but in a relatable and easy to access way.

This book in particular was always one of my favorites! The first told from Cassie's perspective, this book also introduces Ax to the series, a beloved and much-awaited addition! I was excited to start reading Animorphs again, but chose to pick up the series here, just due to personal preference.

I love Animorphs, and would strongly recommend the series to anyone, especially those who love sci-fi, and its a great way to introduce kids to sci-fi, or to reading in general!

Ashley says

The Message is our first Cassie book, and that means it's time to question the morality of our actions. Hurray.

In all honesty, when I was a kid, sometimes Cassie's books frustrated me a little bit. I thought she was a wet blanket and her hair was boring. I could never understand why she was always questioning everything, like, shouldn't it just be obvious what's right and wrong? Why are you so upset all the time, girl? Calm down and just enjoy turning into a dolphin JEEZ LOUISE.

Now, though, I recognize that this series would not have been the same without Cassie. I mean, obviously, but beyond the surface level of it, she was the character who pushed the others to constantly think about not just the physical and strategic ramifications of their actions, but to stop and ask, yes we can do this thing, but *should we?* Why? Here it's a relatively small thing Cassie is considering--whether or not it's wrong to morph an animal that is so intelligent, i.e. a dolphin--but in later books she takes it all the way up. It's because of Cassie that this series is elevated to one that isn't just fun, but really hits you in all your sci-fi emotion

buttons. What does it mean to be human? To be alive? At least, I remember it doing that for me when I first read it (and re-read it over and over again). We'll see if that holds true as I continue to revisit as an adult.

Cassie is the conscientious one, the "tree-hugger". She doesn't care about clothes or make-up. She believes in the sanctity of all life. It's one of the reasons that she (and Tobias) are the only two to hear the message from Ax the Andalite, who is trapped at the bottom of the ocean in a dome ship, where he's been since Elfangor died.

Wait, so let me back up.

Cassie and Tobias have been experiencing the same dream. Something is calling to them from the water, and they think it might be an Andalite. They rally the other Animorphs, and for once even Marco doesn't object to, first, a fact-finding mission, then another to rescue the Andalite once they confirm he's down there (which involves talking to a whale--so it's canon that dolphins and whales have telekinetic powers, and no one can take that away from me). They all want the chance to repay the Andalites for the sacrifice Elfangor made for them in the first book.

I really have a fondness for this book. I love watching the kids become dolphins for the first time, diving so deep underwater, going so far out to sea, and (view spoiler) I love the cognitive dissonance they experience as they fight off a shark attack, and realize that life on Earth can be just as dangerous as fighting aliens. The danger in *The Message* feels much more epic to me than the first three books (even with that destroyed Yeerk ship last time). I think it's because the vast deepness of the ocean is so primeval. It evokes terror just as much as wonder. And that last chase scene, as (view spoiler)

I feel like this book is where the series really gets going. They go on this mission that actually changes things for them. Ax is part of the team now. They're learning new things about morphing, and about the Yeerks. And all of them, but especially Cassie, have a new reason to keep fighting: (view spoiler) That's like a kick in the gut to Cassie, who cares more than most about preserving life on her planet.

Plus, we get not one but two new morphs that turn the kids into total goofballs (dolphin, seagull). Kids eat that shit up. And who am I kidding, I still love it, too.

Next up: Marco gets some new information!

Matt Mazenauer says

Good: The ocean is very dangerous, some of our first glances at the mythology of animals being more than we humans suspect, clever strategy and planning to get to the sea floor.

Less-than-good: Ultra convenience of an Andalite survivor chilling in Sandy the Squirrel's Bikini Bottom glass dome park.

Robert says

Big changes happen in this book so it's a must-read. There were a couple of plot choices I disagreed with, but as a whole it was pretty good.

Jenny Clark says

Parts are starting to get repetitive, like the whole "We can't tell you our names, ect", but I suppose that, and the reminder that Tom is a Controller and Tobias is stuck in morph are needed, since not everyone starts at the beginning.

As usual, awesome description of the morphing, and the animal mind. I love how Cassie has the conflict of if morphing something as intelligent as a dolphin is right. Also, the dolphin/whale interactions were lovely. I also enjoyed the Cassie/Jake scenes. It was interesting to see how practical Cassie was about death, saying it is something that happens and needs to be moved on from, as well as Tobias accepting some parts of being a bird. And even more of the "Death before capture" from the last book. What an amazing bunch of teens.

And, finally we meet Ax!

I am still looking forward to book 19, my favorite of Cassie's.

Jackie Krasuski says

I do not know how I ever would have survived junior high without this fantastic science fiction series. Maybe the story quality went down as the book numbers got higher, but the idea that aliens were invading our planet secretly... it was almost good enough for a young teenager to believe.

August Busch says

It's funny this one was one of my favorites when I was younger. I think it was because it was set in the ocean. But wow, how time has changed. So far this was my least favorite. The plot devices were awful! Getting messages via dreams... cliche but OK. Figuring out were the ship is from a whale... Ok lets put some more effort into this.

Stephanie says

Cassie's turn to narrate, and to find her reason to fight the Yeerks. But more than that, both her and Tobias are receiving a message in their dreams, a call for help. And it's up to Cassie to decide if that call is real, and if it is worth risking all the Animorphs' lives to find out who or what is calling for help.

It's only now that I get the joke about the dolphins names' at The Gardens... they're named after the characters of "Friends".

Some more fun/favorite quotes from this book:

"I was busy watching my taped reruns of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*," Marco said, giving Rachel a sly look. "Last night it was the one where it was a beautiful day in the neighborhood." -- page 18

Marco's cooperative mood hadn't lasted long. I knew it wouldn't. Marco is never happy unless he's complaining about something. Just like Rachel is never happy unless she has something to fight against. And Tobias is never happy, period. He thinks if he's ever happy, someone will just come along and take his happiness away. -- page 29

Typical guy. [Jake] had the totally bad timing to show up when I looked like Ms. Manure. -- page 40

"If you think we should pursue this, you know Rachel will be right behind you. Me, too." [Jake said]
"And Marco?" [Cassie said]

Jake grinned again. "Marco won't be right behind you. He'll be several feet back." -- page 42

He flew straight up out of the water, like a sleek, pale gray torpedo. Eleven feet long from nose to tail. Four hundred pounds. He simply flew into the air, seemed to hang there, ten feet above the surface of the water, took a skeptical look at us, gave us his permanent wise-guy grin, and slid back beneath the water so smoothly that there was barely a ripple.

"That is a dolphin," I said to Marco.

"Okay, I like that. *That* is excellent," Marco said. -- page 79-80

More under the spoiler:

(view spoiler)

And possibly one of my favorite quotes from this book -- the one that I just had to share with my flatmate even though it was after 10pm and she was in the middle of doing dishes:

Life was joy. Life was a game. I wanted to dance. I wanted to dance through the sea.

So I did.

There was nothing I could not do. There was nothing I could ask of my body that it would not give me.

Racing, spinning, turning, diving, skimming the surface, flying up into the sky.

I wasn't just *in* the sea. I *was* the sea. -- page 64

michelle says

i just wanna know why whales are the only animals w souls (so far?) (maybe only cassie can tell?)

mindy says

Ok. Finished Cassie's story and I think I love her even more as an adult than I did as a kid.

This one really confirms the fact that in the 90s, we are all really obsessed with dolphins.

The Library Ladies says

(Originally reviewed at thelibraryladies.com.)

Narrator: Cassie

Plot: Cassie and Tobias have been having strange dreams of the ocean. And when the Animorphs begin to see signs that the Yeerks, too, are showing interest in a specific part of the ocean, they decide they'd better check it out. They morph dolphins, and with the help of their whale friend, they discover a piece of the Andalite home ship sunk to the bottom of the ocean. And even more importantly, there's an Andalite on board, but not the adult warrior who could lead their team that they'd been hoping for, but a kid, Elfangor's little brother, Ax. Many ocean hi-jinks ensue including another desperate escape from Visser Three. This book is important because it introduces Ax for the first time, a main character who will be part of the Animorphs team going forward. I always forget how much he brings to the tone of the books and how much is missing in the first three with his absence. But he's finally arrived! Yay!

Peace, Love, and Animals: This is our first book from Cassie's perspective. And while Cassie isn't one of my favorite characters in the series (in all honesty, usually her books are my least favorite), she does get one of the best books of the series. I liked this book so much that as a kid I picked it for a bookclub book (we had a family bookclub with another family and everyone got to pick a book, and I picked this one!)

As Cassie's little section title implies, most of what we get from her in other books has to do with her pacifist take on the war and her role as the one with the animal connection. Diving into her viewpoint, we get a lot on both of these aspects of her personality. She struggles when she finds herself in a decision maker/leadership role in this book as one of only two Animorphs dreaming of Andalites; she's clearly much more comfortable

as the supporter of the group. But she does rise to the occasion which speaks well of her ability to do what needs to be done to save her friends and other creatures, even if it goes against her own nature.

Secondly, because the morph they use in this book is dolphins, we hear a lot about Cassie's perspectives on animals. Specifically, here she is concerned that the Animorphs are not any better than the Yeerks in that a large portion of morphing has to do with taming the wild mind of the animal they become, so is it the same, especially when the animal is very intelligent, like dolphins? While I'm impressed that this short little book in this ridiculous sci fi series is tackling deeper issues like this, this same dilemma of Cassie's is what makes her frustrating for me as a character. There seem to be large holes in her reasoning here, in that they are not taking over the minds of animals that exist independently of the Animorphs themselves. The morphed body is her own body and it does not exist on its own.

Further, we've been getting into each Animorph's personal reason for fighting in each of their books. And here she finds her motivation after learning from Ax that the Yeerks not only arrive on a planet to take over the minds of the primary sentient species, but that they also terraform each planet to resemble their barren home world, destroying the natural flora and fauna. Yes, it's horrifying what the Yeerks have planned for Earth itself, but it makes me question Cassie that her tipping point was its destruction not, say, the human race being killed and enslaved.

Our Fearless Leader: Jake has a nice little scene with Cassie that reminds us all why he's such a great leader. She's in the midst of a mini crisis about having to make decisions for the group, and we get some lovely thoughts from Jake about the way he handles this same pressure constantly. While he is not the decision maker behind this adventure, he is a leader all the same, providing the support needed for a teammate who is struggling. It's these behind-the-scenes moments of strength and support that really show why Jake is such a natural leader.

Xena, Warriar Princess: Rachel's not up to much, though it is interesting hearing about Rachel and Cassie's friendship from Cassie's perspective. They're such oddball best friends, but it is clear how they balance each other out. Rachel has the confidence to challenge Cassie and get her moving when she could get stuck over-thinking every decision. But Cassie also brings reserve and caution to Rachel's impulsiveness.

A Hawk's Life: While we learn that the Animorph's believe that Cassie is having these dreams due to her morphing powers (that she is so much better at it and thus more closely connected to Andalites in general), Tobias's connection seems to only be that he had a deeper connection with Elfangor before he died (foreshadowing!!) Poor Tobias once again gets left out of much of the action due to the obvious: hawks don't do water.

The Comic Relief: Poor Marco has a rough time, but we'll get to that in "Body Horror"...But the fact that he can't swim is a big problem in a book that involves the ocean. His close calls in this book only further cement his wariness about his future involvement in Animorphs missions. He's still worried about leaving his father alone. But he does concede that after watching Elfangor heroically die trying to distract Visser Three from them, if there is an Andalite in need, he'll be there.

E.T./Ax Phone Home: Yay, Ax is here! We only get a bit of him when he shows up in the final third of the book. But his introduction does bring in a bunch of recurring things that will show up in later books. First, the running gag that he calls Jake "Prince Jake" since that is how Andalites address their war leaders. Second, his wealth of information on the Yeerks and space history. And third, the fact that he creates a new morph by combining the DNA of all of the Animorphs. It's super wacky. It's like his morph is their group-child or something.

Best (?) Body Horror Moment: Marco gets bit in half by a shark! Marco gets bit in half by a shark! It's as gross as it sounds. As dolphins, the group sees a whale being attacked by sharks and get into a scrap saving it that results in the horrifying image of Marco floating in the ocean with his dolphin tale only hanging on by a few threads of skin. But it does present an important concept about morphing going forward: any wounds that they get while in morph are healed when they de-morph/re-morph since it is all dependent on DNA which isn't affected by this type of physical damage. Also, the Animorphs discover that the whales can sort of kind of speak? And the whale saves Marco here and the whole group later on.

Couples Watch!: Man, I really forgot how blatant she makes these couples right off the bat! While Cassie and Jake aren't my favorite couple, they do have several very sweet moments together, including the scene I described earlier where Jake is boosting up Cassie's confidence. They also have some nice "shared looks" and all of that.

If Only Visser Three had Mustache to Twirl: There's a scene that's described here that we never see but I want it now! Apparently, due to his Andalite host body, Visser Three is also having these weird dreams and they're making him grumpy. So much so that at one point he shoves a Hork-Bajir out of an airlock when he disturbs him. So essentially he's like Darth Vader, and you're going to get Force strangled or shoved out airlocks at any moment if you catch him at the wrong moment.

Adult Ugly Crying at a Middle Grade Book: Poor Ax! The guy's been stuck at the bottom of the ocean for a month or so now and then when people finally show up to save him he learns that his brother is dead. Stuck on a lonely planet as the only one of his kind, forced into a war he's not prepared for with a bunch of kids who he doesn't know and are a different species. Sad times.

What a Terrible Plan, Guys!: It turns out that the Andalite ship is wrecked out in the ocean quite a ways from the shore. So far, in fact, that one 2-hour dolphin morph won't get them there. So they decide to first morph seagulls (this is a hilarious morph, by the way, in that they all become food obsessed while in it).

Then they scout out a ship heading in the general direction they want to go and hop on board, de-morphing to human and hiding out. Then when they get nearer, they jump off the side (forgetting somehow that Marco can't swim, so he has to half morph a dolphin then get tossed over). Then swim the rest of the way as dolphins. Which...already this is a bad plan. But the biggest problem is HOW ARE THEY PLANNING ON GETTING BACK?? There's no discussion of this and as it turns out, they end up needing to be rescued by the whale who carries them a large portion of the way back. Pure luck.

Favorite Quote:

Rachel: "First we morph into something like a seagull."

Marco: "I hate plans that begin with the words 'first we morph.'"

Scorecard: Yeerks 1, Animorphs 2

Another win for the Animorphs! Managing to swipe Ax out from under the Yeerks' noses counts as a major win for the team. While they didn't hurt the Yeerks directly, they gained a friend, comrade, and a team member who knows a whole heck of a lot more about the Yeerks and space history than any of them do! Currently the Animorphs are winning the scorecard, let's see how long this lasts!

Rating: One of my favorite books that introduces our last main character, Ax!

Issam says

To the older fans re-reading the series, I have compiled the reprint edit list here:
www.hiracdelest.com/missions/books/relaunch/04.htm

Nia says

This book is little too far fetched for me, but maybe it's just because I don't connect with Cassie as I do with the others. I really enjoyed her perspective and a peek into her mind, she's far nicer than I could've ever imagined.

I liked how nature was brought in this time, it's telling of how the Earth will do anything to protect those who are her children. I sorta believe in that and I kinda loved that bit.

Another great Animorphs book, as usual.

Nic says

This was actually the first Animorphs book I ever read, purchased for me almost a decade ago by a clueless Mom who knew I liked books and dolphins. Thanks, mom.

Cassie was always my favorite character, because I was so jealous of her cool homelife. Plus, Ax is introduced in this book, and who doesn't like an alien... Lll... LEE UN. ALEEYUN.

Nikki says

I was ready for this to be the first one I didn't like because Cassie is my least favourite narrator, but I totally enjoyed it. I feel like her narration, maybe a teensie bit moreso than the others, gives great insight into the characters, because she is gentle, caring and good at reading people. I also relate to her not wanting to make decisions or be in charge, because she doesn't want to be responsible for people's lives.

I found some of the morph action bits a bit far fetched this time around, but I really like the spirit behind the adventure. Also, we meet Ax, my precious cinnamon bun!

Julie says

[Mostly, if you want to know what I look like, picture
