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Morphing into killer whales, the Animorphs discover a whole new world where humans with gills exist in the deep waters below.

## The Mutation Details

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## From Reader Review The Mutation for online ebook

### Caitlin says

I heard that this book was not as good as some of the others, but I ended up surprisingly really enjoying it. Poor Jake. He's having a rough time. He didn't ask to be in charge, but he is, and everyone looks for him to make the decisions. He can't make the right decisions all the time and when he makes a mistake it weighs so heavily on him. I really fear for him going forward... the decisions are going to get tougher and the impact of those decisions is going to be so much worse :(

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### T Berry says

This is another one I think I missed on my reread of the series. Possibly intentionally.

I seem to recall reading it when I was younger (I think I actually owned a physical copy of this at one point), and while I don't remember details I remember it being creepy. If I did intentionally skip it, maybe that's why.

It was not as creepy as I remember it being. I mean, still creepy. But not "Not gonna read this again" creepy. Overall....sort of an interesting book. It feels very separate from the series. By which I mean the events felt inconsequential. Like filler. Though stuff did happen. Just....very self-contained.

It was definitely interesting to see...maybe Atlantis? Some form of it, maybe, in the Animorphs universe.

I don't generally do updates to reviews (at least not so soon after making them) but I thought more about the book and dropped my score of it so I figured I should probably explain why.

In addition to this book feeling very cut off from the series (and universe, honestly) plotwise, there were a lot of moments that were either out of character or flanderizations of the characters, that came across as odd.

Also like 70% of what happened in the book happened as a matter of convenience to the plot rather than what would, y'know, actually make sense. Which in the moment I kinda let slide past me but after digesting it, I realized it just....wasn't very good.

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### Jerry says

This series delivers once again!

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### JonSnow says

2/5

This gets a lower rating for the uncreative cheesy foolish plot. I know, it's a kids book, but I've come to expect a certain level of quality with this excellent series (with occasional exceptions... starfish book, I'm eyeballing you :| ...).

SPOILERS BEWARE.

This book started out odd with Hork Bajir fish experiment survivor dying... the plot became mildly interesting eventually but simultaneously kind of pointless. The Pemalite Ship plot was presumably resolved. It was hidden by the Chee. Done. But no... now Visser Three built the Seablade and it is in search of the ship for its own gains. Sigh. This opened up an already closed plot point far as I'm concerned.

I enjoyed some of the suspenseful scenes early on. There WAS some intrigue built up. And when the ship got captured I was captivated briefly, until the plot details unraveled this into an at best 2 star book. I give it 2 though because all in all, despite having no point, despite opening up a closed plot, and despite ... I give up... It was okay. Just okay. Lame. But okay.

My big issue with this is that it was a Jake book, and I don't really like Jake too much. For me, most books don't tend to give him enough dimension. Marco feels so real. Cassie even. Rachel as well. Tobias especially. And even Ax. But Jake... I've never really felt much of a connection to him. There were some chilling passages in several books regarding the complexities of living with a brother possessed. But still. Not a big Jake fan. And to top it off, this book didn't really read like a Jake book.

The plot. Oh the plot. Stuffed humans. Really? Really? The Nartec weren't really very interesting. I found them a yawn, a bore. I WAS interested briefly when they first encountered all the random ships. I was very captivated. But quickly lost interest in this one after I realized it was a corny take on the Atlantis myth. I'm all for a good monster of the day kinda book or what have you, but this one just didn't interest me after the introduction of the Nartec. Their whole scheme to take over the world was just ridiculous. Preposterous. Foolish. I could name more words that have the same meaning, but I digress.

The interaction with Visser Three at the end was, meh. I was neither excited nor disappointed. Just... meh. I've come to expect more from these books.

All in all, this was a cheesy low budget B grade Animorphs story (at best). Some people like that. Not me. I like the deeper books. The David Trilogy were among my favorites! I like books that explore complex topics involving morality and tough decisions. This book was pretty black and white in its content. It did explore the concept of unity, and comment upon how the enemies of the past were the allies of the present, etc. But it wasn't really that deep. I enjoy the gripping psychological books, like Tobias books, and Marco books. They always have such deep psychological complexities. We don't get that too much with Jake sadly.

Also... really... waste 50 Hork Bajir on a shitty fish experiment? Really...

Alas, this is a 2 star. That's being quite generous if you ask me. Originally I give this a 3 star but downgraded it to a 2 star and honestly that's being generous when I really get to thinking about it. There were some good scenes, but these simply weren't enough to offset this horrible plot. Fish Bajir. Atlantis. No. This book does nothing for the plot of the series and serves as less than B rated one-off material.

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## **Julie Decker says**

After discovering a terrifying Yeerk experiment to turn Hork-Bajir into aquatic creatures (which failed, at the expense of fifty Hork-Bajir lives), Jake also finds out that the Yeerks have a powerful ocean ship called the Sea Blade. He wants to go destroy it because they're going to use it to find the Pemalite ship (among other things), so they investigate. But after damaging it in a fight between their whale morphs and the Dracon-capable ship, they notice it getting rescued by strange human-like aquatic creatures. Following it in to make

sure it's destroyed, Jake and the others discover another world at the bottom of the ocean. This Atlantis-like city is populated by amphibious humanoids called Nartec who collect human shipwrecks and preserve their crews in creepy taxidermy. The group gets to meet their queen, Soco, and she is pleasant to them but ultimately arranges for them to get their DNA harvested and become specimens themselves. The Nartec are desperately trying to stop themselves from inbreeding to extinction, so this is how they cope with it. After narrowly escaping the operating tables with Tobias's help, they try to recover the Sea Blade ship and hope to use it for escape before destroying it, but they find Visser Three aboard, with whom they must make a deal in order to break the security measures to fly it. They briefly work together in fighting off the attacking Nartec, but then they manage to turn against the visser and go their separate ways to escape.

My favorite lines:

Jake: At any given point, on any given mission, maybe half the team was going to be difficult in one way or another. Including me, of course. Maybe especially me.

Ax: "This is so irrational and strange that I assume it must involve humans."

Jake: "The weapons they used on us? Human weapons. We want to hate them for what they do? Maybe we should stop helping them do it."

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## **Christiana says**

Reinforces the view that taxidermy is always creepy.

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## **Jenny Clark says**

A one off, but not bad, just different and strange. The Sea Blade was an interesting idea as well as the Nartek, but they kinds seam like the Hemlacons (I think that's how to spell it? Don't feel like digging out book to look at it). I think it was supposed to be funny, but it wasn't, it came off as serious so that just made it stranger.

A phone call at three A.M. is rarely a good thing.

When you're an Animorph, the chance of good news ever -- day or night -- is zero.

Any of these people might have a Yeerk in their head. Might be what we call a human-Controller.

My brother Tom is one. His bedroom is two doors down from mine. Marco's mother is a Controller. We don't know where she is.

Our vice principal, Chapman, is one. How many more? We don't know. More. Always more.

We are not winning this war. We're delaying the final defeat. No more than that.

Maybe not as much as that.

Sometimes I'm secretly proud when Aximili-Esgarrouth-Isthill, the Andalite cadet who joined us not long after we encountered his older brother Elfangor, calls me "Prince" Jake...

I'm proud when we're winning. When we're "kicking Yeerk butt" as Rachel would say.

I'm also proud when we don't win but have done the best we could. Acted with courage and honor.

Most of the time I'm also terrified.

Like when I heard Cassie's trembling voice on the other end of the line.

Rachel liked the idea of delivering a harsh lesson. I expected that from Rachel. But from Cassie it worried me.

I said.

Ax said.

*Marco said.*

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## **Ben Babcock says**

OK, been a while since I've dropped one of these into the rotation. *The Mutation* is the first Jake-narrated book since #31: *The Conspiracy*. Whereas the previous book focused heavily on the tough decisions Jake must make as a leader, *The Mutation* instead explores more broadly the toughness required of all the Animorphs. This book is like a bizarre mash-up of James Bond and *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*.

The Animorphs discover that Visser Three has a shiny new toy to use to find the sunken Pemalite ship. So they decide to take the toy away from him the hard way. The first half of the book is fairly intense, because the Animorphs have to use a succession of morphs to locate, dive towards, and then fight the so-called Sea Blade vessel. Remember the good old days when the Animorphs used maybe two morphs in the entire book? This far along in the series, Applegate is signalling the way their lives have changed dramatically. Jake just casually mentions the Chee covering from them while they go on this trip. Similarly, although he acknowledges that all these quick morphs are draining, it definitely feels more routine than it once did.

Yes, the Animorphs are transforming from a motley group of unlikely heroes into *actual* heroes. If only they would start, you know, planning beforehand. But that's probably too much to ask.

The second half of *The Mutation* is a whackadoodle narrative of epic proportions, however. Sea people, seriously?? I mean, I guess I could have gone with it—goodness knows I've gone with so many other weird turns in this series—but the execution is just terrible. They're clearly a one-off, with little actual thought given to how they mutated from humans (radiation did it!, not that it works that way), and their bellicose attitudes towards the surface dwellers handwaved away by ... you guessed it, radiation and inbreeding.

Applegate has gone to a lot of trouble to establish her youthful protagonists as forces to be reckoned with and moral forces equivalent to adults. Hence, it is always disappointing when this series pits these protagonists against cheesy, childish foes. This isn't *Power Rangers* or another Saturday-morning Japanese import where teenagers are fighting goofy alien enemies. Yes, the enemies are alien—but they are serious business. And every time the Animorphs go up against dumb sea people, or have to temporarily make a truce with Visser Three, the series creeps closer to that Saturday-morning territory.

Small moments offer tantalizing glimpses of what makes *Animorphs* so good. Jake reflects on Cassie's un-Cassielike bloodthirsty zeal for revenge against the Yeerks. He also has to weigh the destruction of the Sea Blade (to prevent the sea people from using it on the surface) against the Animorphs using it to escape and return to the surface. These kinds of decisions are always an interesting part of his role as leader.

Unfortunately, these small moments can't carry an otherwise loopy plot. This one has some great underwater action scenes and lots of morphing, but in terms of substance, it's disappointing.

I realize now I forgot to read *Visser* in between this book and the last one (I put them on my ereader a few books at a time, and these ones made it on but *Visser* didn't). So, hopefully soon, we get to learn more about Visser Three!

### **My reviews of *Animorphs*:**

← #36: *The Proposal* | *Visser* →

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### **Kim Dyer says**

The Mutation is another one of the weird *Animorphs* books. It holds itself together pretty well for the first half, with the *Animorphs* banding together in dangerous mission to destroy Visser Three's new seacraft and prevent the Pemalite ship from falling into its hands. Unfortunately, after this it goes completely off the rails.

The second half of this story becomes a horror / adventure, with the *Animorphs* trying to escape from an amphibious race called the Nartec who wish to stuff them and put them on display in their macabre museum. Let's just note that the Nartec are a race of humans who have been slowly mutated by radiation. Yeah, I think even comic book writers stopped talking about the glorious mutagenic powers of radiation back in the 80s...

While exciting and action-packed, this is not a good *Animorphs* book. It doesn't even feel like an *Animorphs* book. It lacks the character development and personal feel that we've had over the previous three books. Its moral (war is bad) is only shoehorned in over the last few pages for good measure.

All in all, this isn't my favourite book. Hopefully the next one will be a bit better.

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### **Bonesy says**

Okay, it looks like I had stopped reading *Animorphs* at just about the right time when I was a kid and they were still being published on a monthly basis. This is the first book in the series (even after all the ghost written books) where I was seriously like, "Wtf? Out of ideas much?" *Animorphs* is known for having really strange wtf moments, but it's usually something so strange that it actually works. That is not the case with this book. I get that the idea behind this creepy underwater race is supposed to make us feel weirded out because they're supposed to be these inbred mutants (think Hills Have Eyes only underwater), but this just didn't feel like a real *Animorphs* book as I was reading it. It could have been written from anyone's perspective. I often forgot that it was Jake narrating! The whole back story with this being a mission about getting revenge on the mutant Hork-Bajir, and then the Yeerks wanting the Pemalite ship, was just ridiculous and didn't tie in at the end at all. This was just some lame excuse to put together a random thoughtless story that introduces another pointless species. There was no creativity here and the author was just terrible. This had potential to be a great book, but NOT an *Animorphs* book.

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## Amalia Dillin says

This shouldn't have taken me four days to read but life.

Honestly though, I feel like this is the most unbelievable piece of the Animorphs lore, that there has been an Atlantean city in the sea for all this time, stealing shipwrecks. I have no problem buying the Yeerks invading but these guys? I dunno.

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## Stephanie says

Visser Three's experiments to make aquatic-capable Hork-Bajir has failed at the expense of the lives of 50 Hork-Bajir, but he still has a new toy to test: the Sea Blade, a ship which can fly and dive into the ocean to try and locate the Pemalite ship. Now it is up to the Animorphs to take out this Sea Blade and prevent the Visser from obtaining the Pemalite technology.

At least, that's how it starts out. Thing is, Jake has been listening to Cassie a lot, and the line between the reasons for the mission gets blurred. Is it just about destroying the Sea Blade, or is it about avenging the lives of the Hork-Bajir? While it may start out as the former, Jake does not forget to mention vengeance on the heels of the preventative destruction of the Sea Blade. Then, as the Animorphs get deeper and deeper into the ocean (literally) they stumble across a lost mutated-human civilization, the Nartecs, who makes museum displays of sunken human air and water crafts, as well as the preserved bodies of those unfortunate souls who drowned. The mission is still about the Sea Blade and avenging the Hork-Bajir, but I would argue that a new reason to keep moving forward drives Jake: pure and simple curiosity.

The Nartec civilization is an interesting one, and we get a tantalizing glimpse into how they operate. Sadly, we don't get to see the tour of the Nartec palace the Animorphs get taken on (not enough space in the book?). Despite that, we still get a very over-arching idea of how their society is organized, and how remarkably and disturbingly similar it can be to human society.

At any rate, the Animorphs are in way over their heads, and they have to team up with an unexpected person to get out of the messy situation, or risk becoming a museum display.

Overall this book is much lighter than the most recent previous ones, and only succeeds in advancing Jake's character if he learns some lessons from this escapade (or should I say, relearns the lessons he learned about decision making way back in #11 *The Forgotten*?). Though Jake's style of narration seemed out of character for him (he's not usually one for such short, curt sentences), I found it a relatively effective way to make certain points. Ax and Marco are wonderfully on-point in their characterization, which had been a bit lacking as of late, with the exception of Marco in *Visser*. I also really enjoyed that Tobias was once again the source of random historical information.

**We want to hate them for what they do? Maybe we should stop helping them do it.**

(view spoiler)



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## Abi says

**The Great Animorphs Re-read:** A bit ridiculous, but creepy and imaginative all the same!

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## Nemo (The Moonlight Library) says

### Brought to you by The Moonlight Library!

Jake and the Animorphs discover Visser Three's newest toy, the Sea Blade, a ship designed to discover the location of the hidden Pemalite ship. If the Yeerks get their hands on that, it's all over. The Animorphs need to stop Visser Three at all costs, even if it means entering an unknown world full of amphibious human mutations...

This book is pretty crap. There, I said it. It's not badly written, but the plot it just so... it's like they didn't even try. Applegate or her ghost writer. The Animorphs get trapped underwater in a giant cave that is supposed to be Atlantis or something, and it's ruled by mutated humans with blue skin and gills and enormous eyes. The amphibious people call themselves Nartec and can speak every language because they steal shipwrecks and turn the survivors into mummies after extracting their DNA to help with their breeding program.

Still with me? Yes, this is an Animorphs book. The Nartec aren't aliens, they're mutated humans, rapidly dying out after thousands of years of living way below the surface just off the coast of California in a hidden cave.

Still with me?

There is no reason why humans haven't discovered the Nartec – the Animorphs can reach the save in orca morph. They didn't need their giant squids, so it's not particularly deep. And all those unaccounted for shipwrecks? Don't you think someone would have found something when ships are being towed from two oceans away? And why didn't the Nartec take anything from the Titanic? It would have been prime for them. (probably on the wrong side of the ocean)

Still with me?

Visser Three shows up to help them escape their watery prison and the Animorphs betray him at the last minute.

Don't read this book. It's a waste of time. Jake spends most of his time moping and questioning himself and beating himself up because he keeps making the wrong decisions. Yet the Animorphs emerge relatively unscathed, as usual, and the Nartec are never heard from again in the entire series.

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## Julie says

Ghostwriter: Erica Bobone, who hasn't done one of these before. I'm so conflicted about to rate this book! I want to give it 4 for the writing and characterisations, which I thought were so on-point (Bobone writes better Marco humour than the guy who's been handed the Marco books, and her Ax is fantastic)... but 1-2 for the ridiculous plot. I wish I knew how closely KAA was involved with that plot skeleton, because I don't know who we should blame for this one.

I know I've said before that I love the series' creative ways to get the Animorphs into strange places on this planet and off, and a museum-Atlantis at the bottom of the sea with mutated merpeople is an interesting setting, but it just doesn't feel like *an Animorphs book* -- there's some creepy abyssal exploration horror scenes that gave me Lovecraftian vibes, but mostly the adventure is just so bizarre and doesn't contribute much to the series, and even contradicts the previous Pemalite book.

Although to quote Janelle's review: "I needed a campy story to break up the dark and depressing tales littered throughout this series. Sometimes you don't want a kid's book that presents terrifying questions about humanity, sometimes you just want a ridiculous adventure at the bottom of the sea."

-- because I really just like pointing out, again, that this children's series is usually *so dark and depressing and sophisticated*. Even when it's sorta meh, as in this book, I still dig it.

Favourite quotes:

(view spoiler)

