



War of the Whales: A True Story

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Two men face off against an all-powerful navy—and the fate of the ocean’s most majestic creatures hangs in the balance.

War of the Whales is the gripping tale of a crusading attorney who stumbles on one of the US Navy’s best-kept secrets: a submarine detection system that floods entire ocean basins with high-intensity sound—and drives whales onto beaches. As Joel Reynolds launches a legal fight to expose and challenge the Navy program, marine biologist Ken Balcomb witnesses a mysterious mass stranding of whales near his research station in the Bahamas. Investigating this calamity, Balcomb is forced to choose between his conscience and an oath of secrecy he swore to the Navy in his youth.

When Balcomb and Reynolds team up to expose the truth behind an epidemic of mass strandings, the stage is set for an epic battle that pits admirals against activists, rogue submarines against weaponized dolphins, and national security against the need to safeguard the ocean environment. Waged in secret military labs and the nation’s highest court, War of the Whales is a real-life thriller that combines the best of legal drama, natural history, and military intrigue.

War of the Whales: A True Story Details

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From Reader Review War of the Whales: A True Story for online ebook

Mani Gardner says

I borrowed the advanced reader copy from my friend. I was a bit hesitant since this is a non-fiction book, but after I read the first chapter I was hooked. The book reads like a mystery novel - at times, I was shocked (in both good and not-so-good ways) to think that some of these events really happened! I am not the most avid environmentalist or animal lover, but this book got me to feel for all the characters, human and animal alike. AND learning about the Navy's use of sonar and secret defense trainings, let's just say there is SO much I never would have known without reading this book. Really puts life in perspective.

In short: Read this book. You will be entertained and informed, regardless of your position in life, I promise you will learn at least one thing -in my case, many things- you never knew before.

Monica says

[The Navy uses low and mid frequency sound waves to combat the emerging and evolving technologies in the world navies today (specifically to combat subm

Ryan Hartman says

In my modest opinion, the military sucks: all branches in every country no matter how far back in time you go. When I picked up "War of the Whales," I certainly didn't expect to have these views not only cemented but also given more ammo. Although the book is mainly concerned with the Navy and their treatment of whales. I believe we can replace the world Navy with any other branch and replace whales with any other part of the environment and this book would not have changed much.

While my knowledge of whales (which wasn't very high to begin with) was not increased by much, my eyes sure were opened as to how far the Navy is willing to go in order to fulfill their blood lust, and how they can pretty much get away with whatever they want to do, so long as it happens while "preparing for war."

Whatever that means.

Horwitz explains, in-depth, how all the world's oceans have become playing ground for the US Navy. The National Marine Fisheries Service is in charge of approving or denying the Navy permits for war game exercises. Although it is and has been widely known that these exercises result in the deaths of too many sea creatures to count, the office is full of marine biologists who studied at institutions funded by the Navy. Therefore, almost all permits applied for by the Navy are approved by Fisheries. When these permits are challenged, the Navy denies responsibly for any destruction. If their denials are disproved, and the Navy forced to admit that animals are dying because of their silly games, they simply invoke national security: "Sure, a few whales may die here and there because of our exercises, but surely that's better than the loss of human life if we're unprepared for an imaginary water attack some time in the unspecified future." More often than not, they win.

After whales began piling up on the Bahama coast in 2001, the National Resources Defense Council, begins what would eventually be a years-long fight to get to the bottom of the causes. At one point, the reader is taken on blow-by-blow journey of what happens to the whales when the Navy uses high-intensity sound. These few paragraphs are heart wrenching and maddening and I wish more of the book would have appealed to people's emotions in this way, instead of boring us with law.

All in all, Horwitz took a long time, strolling down many back roads, to tell this story. At times I was on the edge of my seat, but mostly I just wanted to get to the end of the book and know what happened. A few times I debated whether or not to skip the rest of the reading and search Wikipedia for some answers. A few more times, because of the writer's patriotism and love of civilization, I was almost disgusted enough to abandon the book and light it on fire. Still, I finished it and would probably recommend it, if only because of a lack of anything better on the subject.

Galen Johnson says

I really think this is a story that should be widely disseminated, and Horwitz obviously did a lot of research and presented it in a readable way.

However, I found a lot of errors. For example, Horwitz writes "Even the deepest-diving of modern military submarines can't dive as deep as a big whale. [Footnote: The deepest-diving military submarines...reached crush depth at 3,700 feet meters. Cuvier's beaked whales have been measured to dive almost 1,000 feet.]" Neither of those numbers are correct-- Cuvier's beaked whales can dive to almost 3000 meters, Alfa-class subs had a crush depth around 1,300 m. And "feet meters"? In another section, Horwitz reports that "With their wild salmon prey dying off from dammed rivers and overforested streambeds..." After five years working on salmon issues, I can assure you that overforested streambeds are not a major (or even a minor) contributor to wild salmon dying off. Over-logging? Deforestation? Yes. But very, very few streambeds are overforested. Elsewhere, the author writes of "attack subs...armed with torpedoes rather than missiles." Torpedoes are a type of missile. This sort of sloppy writing was a frequent occurrence.

When the writing is so careless and the editing so poor that I can spot lots of obvious errors even in a non-careful reading, I have a hard time trusting the author about the rest of the story. I also found the way the story jumped from a very character-centered telling of one part of the story to a different character for a different part of the story to be an awkward narrative choice. It also would have been helpful to learn a bit more about the Navy's perspective on the testing-- did they act out of arrogance, or out of genuine need to conduct testing in certain places? I'm a marine ecologist working on conservation issues, and I came away feeling like the story was a bit too one-sided in glorifying Balcomb and Reynolds and pillorying the government. I can't imagine how someone on the fence about this issue would feel.

Sylvia says

I love it when a book inspires me with depictions of people who are willing to fight for what they believe in. It is even better when the book is about real people. I enjoyed reading about Ken Balcomb and Joel Reynolds and their longtime efforts to protect whales and many other species. Highly recommended for anyone who is interested in the environment, and particularly environmental law.

Melissa says

Update: Just received this today (August 8, 2014) and as I posted below I wouldn't have expected anything less than Stunning, GORGEOUS and sometimes fun, from Simon & Schuster books (no I'm not kissing *ss, I have just come to know through other S&S books I've read that the quality and amazing stories from this publisher and their authors is nothing short of superb. That top notch quality begins in the titles, to the

blurbs, the covers, holding the book and its perfection in quality, the marketing pages they insert into the books they ship are truly awesome I have no words, and of course in reading the ones I've been so blessed to read I have a gratitude and respect that runs so deep I just had to say thank you once again!!)...anywho, I received it today and it is a stunning book. I flipped through it a bit and cannot wait to dive in *no pun intended*. This topic is extremely high interest and what I've seen so far is the exquisite quality of the books that S&S unfailingly puts out for us. Thank you 'so' much for such an Amazing gift!!

Not my review since I just won this last night and don't have the book yet, however I just 'have' to say what's on my mind and in my Heart. I'm absolutely honored and grateful. I just want to say thank you to Simon & Schuster and the Goodreads First Reads program for the opportunity to read this book. I swear on my last breath if it weren't for this amazing site I'd never have the chance to read even a crumb of the amazing books I've discovered here. I 'know' without question from other S & S books I've read, that if it's got Simon & Schuster on/in/published by, the book is going to be AMAZING!

I feel the same about many other publishers, (which I feel would be inappropriate to name here on a Simon & Schuster book page), as well as indie author's, just by paying attention to this which isn't something I've ever done before I became a member of Goodreads in 2011. I think so many people here can relate to that about just having that intuition and knowledge learned over time. Paying attention to publishers and authors names on the books we read is awesome knowledge. Sharing them along to others is so important to this wonderful world of reading and that's why I'm typing this out now because everyone needs to know how truly appreciated they are, how much the art they put out there for us is impacting our world's in an immensely profound way. I've learned so much that I went from, woman always searching through the same 'ole book isle in the store, that's now closed, to an entirely new world of endless possibilities and so much more knowledge of the in and outs, the good, the bad and the extraordinary....something that came to my heart and world just by being here. I'm thrilled, excited, grateful and honored to be a part of this site for 'all' it has to offer.

Thank you 'so' much!!! And again, thank you Goodreads and Simon & Schuster for 'all' that you do for all of us here. This book is going to be fantastic, I cannot wait to read it and a shoutout to all to check out the video for this book on Simon & Schuster's website by the Author is awesome!! I tweeted it and G+ it last night. Check it out and I look forward to sharing my thoughts after I've read the book :)

Amazon purchase link (Hardcover link cuz it's Gorgeous and a forever keeper):
<http://www.amazon.com/War-Whales-A-Tr...>

~*Happy Reading, everyone*~

Neil says

Fascinating history of the ongoing battle between environmental stewardship and military preparedness. The story leads to the NRDC v. Winter Supreme Court decision. If you're unfamiliar with that case, no spoilers here.

Hayley Chwazik-Gee says

I suppose I was looking for a thrilling undercover story full of twists and turns when I picked up this book. It ended up being more of a detailed, slow, and technical account of the Navy's impact on whales. Expertly

researched, but a little bit too dense for those of us with little background in law / military / sonar. My one critique about the actual writing was that the characters were hard to follow and there were so many involved. I would recommend this book for anyone considering a career in environmental law!

Holly B says

War of the Whales is a new favorite in my collection of books about the ocean, marine mammal science and environmental politics. The narrative reads as suspensefully as fiction although it is a true story about beaked whale strandings attributed to the use of navy sonar in military training exercises. Proving that you can kill a whale with sound and tackling the herculean task of doing something about it drives the book forward and Horwitz makes sure that all the elements of a good detective story are front and center. You get to know the reticent whale scientist who becomes a public figure in spite of himself. You watch a young lawyer mature into a key spokesman for the Natural Resources Defense Council. You watch them both struggle with personal and financial problems while trying to hang onto fragile marriages. Although it eventually becomes clear where his sympathies lie, Horwitz does not disparage military players and by the time you've gotten half way through the book you understand how and why they become committed to some of the maneuvers that have such deadly consequences. He is masterful at showing how fundamentally well meaning people end up making terrible decisions. Not incidentally, the book happens to be written in my favorite style—smooth elegant prose with a conversational rhythm so it is really easy to read. Cannot recommend highly enough!

Chris says

Josh has done an amazing job of detailing the events surrounding the mass strandings of whales that have been occurring for the last 40 years. Are the strandings explicable? To some, no. You will reach your own conclusions after you read this compelling, extremely well written book.

Helen says

Wow! War of the Whales is a well-researched, page turner of a book about the terrible impact that navy sonar can have on whales. It starts with the mass stranding of whales in the Bahamas in 2000 and follows the investigations into the causes of these and other strandings (which are eventually clearly tied to U.S. Navy sonar war games/testing in the areas). I would give this book my highest rating for anyone interested in the environment, oceans, acoustics, marine life and especially whales. Beautifully written, highly readable!!

There are an array of scientists, attorneys, environmental activists, navy personnel, and other individuals who were interviewed and profiled in-depth for the book and fascinating and complex portraits emerge.

Schuyler Wallace says

WAR OF THE WHALES REVIEW

As a Navy man, sailor, lover of all things oceanic, and a person who once thought about a career in marine biology, I found Joshua Horwitz's "War of the Whales" to be both fascinating and food for thought. I abhor the image of Navy brass as perpetrators of animal cruelty although I'm convinced, after reading the book, that such behavior in the name of national security is entirely in character and unlikely to change.

Marine biologist Ken Balcomb is a fascinating study of a dedicated scientist who is so immersed in his studies that the customary things in life that most people enjoy go unnoticed to him. He doesn't need creature comforts and, in fact, struggles to get the funding to help pay for them or for living a normal life. Although he has two homes in resort locations, neither of which could be considered luxurious, he has been known to eat fresh road-killed rabbits and stays at Motel 6 and eats Pizza Hut when he travels; travails he gladly puts up with to keep his studies funded.

Horwitz makes what seems to be an impossible job of making Balcomb's early life fathomable. A weak and skinny kid, Balcomb resolutely builds himself up to a fitness specimen and spends every waking moment outdoors, wading rivers and combing beaches. As a graduate zoology student at UC Davis he gathered horse lungs from regional slaughterhouses for use in the Davis lab. Then he became interested in the whale deconstruction he encountered and became immersed in maggoty and aromatic whale offal as he dug through the garbage bins at a whaling station looking for intact whale lungs to study. After reading of Balcomb's dedication to smelly work, I am happy with my decision to go a different direction.

Some forty years later, in March of 2000, after a remarkable career as a scientist in both the Navy and civilian world, Balcomb is well established as an expert in cetology studies. He is alerted to unusual whale strandings near his study facility in the Bahamas and in close proximity to U.S. Naval war exercises. And so begins the story of a battle between dedicated marine scientists and the powerful United States Navy who rejects the notion that environmental responsibility trumps its mandate to protect our country.

Balcomb, a reluctant whistle blower, is teamed with a powerful environmental lawyer in an attempt to reign in the Navy's belligerent attitude towards interference from those who disagree with the necessity of national security. The future of the decreasing numbers of sea creatures, already protected from everyone but the admirals, is still wending its way through many courts, including the Supreme Court, with good and bad decisions being rendered almost daily.

Horwitz has done some remarkable research. He introduces us to heroes and villains and carefully explains their agendas. It's clear where his sympathies lie but he still maintains a sense of neutrality. His story is exceptionally well written and moves with clarity and sensibility to an unsolved resolution. Every step of the encounter is explained in understandable language that deeply draws the reader into the turmoil. This is a fight that, under the guidance of the author, will invoke emotion and opinion.

Clif says

This excellent book hit a nerve with me. So put on your seatbelts, here we go...

In law there is a term - "prima facie" - which means "based on the first impression". The prima facie situation of the sole superpower on Earth insisting that it must be allowed to kill animals in any number in order to keep in practice to defend the lives of Americans against foes that do not have the capability to mount an attack that would not be met with an overwhelming counterattack can be captured in one word:

absurd.

Case in point from the book: an admiral expresses the need for the United States to detect a North Korean submarine should it appear off Hawaii. Ask yourself - what would be the immediate future of North Korea should it launch even a tiny attack on the United States? There is simply no credible military armed force threat to the U.S. by any one nation or any combination of nations in the world. But huge bureaucracies, and the military is one, can go on quite well regardless of the magnitude of the problem they were created to address. The Cold War ended 25 years ago, and what of the size and funding of the U.S. military since?

The foregoing doesn't touch on another no-brainer: what will happen when creatures, that have such sensitive hearing that they can detect sounds from fellow creatures hundreds of miles away, are exposed to high power pulses of audio that can even be heard *out of the water by people miles from the source*? This practice goes on today. Whales cannot jump out of the water to escape, nor can they dive for escape, or swim away, the sound is all encompassing. I can only ask my fellow human beings - can you imagine something so awful happening suddenly all around you that you would throw yourself over a cliff, or dive under water where you could not breathe, in order to escape?

But common logic doesn't deter. Those who do harmful things will do so until it is absolutely established that there is harm and they are forced to be responsible by the law. The cigarette companies are the perfect example. I vividly recall the "take a puff...it's springtime!" ads for Salem cigarettes. Look at all the time and effort it took to get rid of that advertising even as people were dying of lung cancer throughout. What hope for wildlife?!

This comprehensive account of the attempt, only partly successful, to protect marine mammals from the United States Navy will leave the reader well informed on the habits and characteristics of whales, the details of sonar and the history not only of military interaction with whales, but commercial exploitation of our seaborne relatives. Oh, and guess who funds such prestigious institutions of maritime research as Scripps and Woods Hole? Yes, none other than the U.S. Navy. Loads of research on bio-acoustic location. Did it protect the whales? No, it was all to enable the navy to mimic the whales and, should it kill the whales once the knowledge was gained, too bad.

The author has succeeded in drawing character portraits that give interesting personal angles on the many subjects covered. Quite a number of marriages fall apart, preventing this story about whales from becoming too dry, even though many whales dry out, beached around the world in a frantic effort to escape.

The book is uplifting, following the progress of animal rights from the days when there were none, to the present in which such organizations as the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC) use the law to protect wildlife as far as is possible under the legislation passed decades ago before Congress became an assembly of people who view any non-military act of the government as improper.

The War of the Whales makes a solid case for foresight in legislation, though of course the Supreme Court can always nullify even the best intentions that have made it through Congress.

It also shows how "national security" can be used to justify anything. We've seen this happen with the presidency, the NSA, the FBI, the CIA and, in this case, the navy. The public must wage a constant battle to defend the rights which are so quickly denied by government agencies only too eager to get more power, while claiming to protect the public. If human rights are so easily put at risk, you can well imagine the status of wildlife.

I hope this book will result in a flood of money going to the NRDC. Only by going to the courts can rights be protected. Without the courts, networking of the powerful combined with the revolving door between government agencies, the military, and businesses all but guarantee the abuse of all living things that have no

voice representing them in law.

UPDATE: I just received the following in an email from the NRDC:

"The Navy's reckless plan for training and testing with deadly sonar and explosives could kill nearly 1,000 marine mammals over the next five years. They have conceded there could be more than 13,000 serious injuries, such as permanent hearing loss or lung damage." So the impression this book gives that the problem has been at least reduced turns out not to be the case - the USN is proceeding as it pleases and there has just been another mass stranding off of Greece.

Nikki says

This is a book I should have rated highly (I can't say "enjoyed" as it is about whales dying due to humans training for fucking war.) but could not for a number of reasons. First of all, I thought the focus was far too heavy on people and far too little on whales, ya know...the point of the book. I grew quite tired of listening to all these details about every person included in the book while whales, even specific whale species, got limited focus. The book also jumps around far too much in terms of time and people. I also found myself wanting more information on certain things while the author clearly felt other elements were more important because he would drone on about those instead. I found the book to be dryly and boringly written, which is bad because I have a greater tolerance for such things than other people and this means there are a lot of people that will not bother to read it. Had it been written in a more concise and compelling manner I think more people would be able to learn about sonar and the impacts on whales and other marine species, thereby making it more likely things could change.

Barb says

I gave this book 5 stars because it's something the public should be aware of and I am one who never knew anything about this. That being said however, it's a well written book and explains the problems with high pitched sounds and sonar that the Navy was using (and probably still is, who knows).

The whales started coming to shore and getting stranded there and the author talks about his research and how they came to try to save these whales and other sea life from what the Navy was doing.

If you are interested in the environment, ocean, whales, dolphins, other sea-life and it's impact than you should read this book.

Not only does this book talk about the effects that the high pitched sounds do on these beautiful creatures, but also the author tells it more like a story. You also learn interesting facts. For instance, I never knew that whales had 13 stomachs. I just find this fascinating.

These creatures of the deep can't speak for themselves and we all need to stand up and help them out before we miss out and they become extinct.

Pam Giarrizzo says

I ordered a copy of War of the Whales as soon as I read about it. I had been hearing for years about the

problems the Navy's sonar program creates for whales, and I wanted to learn more about the issue. I was afraid the book would be dry and technical, though, and that I'd read the first chapter or two before putting it down, never to be picked up again.

I hadn't counted on the brilliant storytelling talents of Joshua Horwitz, the book's author, who makes the battle come alive between the U.S. Navy and those working to save the whales. Despite the need for a certain amount of technical language and military jargon, the book is very readable, even for the layperson.

The main heroes in this story are the Natural Resources Defense Council's Joel Reynolds, who sues the U.S. Navy over its unfettered use of sonar despite the harm it causes to whales, and a marine biologist named Ken Balcomb, who observes and documents mass strandings of whales directly related to the Navy's use of sonar in the Bahamas and the San Juan Islands. Reynolds and Balcomb take on this fight because of their strong commitment to the survival of the whales, even though their passion for this cause takes a toll on their personal lives. In the end, they have the satisfaction of knowing that their efforts have forced many changes in the Navy's sonar program.

For me, War of the Whales is not merely a chronicle of past battles on behalf of the whales; it's a call to action. Thanks to Joshua Horwitz for such a fascinating and thought-provoking book!

Krystal Dion says

I loved reading this book. I am very interested in becoming a marine biologist/ecologist when I grow up. This book is very written with many details. It felt like I was one of the "Earthlings" helping and researching the whales. I liked how the author explained the science behind the things he did. I also liked learning about the beaked whales and all the pictures that were included in the text. I was very interested in learning about mass stranding of whales and it was wonderful to read about people care so much for these whales. I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in whales and marine biology. This book was very fascinating and one of the best books I've read.

Kati Polodna says

Received ARC from NETGALLEY for honest review. Excellent nonfiction work about how military sonar tests drove whales to beach themselves. Well-written and fast-paced, it was informative without being mind-numbing. The courtroom bit was a little more tedious but easy to understand. Definitely worth a read if you're looking for something that isn't just fluff this summer.

Kurtbg says

This book details the affects of military sonar and LFA testing and the affects on mammal sea life. The story starts with whales washing up on the shores of Bahamas in 2000. From there it follows the investigation and legal proceedings. Spliced into the narrative is information on military programs, ocean fish & mammal advocacy and protection, whale biology, and background stories of the participants.

Whales use bioacoustics to identify objects, navigate, and communicate. When there's a really loud noise

permeating the ocean it can unsettle them at the least, and at the worst, cause direct or indirect death. Enter technology and the goal of undersea detection.

The two major antagonists are militaries with sonar programs and oil exploration.

When a single test can kill up to 100 whales it doesn't seem very promising for the future of marine mammal survival.

Neal says

From my Amazon Best Books of the Month review: Reported and written with great passion and precision, this is a gripping and wholly original tale of the ecological side effects of national security. When whales begin beaching themselves in the Bahamas, a marine researcher suspects a clandestine military sonar program. The fight to protect the gentle giants of the sea from the US Navy reads like an eco-thriller crossed with the best of investigative journalism. The action veers from Caribbean beaches to the Pentagon, from the San Juan Islands of Washington State to the chambers of the U.S. Supreme Court. At the center of the action is marine biologist and ex-Navy man, Ken Balcomb, a relentless defender of the whales he's come to love. Take your fictional pick: Balcomb is either Quixote, Ishmael, or David to the Navy's Goliath. He's also got a backstory worthy of its own novel – an absent-father childhood, a lengthy (and secret) Navy career, three failed marriages, and finally a passion for marine mammals. When Balcomb teams up with activist environmental lawyer Joel Reynolds, the story's twists and turns expose us to the hidden histories of underwater submarine surveillance and its impact on deep-sea dwellers. Joshua Horwitz is an exuberant storyteller, and this is a rare trifecta of a book: important, highly readable, and stunningly true.
