



The Invasion

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Sometimes weird things happen to people. Ask Jake. He may tell you about the night he and his friends saw the strange light in the sky. He may even tell you about what happened when they realized the "light" was only a plane -- from another planet. Here's where Jake's story gets a little weird. It's where they're told that the human race is under attack -- and given the chance to fight back.

Now Jake, Rachel, Cassie, Tobias, and Marco have the power to morph into any animal they choose. And they must use that power to outsmart an evil that is greater than anything the world has ever seen...

The Invasion Details

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Dichotomy Girl says

So glad I decided to read this series on a whim. It's actually really really good. (I'm about 2/3rds through the 2nd book as I'm writing this, and am really excited about the way that it's going.)

I guess I expected it to be, a bit cheezy, kinda immature, and a little dated, but still definitely fun. But it's really not, and it kind of makes me wonder why I'd never heard of this series before?

Cameron Chaney says

If you lived through the late 90s at all, odds are you remember Animorphs. It was a best-selling middle grade/young adult book series,

a Nickelodeon TV show,

a videogame,

and a Transformers toy line.

I was a big fan of the show as a kid, I played the games, and had a big collection of the toys. (Yes, I still have them. Don't judge me.) However, I only read a couple of the books. I never began reading the series from the start. So, here I am! I'm finally starting at the beginning and reading on through. And I gotta say, so far I am not regretting this decision.

This book is awesome! No, it's not great literature, but it was such a blast to read. The fast pace never wavered, the action never stopped, and the plot never ceased being interesting. It's just a cool book and I can see why it was so popular back in the day. However, due to the multitude of 90s pop culture references and its fair share of cheese, it's a fairly dated series and will probably never make a good comeback. Still, if you like the 90s, you will LOVE this book! I definitely did.

Also, aside from the keyhole cover, there is the super awesome gimmicky page-flip animation thingy. When you flip the pages, there's an animation at the bottom right hand corner. That crap was the coolest thing ever in the 90s.

FINAL VERDICT: 5 out of five blue aliens

Dan says

Loved these books as a kid, of course. The regular visit to the bookstore for new each installment was a big highlight of each month.

What's really amazing is the power these books have when you go back to them. There was a time when I was depressed, and in my angsty boredom I looked at the full Animorphs collection sitting on my bookshelf and grabbed one of them to read. At first, the large font and simple syntax were a bit jarring, and I didn't know how well these books would hold up. But almost immediately I was absorbed back into the heads of these characters, and I remembered all the ways I identified with them and related to them. The plots were as thrilling as ever, but this time I paid more attention to the ways many complex ethical issues, questions, and debates were woven into these stories. I could see more parallels between the world of Animorphs and the real world I was learning about. I tore through the rest of the series after glancing through that one book, and somewhere along the way I snapped out of my depression. (It might have been the book when Marco gets depressed and Cassie is all sympathetic but Jake just says "Marco. Snap out of it.") I felt stronger as a person after reliving this war through the characters I knew so well. The characters will leave their mark on you, and revisiting these books is a powerful way to remember that influence.

I'm so glad to see this series back on bookstore shelves.

Toàn Phan says

Coi nh? nh?p môi m?t cái cho bi?t cái v?, v?y thôi.

Ashley says

So one of the things I did in middle school instead of being cool was read this series, over and over and over again. It's pretty much the reason I love reading science fiction; it was all up in my head and re-wiring my brain during my formative years. Over Christmas, my mom finally succeeded in getting me to brave her garage and pull out boxes of my old books that she's been storing for years, and what did I find in two of them but this series. They hadn't been touched for at least thirteen years. I don't even remember the last time I read this first book.

I've sort of been hankering to re-read this series for a while now, but actually having the full series in my hands pushed me to actually do it. Coincidentally, in August it will have been twenty years since this book was published, and I'm going to celebrate by re-reading one book a month (sometimes two, when the specials pop up in the chronology) until I've done the whole thing, just like I read it as the series was first published. It's going to take me about four years. It's hilarious to me now to think that waiting that month in between books was so agonizing for me back then, when it's standard now to wait years in between new books for series I read.

For those of you who didn't spend the precious hours of your youth reading serialized monthly novels about children turning into animals in order to fight parasitic body-stealing aliens, let me give you a quick primer.

One sleepy summer evening, five kids are walking home from the mall through an abandoned construction site when an alien crashes his spaceship in front of them. The alien is dying. He explains to the children that

their planet has already been invaded secretly by another race of aliens called the Yeerks, parasites who travel from world to world taking over species. They've been on Earth for years slowly gaining traction, human body by human body. On impulse, the alien gifts the children a piece of his alien technology in hopes that they will use it to fight off the secret invasion until his people can arrive and provide reinforcements. He gives them the power to morph: the ability to absorb DNA from another individual, and change your form to match it. Before they can even begin to absorb all the information they've been given, the Yeerks and their allies arrive, and murder the kindly alien.

And so begins the Animorphs, which is what they decide to call themselves: Jake, the natural leader, whose brother has been taken over by a Yeerk; Jake's cousin Rachel, a beautiful and fashion-conscious blonde with a hidden streak of anger and violence; Cassie, the kind and gentle animal lover, who is always the voice of reason and compassion; Marco, who lost his mother two years before, and hides his feelings behind smart-ass remarks and pop culture references; and Tobias, who was raised by his absentee aunt and uncle, and who more than any of them embraces their new powers.

This book is all set-up, and it does a pretty good job. We learn the basic details of the conflict with the Yeerks. We learn the terminology (Yeerk pools, kandrona rays, Andalites, morphing, Bug Fighters, Dracon beams, Taxxons, Hork-Bajir) and the way things work in this universe (the two hour time limit on morphing, Yeerks needing to leave their host bodies to feed, the limitations of thought-speak while morphing). And we learn that despite being a supposed children's book series, this will be a story that not only has consequences, but will be unafraid to tackle the realities of war on the human psyche. (Of course I didn't realize all that when I was first reading it, but I can't help seeing all the seeds, knowing what's to come.) (view spoiler)

That's not to say things weren't wonkier than I remembered. Some of the plot developments, character, and dialogue were a little bit creaky. And while for the most part all the little details I noticed that set up things to be revealed (the crashed Andalite ship, Tobias' longer encounter with the alien) were consistent with later books, there was also the occasional blip, like here in the first book it appears that even while not in a morph, the kids can direct their thoughts to another person in a morph, where later in the series, it's well-established that you can only use thought-speak while in a morph. Anyway, I'm hopeful that as we get deeper in, the bumps will even out, and it will be the self-assured series that I remember so fondly.

I was super tempted to just read the next one right away, but I'm going to hold myself back and keep to my schedule. Even though tomorrow *is* February 1st, so technically I wouldn't be cheating . . .

Issam says

Best nostalgic kick *ever*.

I *love* this series. So. Much. I started reading it before I was teenager, and was practically a legal adult by the time it was finished. These are the books that made me want to read. *For fun*. It has been such a huge part of my life, and it's such a great treat to be able to go back and revisit these stories as they are reprinted again.

Some things to note about these reprints: The books originally came out in the 90's, so expect the pop-culture references in these new books to be updated as well. Technology-wise though, they have been changed to be made more timeless-- so you'll see things like *Sega* be replaced by *video game system* (or something to that effect).

There was also a very glaring mistake in the original book that K.A took a lot of criticism for, because she later decided to change that rule after the first book. That mistake has now been fixed here, and long time

fans will most definitely appreciate this continuity fix for staying consistent with the rest of the series.

I'm sure there are also other little edits in this book as well, but unless you are specifically looking for them, they are not very noticeable. The majority of the story is still exactly the same, and all the slight update does is make the book a bit more accessible to kids and new readers today.

Aside from this, the books have also been given new lenticular covers. So essentially, these are covers that morph when you tilt them from side to side. The images for it don't translate well into the online world, but the animations are very cool to look at when you're holding the actual book in your hands. I guess I spent an unusual amount of time doing this in the store when I was picking it up for the first time, because eventually a sales lady came up to me and asked "Is everything okay?". I don't think she meant it *in that way*, but I still found it hilarious.

Overall, *Animorphs* is an excellent series, and this book is a great origin story for new readers to discover, and for old fans to revisit. The stories still hold up quite well as any other YA series now, even today, and I urge everyone to give it a try, even if it is marketed as a 'middle-grade series'. The conflicts are well presented, and they cover quite a few important themes involving slavery and warfare-- something that not any average kids series would normally try to tackle.

A most *definite* recommend from me, to anyone looking for a great story. A+

Huy says

??c h?p d?n, mình ??c m?t lèo không ngh? luôn, cái ý t??ng mu?n hóa thành con v?t gì c?ng ???c nó thú v? kinh khi?p :(

Alan Woodall says

I have every single one of these books, from #1-54 of the regular series, the Ellimist/Andalite/Hork-Bajir Chronicles, Visser, all four Megamorphs, and the two Alternamorphs choose-your-own-adventure books. I have read most of these more than once.

While the books are very very formulaic and repetitive, particularly in action sequences and morphing descriptions ("He tucked back his wings and went into a dive..." "The feather pattern came up on my skin and burst into 3D..."), they have very lovable characters. My personal favorite was Marco, mostly because he was the sarcastic asshole of the group, and usually the funniest (albeit often outdone unintentionally by Ax).

Also, they are unafraid to do real damage to the characters, short of killing them, looking into ethics on a level that is startling for a children's series especially. They are constantly faced with the concerns of killing beings that are not under their own control, and eventually this spreads to making sacrifices of human-controllers (and non-controllers) as the situation becomes ever more desperate. They do not escape the war unscathed, and the lesson here ultimately is that world-saving does not breed heroes, as well as showing the horrors of war. Cue Brando.

Wendy Darling says

3.5 stars THIS BOOK IS SO EXCITING. Kids morphing into animals, flying saucers, and allllieenns!

We're discussing the first 3 books on the blog 10/31. I can't believe I've never read these before.

Robyn Jefferson says

ignore that i am 23 years old and only just now reading animorphs, thanks

Angela says

This was my face the entire time I was reading this: :-D

Really, I couldn't stop grinning. Because Animorphs defined my adolescence. From my first book, received Easter Sunday 1997, through the bitter end (when I was finishing my sophomore year of high school), Animorphs was with me. I met my best friends through these books (and I met three of the women who stood for me on my wedding day through our shared love of Animorphs). So when I heard these were being re-released, it was fabulous. And when I got my galley copies of 1 and 2 in the mail, I sat down immediately and started reading.

Not much has changed. It's still easy to read the book in an hour. All the famous lines are still these (I cackled at "Idiot teenagers with a death wish"). The screwups are gone. It felt wonderful to slip back into this familiar story, almost to where I could recite line-for-line what was coming up next (I don't *quite* have it memorized, but everything just felt *familiar*).

Scholastic started re-releasing Baby-Sitters Club books and I read the new prequel when it debuted, and what I was struck by in the prequel was how clunky a lot of it felt. The dialog and narration didn't feel entirely natural. Perhaps I'm partial to *The Invasion* because I loved Animorphs way more than I did BSC, but I believed back in the day and that belief is reaffirmed now: these books were written to be read by anybody. The dialog is smooth and could have come from any contemporary MG or YA novel. It's rough and violent and bleak in a way I haven't seen in a book for awhile - it's not gratuitously so, but the fact that we don't cut away from the darker parts underscores that these are deathly serious books.

I am SO GLAD these books are coming back for a new generation of kids to enjoy. This is absolutely classic 90s alien invasion science fiction and should be read by everyone!

Sam Julian says

I re-read this the past weekend and now I can't stop thinking about it. I'm tearing through wikipedia remembering how awesome the whole thing was. I want to go back through the archives and read them all! There's only 64 books... this one only took me 90 minutes to read. I could burn through it in a few

weekends...

< No Sam, no! That's the bookworm brain talking. You're an *adult* now, remember? >

Right, right. Sorry, lost myself there for a second. What was I doing? Right, working. It's just-- it would make such a great tv show if they remade it today! The nickelodeon version sucked, they rushed the plot and changed everything! And we have such better CGI now! If Starz or Hulu picked it up it could be really compelling!

< Sam! >

I just downloaded the entire series on epub.

< NOOOOOOO >

Sam read Animorphs books for longer than two hours. Now he can never go back

Julie says

I'm embarking on my Epic Animorphs Reread 2015, so my read count is going to end up vastly skewed this year, but I'll probably just increase my reading goal once it becomes an issue.

I can't even count the number of times I've started rereading this series, but this time -- *this time!!* -- I'm probably going to manage, purely because I have them all on an e-reader now, which makes things a lot easier than carting around my battered, ripped, well-loved mass market paperbacks, which are all in storage on a different continent.

Necessary disclaimers: K.A. Applegate was formative reading for me, probably even stronger than Harry Potter was. I was a member of the Animorphs fan club, with ~secret letters~ from the kids; I had a calendar and a poster of the aliens, a <JOIN US> holographic sign; I played the shitty online web game and printed out instructions for my friends on how to access it; I played the computer game demo despite the fact that the family desktop could barely handle it, but it still seemed like the COOLEST THING EVER; I made fanpages in Angelfire and laboriously hand-coded navigation grids of character photos, finding individual pixel coordinates in MS Paint; I would run home to catch the unbelievably terrible TV show whenever it happened to be on Norwegian TV (IT'S ALL IN YOUR HAAAAAANDS); I bought the first couple episodes on VHS; my best friend and I were convinced Yeerks had infiltrated the teachers at our school; I joined websites and chatrooms and it was probably my first-ever fandom. I'm convinced my own site must have looked better, but most of my dial-up days were spent browsing pages like this.

Needless to say, I was *deep*, y'all. So I am not going to be an objective reviewer at all. But that said, I *have* reread the first dozen books a few times since getting older, and I still find them emotionally affecting. The writing style itself is sparse and simplistic -- this is middle-grade, what can you expect -- but the content is surprisingly dark and gutting at times, even this early on: the crushing defeats and losses they experience from the get-go, the horror of Elfangor's death (he is fucking EATEN ALIVE).

At the very end, he cried out. His cry of despair was in our heads. His cry will always be in our heads.

So again, while the writing style is simple, the content is sophisticated, and will only get moreso as the series

continues. And even so, they're such kids at the start, they're so small and young and new to this -- and they'll spend the next 3+ years of their lives, their entire formative adolescence, fighting a war. They'll become hardened warriors, making tough calls, experiencing betrayal and loss. In *The Invasion*, it's all so new. (KAA hadn't even sorted out her worldbuilding details yet either; keen readers can pick out inconsistency between the rules of morphing between here and the second book. It's like the pilot of a show!)

I have a lot of Animorphs feelings. I'm nostalgic and sentimental about it, yes -- a first-time reader wouldn't be near tears like I was, knowing what's eventually coming -- but I think it is still very, very good. All middle grade readers should read Animorphs, IMO (and, honestly, young adult *and* adult readers too). Nobility, sacrifice, heroism, camaraderie, family, and love -- fighting for what's right, and good, no matter how hard it is, no matter how easy it would be to turn aside and do nothing and go on with your life. And at the same time, remembering to have a damn good time with your friends, still finding the time to stay light and supportive and crack jokes, because otherwise the horror of it will consume you.

I'm really looking forward to mainlining the rest of these books. I love the characters all so much, each and every single one of them. My later reviews will be much shorter; this rambly horrorfest of thoughts was just setting the stage for the series as a whole.

Favourite quotes below:

(view spoiler)

(I have a lot of brothers feelings. Is anyone surprised? Answer: No one.)

EDITED TO ADD: Series reread complete, between March 3rd and November 27th, 2015! Because it would be messy and ugly to put all 62 links in here, and I like things looking pretty, here's my Animorphs master post for anyone wanting to read my reviews across the entire series. In conclusion, it's amazing and heartbreaking and definitely worth revisiting as an adult; it's even better than I remembered, and more sophisticated than even a lot of YA I'm reading today.

Nikki says

This series is amazing. Katherine Applegate presents a phenomenal story with five diverse, fleshed-out characters, and doesn't sugar coat it. This first book is fantastic and grips you right from the start. I love each of the characters and everything they add. Reading this again as an adult, I really value how this series doesn't ever talk down to the reader. Also the nostalgia value is off the charts!

Swankivy says

Started reading *Animorphs* 'cause I wanted to see if it was stupid. Boy was I ever wrong. Kids are fighting against mind-stealing aliens in this incredibly spooky and realistic-sounding character-oriented saga. In the first book they figure out what the circumstances of the invasion are and are given their morphing powers. I read the entire series. It is probably a lot different from what you think. I read these for the first time when I was in my mid-twenties, so that should tell you something. . . .

Lots of people think *Animorphs* is stupid based on their (wrong) assumptions about the books or because they have seen the less-than-stellar television show. But the series is amazing. You can laugh, now shut up and get the first one. Basic premise: Five kids get the ability to morph into any animal they can touch (to acquire their DNA). A dying alien (an Andalite) gave them the power because there are other aliens, slug-like creatures called Yeerks, trying to take over the planet by squirming into people's ears and taking over their bodies. So it's a quiet invasion, people are being taken one by one and then made to act as though everything is cool . . . and of course, they become recruiters for getting more people to infest.

The Animorphs--Jake, Rachel, Cassie, Marco, and Tobias (and later, an Andalite kid named Aximili, Ax for short)--are all that stands between the rest of the world and total slavery; they're trying to hold off the Yeerks until the backup Andalite fleet gets there. They use their morphing technology to spy on the Yeerks and to destroy their facilities and whatnot.

But what makes these books so amazing is that these are kids, having to pretend they're normal kids so no one knows they're the "Andalite bandits," and they are fighting the enemy while living right out in the open, under their noses. Internal Andalite and Yeerk politics make the situations complicated, and through the fifty-four (and then some) book series it slowly escalates to an all-out war, with a child (Jake, leader of the Animorphs) as basically the president and general of the forces of Earth.

Thousands of humans and aliens die, sometimes in violent and horrible ways, and stunning moral crises present themselves all through the series. The Animorphs form alliances with other species and with each other; they have the beginnings of romantic relationships in some cases; they still have homework and family

problems (in some cases, serious ones). These six kids put their personal problems aside as best they can and become warriors, completely losing their innocence and most of their humanity in the process. Though they're considered kids' books and the TV show was a bit goofy, I have no doubt that if marketing had been different and the thin serialized books had combined into fourteen or fifteen thicker books, it probably could have been accepted by adults. But since it's an intermediate series, you probably think I'm kidding around about how good these are. But I'm serious. Ms. Applegate's books are not without flaws (there are occasional continuity errors and little speed bumps), but they are highly recommended.

Here are some of the inconsistencies and notable aspects of the book:

Jake opens the book by claiming he can't reveal his name or identifying personal information because it would help the Yeerks find him and his friends and family. The problem is, they keep up this "we can't tell you who we are" schtick throughout the series until open war is declared late in the game, and despite that even from the beginning there are multiple details that could have easily identified them. This breaking-the-fourth-wall bit is poorly conceived, because it also reveals that the Animorphs are human, and that's a detail they try to keep secret from the Yeerks (and succeed at keeping for over half the series). Just finding any five kids with their names and descriptions at a school in a known area (near The Gardens) would be a pretty easy afternoon's work for a Controller with data processing experience, but since they give even more information (siblings' and parents' names, specific recognitions the kids have gotten, etc.), it would have been cake to track the kids down if these books were actually released into the same world they're trying to hide in.

Marco is shown to have always had the capacity to be a master strategist, an ability that comes out obviously much later in the series. Before they even become the Animorphs, Marco uses his strategy abilities to beat Jake in video games.

It is shown even in this first book that Cassie and Jake "like" each other. Cassie asks the boys to walk with them when they cut through the construction site; if she hadn't just wanted to have a chance to be near Jake, they might not have all been together to meet the alien. It is a bold step in a children's series to have interracial dating (Cassie is black, Jake is white); not many authors have tried to cover that sort of ground in children's literature, but in these books it totally is beside the point.

Jake only knows Tobias because he saved him from bullies once. Now Tobias sort of looks up to him, which is what got him involved in the first place. Little did he know he would pay his hero back by acting as a loyal soldier to Jake in the most bizarre war ever to hit Earth.

The Andalite, Elfangor, is said to have a three-dimensional picture of "his family" inside the ship, and there were two that were children. Since Elfangor was an adult when Ax was born, it's unlikely that one of the children was himself, so this is suggesting that Elfangor was the father in the picture and that he had a wife and two children. But in later books there were never any references to Elfangor taking an Andalite mate or having kids. This, like several other issues that crop up in this book, is probably just a result of the author not having worked out all the details yet when she wrote the first book.

The kids find out early on that morphing fixes injuries, so it's confusing how Elfangor, who had the morphing power, could have been mortally wounded and not morph to get rid of it. It's possible he was too exhausted, but he was in much better shape than the kids later were sometimes when they morphed to escape mortal injury, and he had enough time and energy to give instructions and information about the Yeerk invasion, so he probably should have been able to morph and fix his injury. He still would have had to deal with Visser Three, but the fight would have been very different. It is also possible he was tired of fighting and had made peace with his death, but that seems a bit unlikely . . . unless he was deliberately doing it to provide a distraction for the Animorphs' escape.

A lot is revealed to us through the communication between Elfangor and Visser Three, right before Elfangor

is destroyed. In the conversation, it is revealed that the Hork-Bajir are slaves, conquered and stolen by the Yeerks, but that the Taxxons, the giant worms, are actually allies, voluntary hosts. Also, we learn that a "visser" is a rank in the Yeerk society, and that Visser Three aspires to be Visser One. And finally, we find out why the Yeerks want humans: Because they are easy to conquer and very numerous, yet are pleasant bodies to live in.

The fight between Visser Three and Elfangor (well, the scene in which the visser eats him) doesn't suggest that they have a very long history. They're clearly rivals, but it's a stale conversation that shows none of the very personal nature of this battle--information readers discover later in the series.

When the kids meet the Andalite, Tobias is the most drawn to him, and seems the most sympathetic to his situation. There's a reason for this, which is revealed much later in the series.

Jake is appointed the leader very early on, when the other kids are first looking to him to see if they would accept the power to morph. This puzzles him at first, but he is indeed the best leader, and later in the series he embraces his position.

This book contains an inconsistency. In this book in several instances, humans were able to project their thoughts, once to the Andalite and also Jake was able to send his thoughts to Tobias while Tobias was morphed but Jake was not. This is not how the thought-communication works in later books; normally they can only direct their thoughts while in a morphed form, and at that point they can direct thoughts to one person or many however they like. But no one can just hear them thinking when they are human (as Prince Elfangor does at the beginning of this book). Ms. Applegate was asked about it in an interview, and she replied that she could make up some kind of lame excuse if she wanted, but in all honesty she'd just made a mistake and hadn't worked that out fully before incorporating it. It's been said that this is fixed in the reprint.

Tobias is the first to morph. He turns into his pet cat. It is through that experience that they realize that morphing isn't at all painful, and that they also receive the instincts of the animals they morph into, since Tobias knows who he is while in cat morph but still somehow wants to chase strings and kill mice. Morphing also has the unfortunate side effect of making them turn up naked after they've shrunk out of their clothes, though later they do learn to morph skintight clothing as part of their human forms.

Tobias and Jake discover through their first morphing experiences that acquiring an animal's DNA puts the animal into a trance.

Another inconsistency was in this book: When Jake turned into his dog, it was more like he was an exact copy of Homer than the same dog from the same DNA. He seemed to have Homer's memories (e.g., he knew a bunch of information, through scent, about another male dog that Homer knew). Also, he was apparently neutered just like his dog, and in a later book the kids acquire DNA from steer and end up morphing into uncastrated bulls, which makes them quite a bit more violent. Apparently the physical details of an animal that are not genetic were still able to be copied at this stage of the game but not later. (This brings up a plethora of questions, such as how copying from DNA can possibly dictate how old they are when they morph, or things like hair growth or weight or distinctive markings acquired through life choices and whatnot.)

While in dog form, Jake can apparently smell something he relates to Visser Three when he gets the scent of his brother, Tom. This is because, unbeknownst to him at the time, Tom is a Controller. It seems odd that they don't use the dog's ability to smell Yeerks as a way to detect Controllers in later books.

Cassie is revealed to be the best morpher; she is the first to learn to morph clothing and can morph with both more speed and more control than the others.

When Tobias acquires a hawk morph from an injured hawk in Cassie's barn (a.k.a. the Wildlife Rehab Clinic), it is discovered that injuries to the acquired animal do not affect the DNA itself, so they can morph into an uninjured animal.

The "full members" of The Sharing (a.k.a., people infested with Yeerks) have one of their meetings on an open beach where anyone can just wander up. This lack of security is amazing considering the precautions they're forced to take in later books; it's funny to read this and see Controllers just talking about their plans out in the open.

Rachel is also revealed to kind of like Tobias, even this early on. She mentions that she cares about him, and occasionally says and does things to comfort him that she doesn't do for anyone else.

Nemo (The Moonlight Library) says

Brought to you by The Moonlight Library!

I've been thinking about this review for a while. There's two major difficulties: it's often hard to write a great review of an amazing book, and how does one review a book one has read a billionty times since one was ten years old? (That was nearly twenty years ago. I SAY NEARLY I AM NOT THAT OLD.) This is an establishing review as well, so it will be longer than my other ones.

Let's start from the beginning. I first saw this book when I was ten years old in my school library. It sat alongside book #2. I seem to recall half of my class telling me about this book, because #2 had a girl turning into a cat and everyone knew I liked cats (as should be obvious from my blog header). I was tempted to read #2 first because as an eight year old I wasn't aware that book series had this thing called 'continuity' – I'd read Goosebumps, the Babysitter's Club, and the Saddle Club, each of which you could pull out a random book and enjoy a stand-alone story – especially Goosebumps, of which most of the books were unrelated. I was unprepared for the overarching story arc that encompassed all the books. This was especially relevant when I read #2: The Visitor, but we'll get to that in the next review

In #1 The Invasion, Jake is our narrator. He's an average guy – he's got good grades, is good-looking, likes basketball and video games. His best friend is short, annoying Hispanic Marco. His crush is black farm girl Cassie. His cousin is blonde Amazon warrior Rachel. There's also this weird, quiet kid Tobias. The five take a walk through a construction site, meet a dying alien who warns them of a silent invasion and gives them a power to fight back: the power to morph. That means they can turn into any animal they touch. Unfortunately, so can their greatest enemy: Visser Three. He's the alien leading the invasion and wants nothing more than to destroy our trusty Animorphs. He's also scary in a love-to-hate kind of way: psychotic, ambitious, and completely ruthless.

The book follows the kids' first adventures: acquiring powerful 'battle morphs' and attacking the Yeerk pool, where the invading parasitic slugs have to return every three days. Not everything turns out OK, which is what I love about Applegate. She's not afraid to give us an unhappy ending, even in her children's fiction. Looking back, I can see that the prose is written with a breakneck pace. You don't want to tear your eyes away from it. It's so breathtaking that the non-essential parts are left out and your brain has to race to catch up. There are also a few mistakes that Applegate would later refer to as KASUs (Katherine Applegate Screws Up) such as Tobias in cat morph able to hear Jake's thoughts, which was removed from the reprint.

The best thing about these novels, what made them so popular and what made Applegate want to write them

in the first place is looking through the eyes of the human as they're morphing and describing everything in vivid detail, even the gross parts, and looking at the world through the eyes of the animal filtered by our human narrator. Applegate really gets into the head of Jake's dog, lizard, and tiger. It's joyful, scary, comforting, amazing. And that's what made these books so special.

Ashley *Hufflepuff Kitten* says

Reread this in an hour or so last night. God but I love these books. And we've only just cracked the world-building in this first book. It's very concise but still fantastic, the morph acquisition is plausible, and the characters are well-defined from the beginning. Still so good.

Ben Babcock says

ANIMORPHS!!!

That's it. Review done. Go home.

What else do you want me to say? This was *my* series growing up. Sure, I read *Hardy Boys* and *Nancy Drew*—and someone was still writing new volumes in those series, too, updated for the modern 1990s. (I'm sure there is an entire PhD thesis devoted to tracing the ways those two series have been revised and rewritten and re-released throughout the twentieth century—and if there isn't, there should be.) But it was probably an early indicator of my lifelong love for science fiction that I fell hard for *Animorphs*.

I depended on my school and public libraries to furnish me with copies of these books. For some reason, the first ten books were hard to find, so I didn't read most of them until I was well into the series. After about #17, I just started buying them. With actual money. Or with **paper Chapters gift certificates**. Remember those? I remember getting multiple copies of #21 for a birthday—this was the first time I learned the dangers of asking for a specific book for a present—and the excitement of going to Chapters with gift receipts and exchanging the book for sweet sweet store credit.

I remember staying up late at night with the comfortable thickness of *The Andalite Chronicles* and *The Ellimist Chronicles* and enjoying the feel of the shiny cover as I turned page after page, long after my bedtime. (I was a rebel, in my own way.)

I guess what I'm saying is that I have a lot of good childhood nostalgia about *Animorphs*. Now, here I am, 25 years old—and I'm going to reread them all. I've considered it, off and on, for a while. Coincidentally, two separate things have galvanized me to do it now: *Read it and Weep*, one of my favourite podcasts, just did an episode on *Animorphs*; and Goodreads friend Julie has embarked on her own series re-read, and I like nothing more than copying people cooler than myself. Go read her reviews!

As far as *The Invasion* itself goes, it sets the stage for the rest of the series. The writing is shit, of course—and this is *before* the Scholastic interns take over. Applegate pretty much tells instead of shows at every opportunity. I have a little more faith in the ability of children to grasp subtext (I think they can understand it, even if they don't have the critical framework to *explain* it to someone else). I suspect, however, that because these were Scholastic books, they were supposed to be easy to read.

And it would be a mistake to conclude that poor writing style means poor storytelling. Even in this first

book, the signs of the heights this series would attain are there.

You've got the main enemy: the Yeerks, pure evil brain slugs who want to snatch our bodies. No one in authority seems to know this is going on. Only five kids who happen to be around when a dying alien crash-lands his ship learn the truth.

That truth is harsh. These kids are in middle school (so, I'm assuming Grade 7 or 8). They're just beginning to brim over with hormones and body image issues. (We could get sidetracked for hours talking about how morphing is a metaphor for body image and confidence....) And suddenly a blue deer alien with a scythe on its tail gives these kids the power to morph into any animal—but only for two hours!—but, oh by the way, you'll need this power to stop evil aliens, and their leader's host body can also morph. This leader, Visser Three, promptly shows up and eats the injured Andalite, Prince Elfangor, while our five protagonists watch from their hiding spots in terror.

This is what I love about children's literature. If you did this in a movie, the MPAA would be all up in your rating, and you'd get angry letters about nightmares. But *Animorphs* occasionally taps into some deep, Grimm fairytale levels of darkness.

The Invasion, of course, also introduces us to the five Animorphs themselves. Jake is the viewpoint protagonist for this first book. His voice is frustratingly average-pre-teen-boyish. Already, however, we start to get a sense of the diversity in the group—and I'm not just talking about the 1990s-style, one-of-every-major-ethnicity ensemble casting that pervaded our television shows. Even this early in the series, Applegate lays the ground for exploring issues in the Animorphs' lives that have influenced them and set them on this path to being heroes. Jake has a complex relationship with his brother Tom (who happens to be a Controller!). Cassie has grown up caring for animals. Rachel has an absent father, a mother who isn't always there, so she shoulders a lot of responsibility for her siblings. Marco tries to use humour to hide his insecurities. And Tobias—poor Tobias—is the kid neither aunt nor uncle wants, the kid who ends up being trapped as a red-tailed hawk and is probably better off for it.

They don't always get along. There are plenty of debates and arguments about whether they should be fighting or, as the series progresses, *how* they should be fighting. This is not the unified team you see in Saturday morning cartoons; there are no cheeky winks at the audience as the Animorphs team up to trounce the incompetent henchmen yet another day. The Hork-Bajir are terrifying; the Taxxons are gross but still threatening. And we haven't even seen Visser One yet!

As far as series openers go, *The Invasion* is pretty intense. It raises the stakes with every chapter, not just establishing the setting and main conflict but planting seeds for subplots and story arcs galore. This series ran for over 50 books. So no matter how poorly written the dialogue and descriptions are here, I can't fault Applegate or her editors for their vision or ability to plan ahead.

Next review I get to talk about Rachel—who is, hands down, my favourite—and the wonderful way *Animorphs* handles gender roles.

My reviews of *Animorphs*:

#2: *The Visitor* →

AJ Griffin says

Rather than go through the 23482398 of these that I read as a wee one, we'll commemorate the one that got it all started. If you're my age, a boy, and at least a little bit of a dork, you read these books. They had everything I wanted at that point: quick, dramatic chapters printed in this super-cool space age font, badass fucking aliens (you got your giant centipede things, your huge warriors with bodies made of blades, weird blue centaur-things with stalk eyes and scorpion tails, and nasty-ass slugs that crawl into your ear and control your brain), a core of main characters that had token, unfailing identities, and some great romantic tension between them.

Some might argue that the concept- a gaggle of 13ish year olds stumble upon a dying alien who grants them the power to morph into any animal so that they can fight the impending invasion of a species of brain-infesting slugs, accept this offer, actually avoid death in the first 5 minutes while still doing their homework- is a stretch. So is the Bible, dudes. Unlike Jesus and Co., however, the Animorphs actually interested me. I used to spend time playing around outside and somehow pretending I was part of the Animorphs (how do you adequately pretend you're morphing? Especially when you're like, 12 years old?), and I even did a couple book reports on them, despite the chagrin of my teachers. Shit, I actually tried to watch the Nickelodeon TV show- but that sucked even then.

If nothing else, you could always count on the Animorphs to be steadfast and true to character. You knew with every book that at some point they were going to be in a situation that seemed hopeless; Jake (the 'leader') would say something strong and inspirational; Marco (the smartass) would crack a joke to lighten the mood; Cassie (the giant pussy) would come up with some sort of emotional, spiritual bullshit; Rachel (the violent femme, so to speak); Tobias (the neglected, dweeby, generally-pitied kid who managed to get trapped in the form of a hawk in like, the second book) would just kind of grit his teeth and bear it; and of course Ax, the alien of the group who lacked any human personality, would comment on the time.

I don't know why I eventually stopped reading these books, but I never got to the conclusion and by the time I went back to find out, the Animorphs were nowhere to be found. I guess it's destiny. Someday I will find the final book, and a giant void will be filled.

In conclusion- A Few Subtle Ways To See if Someone is Cool:

- A) Mention "Visser 3." Gauge the reaction.
- B) Tell them you'd love to hang out, but you've got a meeting with The Sharing later. This should concern them.
- C) Anytime something strange happens, attribute it to that dastardly Ellimist.
- D) Each year, coordinate a Day of Mourning for the Gedds.

But most of all, anyone who read this gargantuan babbling of mine is awesome. In a kinda pathetic way.

Kay says

Don't let the rating fool you; reading this book initiated the most significant literary experience of my life. It started in grade school and ended much too soon in high school. I read all of the books in the Animorphs universe, and after years of dragging my mom to the book store to buy me the latest Animorphs release, I finished the last book with a feeling of gratification, nostalgia, and love.

It seems silly and frankly impossible to describe to what extent this series has touched me. It's not been just an influence in my life--it is a *part* of my life. I can only start off by saying that I blame Animorphs for my interest sci-fi, physics, biology, genetics, ethics, animals, war tactics, and basically almost every aspect of my intellectual and emotional life. The books opened up galaxies, physics, technology, alternate universes and other fantastic ideas to my impressionable young mind. It made me believe that things like speed-of-light travel and paradigm-shifting catastrophies were possible, even if they don't exist (yet).

I also can't think of better characters with whom I could interact monthly. Each Animorph, and each protagonist and antagonist that they encounter, all had motives and desires and ambitions that made them so likable even when you hated them. K.A. Applegate was able to humanize the least human of aliens, from the all-powerful and godlike Ellimist to the hunger-driven monstrosities called Taxxons. My heart broke even for the seemingly sinister assistant vice principal when I discovered his role in the series. While exposing the flaws of each being, human or not, friend or foe, Animorphs showed us how to care for them, to sympathize with them as fellow creatures on this grand stage called life. More than anything, the capacity to care and to understand is what I walked away with, and I thank Ms. Applegate forever for that.

K.A. Applegate, with her humor and intellect, constructed one of the most encompassing YA series to this day. I've yet to read anything of the emotional depth and sympathy of Animorphs. And I'm not just talking about sympathy for another person, but for mankind, for alien species, for the enemy--and most of all, for people who are different from us. What we don't know, we fear, and while sometimes this is justified, Animorphs taught me that a second and third and fourth look is always merited. This was the first series that taught me that the world is a canvas painted with shades of gray, that nothing is fair, and that the good guys may not always win. But the series also taught me about the power of sacrifice, duty, and love. They were hard but valuable lessons.

The series might be too young for adults to pick up. Undoubtedly my affection for this series plays some part in my re-reading the books every now and then. Each individual book has its strengths and weaknesses, and some are better than others. Some books are scary, others humorous, and a few heartbreaking. But with Animorphs, it's the *series* that packs a powerful punch. If I could rate a series, I would give Animorphs 100 Big Gold Stars.
