

★ **Orca: How We Came to Know and Love the Ocean's Greatest Predator**

**Jason M. Colby**

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“As a boy, I saw my dad cry on only three occasions,” writes Jason Colby. “One was his father’s funeral. The other two involved dead orcas.” Colby’s father had been in the business of capturing and selling killer whales for sale and display, but he, together with public opinion, turned against whale captivity. “Tell someone today that your father caught orcas for a living and you might as well declare him a slave trader,” Colby writes.

What turned the tide? Strangely enough, it was captivity. Orcas, also known as killer whales or blackfish, are the ocean’s greatest, most efficient predators, and had long been hated and feared. The Latin name *Orcinus orca* can be translated “demon from hell.” As far back as 79 CE, Pliny the Elder described the orca as “an enormous mass of flesh armed with teeth.”

But captive orcas gave scientists and the public a different perspective. Trained to respond to human direction, they have entertained audiences worldwide with their intelligence, beauty, grace, and power. They were found to be complex social beings with their own culture and dialects, strong family bonds, a sophisticated method of biosonar, and a cetacean version of ultrasound that allows them to “see” inside the bodies of other animals. They teach their young hunting strategies, and wild orcas have even cooperated with humans in the hunt for baleen whales.

Through interviews, public and private archives, official records, and previously unavailable information that includes his own family’s involvement in the conflicted, bloody history of the relationship between humans and orcas, Colby shines a light on how little we understand of these magnificent creatures. His book gives a glimpse into a mysterious yet strangely familiar world, brought to life in a story that’s tragic, heartbreaking, and finally hopeful.

KRISTINE MORRIS (May/June 2018)

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