Thirty-Three Ways of Looking at an Elephant

Dale Peterson, Editor
Trinity University Press (Oct 20, 2020)
Softcover $24.95 (320pp)
978-1-59534-866-1

Collection editor Dale Peterson calls his experiences with elephants in Asia and Africa “among the most transformative” of his life. The heartwarming, heartrending essays of *Thirty-Three Ways of Looking at an Elephant* reveal the minds, emotions, and social behaviors of the magnificent animals, according them the respect and admiration they merit and advocating for their care.

The conflicted relationship between elephants and humans goes back thousands of years; its story can be found in African myths and folk tales, Hindu theology, and ancient Greek texts, including the writings of Aristotle. It was war that first brought elephants to Europe; Macedonian soldiers in Alexander the Great’s army used them as “living battle tanks,” trained to kill humans without hesitation. In the colonial era, they were brutally slaughtered to near extinction for their ivory, a practice which, though forbidden, continues to this day. Elephants were captured and forced to work in teak harvests, trained to perform in circuses, and even assisted in retaking Burma from the Japanese in WWII. Most were abused and suffered horribly in captivity. A warning for sensitive souls: some of these accounts are disturbing.

Challenging Descartes’s assertion that “animals are merely naturally occurring machines,” the essays are rich with insights into elephants and their matriarchal societies, showing them to be fierce in their devotion to their children, intelligent, sensitive, and playful. They are creative problem solvers, adept at learning complex tasks, and endowed with phenomenal memories. Astonishing facts about their sex lives, their surprising agility, and their ability to use infrasonic sounds to communicate over long distances evoke awe and admiration for the endangered animals.

Elephants recognize the bones and tusks of family members and honor them with grieving rituals. These moving rituals are reserved for their own kind and for one other creature: humans.

KRISTINE MORRIS (November / December 2020)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission’s 16 CFR, Part 255.