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K.A. Applegate , Katherine Applegate

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Jake's dad and brother Tom have left for a meeting of The Sharing, where Tom may force their dad into involuntary Yeerk infestation. Jake must save his father, but for the first time, his quick-thinking tactical mind freezes up ... with everything at stake.

The Conspiracy Details

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From Reader Review The Conspiracy for online ebook

Alan Gilfoy says

This starts out with some of the usual stuff about Jake feeling the pressure of leadership, and adds a point about knowing the capabilities of one's team. We've heard that before, but not as often. He ends up making good points about how it's hard to be on the defensive because you're waiting for the enemy to make their choice. Also, you can make only so many defensive stands, and want to go on the attack eventually, so I understood that move.

I had thought Grandpa G was a grandfather rather than a great grandfather.

I did like seeing more of the character of Jake and Tom's father.

I knew that would be trouble for Tom, partially because he couldn't explain why. I hadn't expected Tom to move so quickly, and by infesting the father. I figured he would have went along and escaped early.

Having to choose between his family and the war effort as a whole, and how that clouds decision making, was an obvious comparison to Marco and his mother. So it makes sense that the point is eventually made in the text.

Tobias has a good point that a controller father would mean more suspicion on Jake, so keeping him free would be good personally and for the war. At the least, seeing things that way is a way around the dilemma.

I also would have been tempted to kill Chapman. There's moral angst about it in the book, but like Tom, would it have drawn too much suspicion? I agree there wouldn't have been any point in drawing it out.

I remembered Grandpa G had been in WWII. Battle of the Bulge made clear that meant Army and European Theater in particular. Assuming he was a grandfather, I assumed he was low-ranking enlisted. Being a great-grandfather and thus older, Sergeant made sense, though wartime emergency might have made for younger officers than usual.

Individual Animorphs often get backup even when they aren't expecting it, so I should have seen that coming. Their plan made sense to keep things the way they were. Narratively, I know they couldn't safely save Tom, but the ending felt stale. Also, the Animorphs will have to tell their parents eventually, and now may have been a good time, like telling Cassie's parents might have been useful when Ax was sick in #29.

People who fought in different wars understanding each other is a great theme. Here, it helps drive home the point that Jake has trouble coping with what he's going.

Nemo (The Moonlight Library) says

Brought to you by The Moonlight Library!

Jake and his family have to attend a family funeral, and they'll be gone to the middle of nowhere for four

days. No Yeerks. No Yeerk pools. No Kandrona rays. Tom isn't happy, but Jake's dad is adamant. Now Jake and the Animorphs have to keep Jake's dad alive, or Jake will have to make the ultimate choice: his father, or his brother.

This most certainly was not one of my favourite books when I was a kid. I didn't like the reactionary element – the Animorphs are put on the defensive, trapped as they are by their anonymity and the whole Tom-is-a-Controller thing. I didn't like how Jake basically hung around, waiting to defend his dad, reacting when necessary and being limited in what he could do. Because Tom was a high-ranking Yeerk, the Animorphs couldn't just randomly keep showing up to wreak Andalite damage wherever Jake's dad went.

I found it frustrating.

However, as an adult, I appreciate much more how Jake's hands are tied. He can only react, but not in a way that will make the Yeerks think that Andalites are involved. He needs to do it more subtly than that. One of my favourite sections is when the Animorphs decide to go on the offensive to take the attention away from Tom and kidnap a higher-ranking Yeerk, their assistant principal, Chapman. It's really intense and an enjoyable read because for once the Animorphs get to make the first move.

Even the climax is frustrating, because like in the previous novel with Marco, Jake has to decide to kill a family member. But there's no one there to hold him back. Jake thought he could do it alone, so he left the other Animorphs behind. However, there are other similarities to the previous novel as well. Marco managed to stay emotionally uninvolved, and Jake proves he can't do the same thing when it comes to his dad. That's something I only picked up on as I re-read the books. Marco and Jake have to make the same calls, except Marco's more ruthless than Jake, who's the leader. It's very interesting watching their different approaches to their family members, and well worth the time to take to read.

Jennifer says

This is one of the Animorphs books that stood out to me more as an adult than as a kid. It's an interesting look at what happens when push comes to shove for Jake. What happens when the Animorphs' strong, stable leader breaks down? What happens when he must choose between saving the world and saving his family? The contrast between Jake's thinking process in #31 and Marco's thinking process in #30, when put into similar situations, is especially interesting.

Another thing that stood out to me upon rereading the series all at once (as opposed to 1 book/month for a few years) is that this book tests the friendships between the Animorphs, and highlights how Marco and Jake in particular have come of age during a war. Marco and Jake used to be best friends. Now? They're still best friends, but the war has brought out a strategizing ruthlessness in Marco. Would Marco apply that same ruthlessness to his own best friend, just to save the world? The book never answers this, but it's interesting food for thought in terms of the character dynamics of this series.

Ben Babcock says

In case you were wondering if the gut punches ever stop coming, the answer is no. No, they do not. First Marco and his mom, and now Jake and his brother. Applegate plays hardball in #31: *The Conspiracy*, where

Jake and his family will be away from the city for four days, which is a problem for Tom's Yeerk, who must return to the Yeerk pool in three days to feed. This sets into motion a bizarre (and somewhat absurd) chain of events while Jake breaks down and wonders if he will have to kill his brother.

So, you know, just another day as the Animorphs.

The comparisons to war and discussion of Jake's transformation into a leader are far more explicit here than they have been in other books. Jake likens his experiences to those of his now-deceased great-grandfather, who fought in World War II and has the medals to prove it. I like the way Applegate uses this analogy, particularly with regards to the medals and Jake's newfound understanding for why his great-grandfather never talked about the war. Previously we've seen Jake's transformation into a more hardened leader through the others' eyes, and occasionally in his own novels he reflects on it. But this is the first novel where he really thinks about the *future*, about what might happen when the war is over, if they win. What will he be? Who will he be? We call veterans "heroes" but it is reductive and probably inaccurate to think that they consider themselves such.

And so the series continues with its theme that in war there are no winners.

Perhaps more moving is the way the other Animorphs step up with Jake unable to lead. Applegate portrays Marco as the coldly calculating lieutenant who has the contingency plans in place, even if they mean ... well ... even if they mean doing what Jake might not be able to do. It's the same Marco who was entertaining the notion that he might have to kill his other mother. Once again, the stark contrast between class clown Marco and cold Marco is very fascinating. Rachel might be the group's hot-blooded warrior, but Marco is the one who will sacrifice the queen if it means checkmate.

One of the most enduring aspects of this series, and one reason it still feels fresh even thirty books in, is the characters' vulnerability. In other novels, particularly in YA, vulnerability often feels ersatz. I'm speaking of emotional vulnerability here, rather than vulnerability to defeat at the hands of the antagonist. The Animorphs, as they take turns telling these stories, bare their souls to us. Each time we learn a little more about them, about their fears and reservations. About what they worry will go horribly wrong if they fail, or even if they succeed.

I'm giving *The Conspiracy* a lower rating than this review might otherwise seem to justify simply because the actual plot is dumb. Don't tell me the Yeerks couldn't find a way around the trip, or a way to extricate Tom without killing Jake's dad. And even if killing him was the most logical or even expedient way to deal with the problem, why a drive-by shooting? The Yeerks must have so many more subtle methods at their disposal. But of course, this is the lumpy cake filling that is Animorphs plots: sometimes you get one that's just too convoluted, because hey, we're knocking out fifty of these and we need to make sure those kids morph some cool things.

In this sense I'm reminded of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and, perhaps even more so, *Star Trek: Voyager*. (I'm ridiculously excited at the moment, because Netflix Canada just got all six series—they had TNG for a while, then it disappeared in March, and now it is back, plus more. It has been *ages* since I got to watch *Deep Space Nine*!) Anyway, my point is that while these series are awesome in aggregate, the actual episodes within them can often be stinkers. Even episodes with valid and interesting philosophical themes will fall flat from an entertainment or artistic point of view. That's what happens when you produce 26 episodes a year, and it happens when you write so many books in a children's series. The surprising thing isn't that some are silly, but that so many are actually gold.

Speaking of *Star Trek*, next week—er, I mean, book—Rachel faces “The Enemy Within”, although because of a morphing accident rather than a transporter accident. Don’t touch that dial!

My reviews of *Animorphs*:

← #30: *The Reunion* | #32: *The Separation* →

Jenny Clark says

So, now this is a full blown war. In many senses. This is another small stakes book, but gosh it is heavy. Jake and Tom's great grandpa dies, and they have to go away for four days. Too long for the yeerk to survive. So now, Tom either will be killed because he is free and can blow the whistle on them, or his yeerk can kill or infest his dad with another one. When infestation fails, Tom tries to have his father gunned down.

Yea.

Jake ages a lot in this brief book.

There are a lot of really good quotes here too.

Well, it's not that kind of a war.

The battlefield is wherever we are, we being my friends and I. We are animal-morphers, given the ability to absorb DNA by touch and then morph into that animal. It's an incredible weapon, the kind that both dreams and nightmares are made of.

Ask Tobias, who stayed in his red-tailed hawk morph longer than the two-hour limit and now spends his days catching and eating small mammals.

Or check in with any one of us in the small hours between night and morning, when the nightmares come, the nightmares of twisting bodies and mutating minds.

Like I said, this is not your standard-type war.

And this is not a clean war, if there is such a thing.

I know how the guys fighting in the Civil War felt, North against South, brother against brother.

Living with the dark, ugly fact that if you met your brother on the battlefield, he would kill you.

Unless you killed him first.

I know the real Tom is still inside himself somewhere, raging against the Yeerk holding him hostage, begging for someone to save him.

I know because I was infested once by the same Yeerk who'd first infested Tom before his body had been turned over to a new Yeerk. I had access to its memories, so I saw how Tom had been dragged, screaming, fighting, and finally pleading at the Yeerk pool to receive his slug.

I was saved. Tom was not.

But it stays with me, that memory. It always will.

So will the battles. Win, lose, or draw, they're chaotic clashes full of pain and rage. And when the fighting's over and the adrenaline drains away, you're left exhausted and sick, with way too many memories.

I was about to leave when Grandpa G said, "You know, I see myself in you, Jake. You've got an old soul."

An old soul? Was that supposed to be good or bad?

He never said. Just gave me a small, kind of sad smile, and looked back out over the lake.

I hadn't known what he'd meant then, or why he'd said it. I don't know, maybe he saw my future, somehow. Because now I was old. You see too much pain and destruction, you get old inside. It's one of the by-products of war.

I'm the unofficial leader of the Animorphs. I send us into battle. When things go wrong, when we get hurt or have to run for our lives, that's on me, too.

I'm not complaining. Has to be done. You know? Someone has to make the calls. A good leader has to make tough, informed decisions. Recognize his soldiers' special strengths and use them accordingly. Fight to win with the knowledge that he may die trying.

But most important, a leader won't ask anyone to do anything he wouldn't do himself.

That one came home to haunt me.

Because in three days, my brother Tom was either going to kill or be killed.

And it was up to me to decide.

I hit the sidewalk, automatically heading for Marco's, but I really didn't know where I was going.

I wanted to talk to Cassie, but she and her parents, both vets, were at some animal rescue seminar until later.

Too bad, too, because she was the one I really wanted to talk to.

Out of all of us, Cassie's the one who really understands the more complicated things: motives, emotions, right and wrong.

Marco's my best friend, and if I wanted to talk about what works, about how to get from point A to point B and forget the consequences, I'd talk to Marco.

But Cassie sees beneath the surface. I'm no genius, but I knew I was too close to this to see clearly.

"We have to cover our tracks, Jake," he explained. "We can't let Tom know that we know."

"Right, whatever," I said, hurrying toward the door.

I didn't tell Marco, but at that moment I just didn't care about keeping our secrets. I didn't care about saving the world. I was saving one man.

The rest of the world could take care of itself.

There were some losses I wasn't willing to take, no matter what. I'd lost my brother. That was it. I wasn't losing anyone else.

Ax snapped.

I said.

I'd never heard Ax this mad. Never even close.

Ax said.

Ax looked at me, fierce hawk eyes glittering.

I didn't answer him.

I wanted to believe it was important to both, but my weary brain couldn't even form the words to convince myself, much less him

"You're still such a kid. You think everything is so simple, don't you? That it's all either right or wrong, black or white. A good guy, a bad guy, and nothing in between."

No, Yeerk, I don't. Not anymore. I used to. But I've been across the line; I've done things I can't let myself think about. I know all about the shades of gray.

I said, "Sometimes even the good guys do bad things. Doesn't mean there's no difference between good and

evil."

"Good and evil," he said with a tired smile. "Strong and weak. That's the reality. Winners and losers."

"The knife, Tom," I said.

He laid it back in the footlocker.

He turned out the light. We crawled into our respective bunks. Our separate foxholes

He only talked about the war twice, at least to me. Once when he opened his footlocker. And the other, that day, long ago, when we'd sat on the dock.

When my war ends, if I survive, I probably won't talk about it much, either.

As far as experiences go, once will be enough.

I always knew he'd been a hero in the war. That he had medals and all.

And I'd wondered why he didn't put them up in a display case, show them off for all the world to see.

But I was a little wiser, now.

Medals aren't so simple for the people who earn them. Every time Grandpa G had looked at those medals he'd thought about the things that had happened, the things he'd seen others do, the things he'd done himself.

I know he was proud of being brave, proud of doing his best for his country. But I also know why the medals were in a pouch, in a footlocker, in an attic, kept far out of sight.

Someday maybe there'll be medals for those who fought the war against the Yeerks.

I'll need to buy a footlocker.

Kim Dyer says

This story shares a number of similarities with *The Reunion*, but I did feel as though it approached them better. The concept is more straight forward. There's no elaborate plan. Just Jake as he tries desperately to protect his oblivious father from the Yeerks. While Marco's story only lead to a single choice - would his mother have to die - Jake's story dips its feet into more morally grey areas. The question isn't just will he be able to save his father, but what lengths will he have to go to do so.

It's not the first story to explore how the pressure of leadership weighs heavily on Jake, but it's probably the most effective. The choices that he makes in this novel noticeably change him, and also reflect on some of the less desirable traits of the other Animorphs. Once again, Marco comes off particularly cold-hearted in this story, while Cassie's lack of voice shows the first hint that she and Jake could be drifting apart.

The ending of the novel was also suitably dark, and I liked that. I felt that *The Reunion* rounded off too neatly. While *The Conspiracy* ends as well as it could, it is still somewhat downbeat. For me, that was okay. It makes me curious to see what Jake's narrative voice will be like in his next story.

The Library Ladies says

(Full review here at [the library ladies.com](http://thelibraryladies.com).)

Jake arrives home to see his mother getting in a taxi crying. It turns out that Jake's Grandpa G has died, and the entire family is going up to his remote cabin in the woods to prepare for the funeral. Jake, Tom, and their

Dad will come up in a few days and stay for four days. Four days, one day past the three day limit that will lead to starvation for the Yeerk in Tom's head. This presents a problem, especially when Jake's Dad refuses to budge on insisting that Tom come on this trip. (We'll give Jake a break for emotional distraction, but he doesn't realize that this four day limit will be a problem until he runs into Marco and after telling him the whole story suddenly realizes ah, that's why Tom is so upset.) What's worse, Marco points out that Jake shouldn't have left Tom alone with Jake's dad, surmising that he might do something desperate to get out of this trip.

When the two get back to the house, Tom and his dad are gone, but there is a crumpled note in the trash (Tom throws it away to cover their tracks) from his dad saying that he and Tom are going to the Sharing so he can explain why Tom will need to be away. Jake and Marco know the truth: they're going to try and infest his dad with a Yeerk. Still panicking, Jake thinks to have the Chee track his father down. Marco steps in saying they need to be careful and use a pay phone so they're not tracked. The Chee have Jake call his dad's cell phone so they can track its location, but to make sure to stay quiet so the Yeerks won't get suspicious. When Tom answers it, Jake almost speaks and Marco has to lunge to get the phone away from him before he reveals them. The Chee narrow the location down to a few blocks and Jake and Marco morph birds to check it out.

They arrive at a mini mall where Jake spots his dad's car in the lot. He starts to morph tiger and once again Marco has to pull him back, pointing out that they can't barge in and make it known that the "Andalite bandits" have any interest in this. Instead, gorilla!Marco begins setting off car alarms, punching Jake's dad's car and Chapman's car for extra fun. Tom, his dad, Chapman and few other Controllers come out. Jake is able to confirm that his dad is still free when Tom tries to convince him to leave the car and come back inside. But Jake's dad refuses, saying he needs to take care of his car now.

The group meets back up in the barn and discuss the general crappiness of the entire situation. Rachel is mad that Marco and Jake went in alone, Tobias is confused by family dynamics having had a terrible aunt and uncle his entire childhood, and the group as a whole recognizes that there is no larger fight going on here, but that it's a terrible position for Jake. They all come to the conclusion that there is a good chance that Tom will simply try to kill his dad as a way out of this situation and that they will all need to go on surveillance to try and prevent it.

The next day, roach!Jake follows his dad to work, hitching a ride on his dad's pants leg. At the doctor's office, Tobias spots an angry looking guy lurking around the entrance. But throughout the rest of the day, nothing of note happens. On the way back out, the angry looking guy is still there. Tobias and Ax ask Jake what they should do, and Jake freezes. Deciding to go with the "gross out" method, roach!Jake runs up the angry man's body and perches on his hair. Just then, Tobias swoops down and tries to rake his hair, but instead ends up with the toupee and Jake caught in his talons. Jake realizes that because of his freeze, Tobias and Ax made the wrong call, exposing weird animal behavior that could have been spotted by Yeerks. And all for nothing, as the angry man just had a beef about parking spots.

Back home, Jake tells Tobias and Ax to head out and no need to send reinforcements, he'll cover it. After dinner, Jake notices that Tobias is outside, clearly having ignored his instructions to go home. Jake decides to join him for a bit and morphs falcon. From the air, the two of them spot Chapman and another man with a gun in a car heading their direction. Jake frantically swoops down and starts to demorph on his own roof, in plain sight of anyone who would be looking. As he demorphs, he slides down the roof and is dangling in front of a window. Tom is facing the other direction on the phone, the only reason Jake isn't spotted. Jake overhears Tom telling someone on the phone that his dad is outside, take the shot. Finally demorphed, Jake drops to the ground and rushes around to volunteer to finish watering the lawn for his dad. As the car drives

by he “accidentally” sprays it with the hose, and they continue on.

Again in the barn, Tobias relates everything that happened that day (Rachel and Ax are away watching Jake’s house). No one is too impressed with Jake, not only for freezing up in the parking lot but for demorphing in plain sight. Even Cassie doesn’t come to his defense. But Marco is the most harsh.

I glared at him. “You’re enjoying this, aren’t you? This is payback for when I doubted you over your mother.”

“I was ready to do what had to be done,” Marco said.

“So am I!”

“No. You’re not. You endangered all of us. You demorphed on your roof! On your roof! In daylight. With your brother in the house! If Tom had seen you do that you’d be head down in the Yeerk pool right now, and the rest of us would be standing in line behind you!”

Marco insists they take a vote on what to do next, saying that Jake’s not in a position to make a good call. Cassie, through silence, sides with Marco, surprisingly. They assume that Ax will take himself out of the vote and Rachel will side with Jake. Tobias essentially defuses the situation by saying they need to come up with a plan that isn’t just reacting to what’s going on. Jake bursts out that he has such a plan: capture Chapman and use him as a distraction so the Yeerks won’t have the time/energy/resources to focus on Tom’s problem.

To pull this off, they go for the very unsubtle route. Rhino!Jake, grizzly!Rachel, gorilla!Marco and partially human morphed Ax (to make his human more unrecognizable) all barge into Chapman’s house under the pretense that Ax is a friend of Melissa’s. There they bring down destruction (with a near miss of Marco being shot and just being able to demorph/remorph), but manage to nab Chapman in the end and smuggle him to a nearby house where they tie him up and begin the charade. Ax is tasked with convincing Chapman that the Andalite bandits have captured him to torture information out of him.

The next morning Jake checks in on Ax who has had enough with this entire plan. He tells Jake that this was a dishonorable plan, to be threatening torture. Then, after deliberately leaving behind some broken glass, they leave Chapman behind for him to “escape.” Back home, Jake tells the others that his family is leaving at noon, but really they leave in the next two hours. After all of the missteps on his own part, Jake has decided that this is his problem to solve on his own.

After a tense ride, they find themselves at the cabin and reunited with Jake’s mom and other members of his family. Jake’s grandpa had fought in WWII, and while discussing this, Tom makes a few insensitive comments about wars and sacrifice. He and Jake go up to the attic to look through some of their grandpa’s things. There, Jake tries to get through to his brother Tom one last time, hoping to get a glimpse of him beyond the Yeerk’s control. They again discuss war and what parts honor and courage play in it. They discover some medals of honor and an old Nazi dagger that their grandpa must have retrieved from a fallen soldier. Jake insists that Tom not take it, knowing that the Yeerk would like to use it to kill Jake’s dad.

Later that night, Jake has disturbing dreams about being in a war, freezing in the trenches and wishing for the fighting to be done. He wakes up and sees that Tom’s bed is empty next to him. He goes downstairs and sees that his father is no longer asleep on the couch with his mother. Outside, he sees his father and Tom sitting together on the dock on the lake. Peeking out of the back of Tom’s pants is the Nazi dagger.

Jake starts to morph tiger, knowing that this is what it has finally come down to, him having to kill Tom. But before he can even finish the morph, he hears a loud crash and watches the dock collapse into the water. Both Tom and his father go under. Even more strange, his father, who is a good swimmer, is bobbing up and down in the water, being pulled somehow away from the dock and Tom. While Tom tries to keep his eyes on his dad, a dolphin fin appears in the water and rams him in the back, leaving him to float face down in the lake. Jake hears one of the Animorphs thought speaking to him to demorph, that he is out in the open in a partial form.

He is unable to get to Tom whom he is sure must be drowning with his face in the water. But suddenly Tom's body begins skimming across the water being pushed from below. Jake grabs him and he coughs, coming to. His leg has been broken badly, however.

In the end, Tom is taken on a medical helicopter all the way back to their hometown. The next day, Jake goes out in the woods and meets up with his friends who explain how they did it. Tobias watched the house and notified them when Tom and his father left. Whale!Cassie managed to drag herself through the shallows and ram the dock, crashing it into the water. Rachel and Ax as dolphins broke Tom's leg and dragged his father to safety. Looking around, Jake asks where Marco is. Cassie says that he's hanging back, unsure how happy Jake would be to see him. He finally comes out and Jake notes that this all had to have been his plan, which he admits. Marco adds that the Chee helped: they were the ones who showed up in the helicopter and insisted that Tom be flown all the way back to their home town.

Jake admits that he was too close to everything, that he should have seen this solution of injuring Tom sooner. Jake takes Marco aside and thanks him for what he's done. Jake hesitates, and then asks what the plan was going to be if Tom hadn't made himself vulnerable by coming outside late at night with his father. Marco is silent, but Jake pushes, saying that Marco had to preserve the safety of the group and keep Jake alive. Marco finally agrees and coolly lays out his reasoning: If Tom killed Jake's dad, Jake would kill Tom, and Jake and the others would be exposed. The expendable piece was Tom. He doesn't finish saying what they would have done had Tom not come out before Jake stops him, saying he doesn't want to know.

Back home, Jake looks at his Grandpa G's medals and reflects on the fact that they had been stored away in a box in the attic and not on display. As a soldier himself, Jake understands this, that living it once is enough without being reminded constantly. He decides that if he is ever awarded any medals for the war with the Yeerks, he too will need to find a box for his attic.

Our Fearless Leader: It's been a while since we've had a big Tom-related moment, let alone an entire book. It's easy to forget that Tom was the reason that Jake signed on to this war to begin with. And here he is presented with the terrible decision to essentially choose between his brother and his father. It's no wonder that he breaks down.

As readers, we've seen the inside of Jake's head several times before and know that the confusion and fear that he feels pretty much constantly about his own abilities to lead this group effectively. He's constantly asked to make split second decisions, many of which put his friends in mortal danger. In the very last book we saw him pretty coldly agree that Marco's plan to kill his own mother was the best route to go. But what the other members of the group see is simply his effectiveness and sure handedness. So you have to imagine that witnessing him break down like this had to be a shock for the group. Again, as a reader, it didn't strike as hard because we've seen Jake have these same moments of panic in the past. But here they really start affecting his outward behavior and choices.

Some of the strongest moments came outside of the Animorphs action and instead focused on Jake inner

thoughts about war, honor, and what the choices that are asked of soldiers really mean in the larger scale of things. Particularly, he discusses with Tom about these things. Through Tom, the Yeerk is essentially presenting the case for the entire Yeerk forces' view on war: there is only room for honor when the war is finished, while Jake is arguing the other side, that right and wrong always exist.

Xena, Warrior Princess: Rachel does very little in this book. She's along for a few missions, but she's also absent during one of the biggest debates when Marco brings up voting on Jake's leadership abilities. Jake immediately says that Rachel would side with him, and no one questions this. I'm not really sure why this was so assumed. Looking at almost all of the previous book in which there is some type of vote, Rachel almost always sides with Marco. So much so, that when she doesn't in the vote to make David an Animorph, Marco remarks on it as a surprising divergence from their usual like-minded way of thinking. She's also proven herself to be more than willing to step into a leadership role if Jake is out of it for some reason, like we saw when he was sick and they were all eels in the pipes. So it's not like she is unwilling to consider alternatives to Jake making the calls. I mean, for plot reasons Marco's vote had to go against him. But I think it's a mischaracterization to present it as if Rachel would have voted this way.

A Hawk's Life: Tobias is present both times that Jake errs in his leadership abilities, first freezing up in the parking lot and then demorphing in broad daylight on the roof. He is able to coolly tell the group what happened and Jake notes that he does it without judgement. But when Jake starts pushing back against Marco's harsher view of things, Tobias, still calmly, tells Jake that Marco is right: Jake's been out of it and he isn't putting the group and their larger war first and it could be disastrous. But when it comes down to a vote, Tobias is also the one to essentially diffuse what was becoming a pretty heated moment by redirecting the conversation away from the vote and onto the fact that they should be on the offensive rather than defensive with this situation. This allows Jake another opportunity to come up with his own plan, to capture Chapman.

Peace, Love, and Animals: Like Rachel, I'm not sure whether Cassie's characterization in the vote scene is spot on. I get that the fact that her not immediately siding with Jake is meant to highlight just how out of it he is, if even Cassie is questioning his decisions. But the fact remains that this book is coming directly after Marco's book, and it just doesn't make sense for Cassie to switch positions on this, especially when the person in question is Jake. If anything, the same concerns she had in Marco's book should be present here, and even more strongly. But beyond that, she's always had complete faith in Jake's abilities, and I'm not sure either of his mistakes up to this point would be enough for her to question that. Unlike Rachel, for instance. I think the swap of their votes was done more for the "shock factor" than as a true portrayal of how these two characters would have acted in this situation.

The Comic Relief: Marco was by far the MVP of this book. Everything with him was great and I loved how it built off the fact that this was happening immediately after his own nightmare situation with his mother. It's hard to count how many great moments there were from him. We had the parallel situation with him and Jake as we saw with him and David when it came to calling up Jake's dad (reminding them both to use a pay phone rather than a trackable phone, stepping in when both Jake/David were about to slip up and give up crucial information). We had him calling out Jake on his bad decision making (though perhaps it was a bit much to be coming down on him about the public morphing given the, ahem, elevator scene from the previous book).

In many ways, I think the last book was a turning point in Marco's character. Up to that point, he knew that he was probably one of the more clear-minded members of the group as far as completing an objective in the most direct manner, regardless of collateral. But after that book, he seems to admit his own ruthlessness. He knows that he is capable of doing the unthinkable, killing his own mother (he would have if Jake hadn't

knocked him out of the way) and that he is also the most capable of putting together a clear plan because of this ruthlessness. Not only does he not pull any punches when noting Jake's priorities being out of whack, but he early on sees the clear reality of the situation: Tom is the expendable piece. And he comes up with the plan to take Tom out, preferably by injuring him. But in the last conversation between him and Jake, we know that Marco had another plan for the more dire outcome, if that became necessary.

E.T./Ax Phone Home: Ax has a very strong reaction to his role as faux interrogator/torturer of Chapman. This is probably one of the biggest moments for Jake to realize just how completely off the reservation his thinking has become. Ax is typically a "yes" man, and here we see him push back strongly against his Prince saying that this was the wrong thing to do, it was dishonorable, and while he'll complete this mission, he will not do something like this again. That last bit in particular stands out as very rarely does Ax make statements like that, especially to and against Jake.

Best (?) Body Horror Moment: I can't remember any real gross out moments from this. I mean, Jake morphs a cockroach and that's never pleasant, but we've also read that one so many times that the shock factor is kind of lessened. He does effectively use the grossness of the roach itself to freak out both his dad (unintentionally as he tries to hitch a ride) and the angry parking lot guy (intentionally, in case he was a Controller).

Couples Watch!: Early in the book when Jake first finds out about his grandpa's death, he has a moment where he wishes he could talk to Cassie about everything. Instead, he runs into Marco. Probably for the best, given the events that followed, but it's still notable that Cassie is more and more who he turns to for support. Marco, while still his best friend, is also something more now, and Jake seems to recognize that the tactician in Marco can never quite turn off now.

Another moment is when they are first discussing Tom's situation. Tobias is confused and asks why Tom doesn't just say he's not going and be done with it. Tobias genuinely doesn't understand family dynamics in this matter, as he slowly realizes that his aunt and uncle only didn't push back against his own refusals to do things because they didn't care about him.

Rachel, of course, is having none of this:

"Your relatives are jerks and they didn't deserve you," Rachel snapped.

If Only Visser Three had Mustache to Twirl: Another rare book where Visser Three doesn't even make an entrance!

Full review on the blog!

JonSnow says

3.5/5, not because I didn't enjoy it. I really liked this one overall. But there are two issues I will address below, when I spoil the book. This one tugs on the emotions as the previous book did. These are getting very adult, very mature, very quick. I find it hard to believe these are childrens books, often. I enjoy them too much. These can't be books for kids can they? Maybe I'm a sucker for 90s nostalgia.

SPOILERS.

Jumping right in here!

Okay so plot:

Basically it's simple. This time the family heart strings are playing with Tom and Jakes dad. Tom HAS to go to Grandpa G's funeral. This means going to a cabin for 4 days. The Yeerk inside will die if that happens. No matter what, Tom can't talk his father out of it. So the Yeerks try to infest his father. They fail thankfully. And they try to kill him. And they fail. In the end Tom is injured at the cabin, long story short.

This book was good, but the premise was stupid. Obviously the Yeerk wouldn't let itself die by going to this cabin. That's just ridiculous. Honestly, it would have been as simple as refusing. But no, he had to bring up The Sharing (the Yeerk underground recruitment organization he is a key player in). He couldn't have his father, Jakes/Toms father, turning against The Sharing. So what does he do. Goes to the cabin, planning to kill his father, and presumably fleeing to the nearest Yeerk pool thereafter.

The other stupid thing about this book was Ax. He did not act like the ruthless Andalite warrior he is. He showed sympathy for the Yeerk. He became angry at the torture. Everything we've read about the Andalites suggests they have NO PROBLEM torturing Yeerks. And all Ax did was threaten Kandrana starvation of Principle Chapman. Nonsense.

Those two issues bring this book down to about a 3 or a generous 3.5, despite the fact I really liked it. It was similar to the previous book where Marco had to deal with his Mother, Visser One, and deal with whether to kill her, save her, expose himself, etc. This time it's Jake, and it's his Father he can't sacrifice. The Animorph's seem too cold in the book at times. They are willing to sacrifice his dad it almost seems. Except that Marco comes up with the plan in the end at the lake that saves him.... Only when Jake confronts him about, what if it failed, what if Tom didn't come out... Marco doesn't say, but we're sure it was them killing Tom to save his father.

These are some serious dilemma's, faced by children, who are much more than children at this point. They're soldiers of a long brutal, thankless war. And the commentary at the end of it being a pointless battle, and about how Jake probably would have to buy a big footlocker, alluding to his grandpa G's who had his purple heart award etc from WWII in it... and how he probably wouldn't want to talk about it after it was over, because the experience of the war was bad enough, that it wasn't something he would want to remember by talking about. That was deep. So really this almost deserves a 4/5. But the above issues bring it down a half star. All in all, enjoyable, but with some faults.

Jeremy MacRae says

Of note: yes, I know that I don't have the right mark for indicating thought-speak, I just needed a quick replacement because Goodreads does... not seem to react well to what the normal mark is. I'll try to see if I can fix the issue, though.

Huh.

Not gonna lie, I'm genuinely surprised that this is one of the books that's gonna get five stars. Back when I started considering doing reviews for the series, I was under the impression that the only (non-Chronicles) books that'd get five stars were among the ones I had already read. This is mostly because the books already

in my collection were from the first half (and where the story shines most) and that as I went into the middle stages from the series — and encountered way more of the filler books — the story would take a dip until the ending and wouldn't really reach the same heights as the first half (and last five books) would.

Apparently, I was wrong!

To sum up the plot: essentially, Jake's great-grandpa has died. Because of this, Jake's parents — primarily his father — have made the decision to stay at his private cabin for a time period of four days. Tom — due to his Yeerk's need for Kandrona rays every three days or so — is not happy about this, and after peaceful attempts to get out of having to go to the funeral fail Tom turns to desperate measures, attempting to infest Jake's father and — when this doesn't work — attempting to flat-out kill him multiple times. It's a book that explores the stresses of conflict, and the things people on both sides of that conflict will end up doing when put under those stressful conditions — Tom goes to further and further desperate measures to get out of having to go to the trip the closer the deadline approaches, and Jake finds that he is compromising himself further and further in his attempts to keep his father safe. It's compelling. Some of the best stuff Animorphs has to offer.

Because one of the best parts of the middle era of Animorphs — as we move from books written by Applegate to books written by ghostwriters — is that each of the five initial members gets a book to themselves that serves to directly challenge both their character and their role within the team. For Rachel, this book is the Solution; for Marco, this is the Reunion. Tobias gets The Illusion, and Cassie gets The Sickness.

For Jake, this book is The Conspiracy.

Jake's arc throughout the series is about how being the leader in the war starts wearing him down, and by the end turns him into a shell of who he used to be. This book I feel is where the slow change of his character is most evident — where the stress of being leader starts eating at both him and his life. Throughout the book, Jake has to make constant, in-the-moment calls on what to do, and the stress of having to do so (and the increasing amount of *urgency* in the need to save his father) results in him making several decisions that compromise his morality and result in him and others publically doubting his ability to act as a capable and responsible leader.

{ And he will return to his people a hero, } Ax said. { This will become an oft-repeated and much celebrated chapter in Yeerk history. My name will become legend, synonymous with ineptitude. A brutal fool of an Andalite. }

{ Ax, I wouldn't have asked you to do it if it wasn't so important. }

Ax looked at me, fierce hawk eyes glittering. { Important to you, Jake, or to the war effort? }

I didn't answer him.

I wanted to believe it was important to both, but my weary brain couldn't even form the words to convince myself, much less him.

– The Conspiracy, pg. 105.

You know what Marco and I used to talk about? Whether Batman could beat Spiderman. Whether Sega was better than Nintendo. Whether some girl would rather go out with him or

me.

And now...

"What are we, anymore, Marco? What has happened to us?"

He didn't answer. I didn't expect him to. We both knew what had happened.

– The Conspiracy, pg. 134-135.

This is the book where Jake's growing self-doubt as a leader (and others doubts in him) becomes most evident. This is the book where his personal relationships with the other Animorphs begin to fade away as the war gets more serious. This is the book where he seriously considers the possibility that Tom will have to die — and in the end, actively attempts to do the deed himself. Others tend to criticize this book for having an idiot plot — one that only really happens because the characters make the worst possible decisions at every opportunity — but I feel as if this is meant to be the point. One of the book's main aims is to illustrate how stress can lead people to make unideal tactical decisions, and the book executes this theme pretty brilliantly. It goes out to show this theme, and it goes out to directly progress Jake's character arc by showing his growing lack of capability to properly lead the war effort, and it succeeds with flying colours in doing so.

It's not perfect, however. There *are* a couple points in the book in which I can agree that yeah, the thing I just saw was pretty uncharacteristic and/or weird. The decision to have *Chapman* of all people attempt a drive-by shooting on Jake's dad thinking about it comes off as bizarre, and seems to me to just be an easy/convenient way to bring Chapman into the story earlier in order to not make the 'kidnap Chapman' phase of the plot but given that Chapman appears in the book *before* that point, I don't see how it was even really needed. The random dropping of the fact that the medical helicopter is full of Chee, in addition, doesn't really make a lot of sense — if they were there why didn't they just let the Yeerk starve right there? Why did they choose to put Tom into a hospital and let him get re-infested? Does the Chee pre-disposition against violence mean that they can't let violence happen through inaction? It's... something that doesn't make a ton of sense and something that ultimately could've just been altered/changed and just made a normal helicopter.

But overall... yeah. This book was surprisingly really good. There are a couple nitpicks, but in the end those can basically be ignored in favour of the rich character development and theming that's put on show here.

4.5/5, round up to 5.

Blog: <https://vagueartistics.wordpress.com/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/yugibones>

Allis says

I randomly chose this for a book report. To sum up my book report: The author's use of short sentences make the plot speed by (in a good way), add suspense, and finalize the ending. The vocabulary is relatively easy for anyone above third grade, so the reader doesn't have to focus on what the text actually means. The book is short, so that implies that this book (and the other Animorphs books) are meant to be read quickly. (Don't judge me for how bad this is! I only spent an hour on the whole project.)

Spoiler Alert It was a much better choice than I initially thought. After reading this front to back ten times, I got a good message. Lots of symbolism can be found with the grandpa's death or the way Tom tries

to kill Jake's dad. At the same time, it's a repeat of Marco's family issues with someone else. I can't really blame the author for not coming up with an original idea for this book. (I mean there are 52 books in the series! You can't always be original with such a long series)

I don't think you have to read this one to get the point of the series. Honestly, feel free to read book #1 - #4, #8, #10, #13, #16 - #23, #29 - #30, #33 - #34, #38, #43 - 46, #49 - #53, first half of #54

:)

Amalia Dillin says

I must have confused this book with another because I thought for sure it ended differently, but regardless, this is another intensely personal fight for an Animorph -- which feels like three in a row now, of very intensely personal battles against the yeerks -- and the fight gets really real and really focused for Jake as he struggles just to keep his father alive and free, and risks the rest of humanity and his friends to do it.

Diana says

This book was really emotionally intense. However, I feel like it could have used a longer story; they seemed to wrap things up really quick at the end. I am glad I have the next book here at home; so I can start that tonight, and hopefully it will clean up some of the ends that I felt were left hanging in this book.

Chelsea Gouin says

JAKE! (Insert angry face) I really had a hard time with this one, especially following the Marco dilemma in the previous book. Jake's grandfather has passed away and he and his family must travel to get to the funeral...the trip is supposed to take four days. The Yeerk in Tom's head has a major problem with that and must either turn their father into a Controller or kill him. So of course Jake is not okay with his father dying or being Controlled. However, the fearless leader of the Animorphs loses his cool like 3 times and almost blows their cover in his irrational actions. Marco tries to use cool logic on Jake, and Jake blows up at Marco. Anyone remember the coldness Jake showed Marco just last book? Jake went on my hate list way quick. It is reiterated again near the end that the war has changed Marco and Jake for the worse and they'll probably never come back from this. In the end, they manage to pull off a plan so Jake's family lives happily (for now) and Marco is still miserable not knowing if his Mom is still even alive. Booo. Ultimately, a great look at how the war has changed Jake and more Marco as leader spotlight.

Stephanie says

Now it's Jake's turn to make some very tough decisions about his father, as Marco had to make about his mother last volume. Jake's great-grandfather has passed away, and now they need to make a 4 day road trip to his isolated cabin for the final arrangements, wake, and funeral. One day too long for Tom's Yeerk to

survive without the Kandrona rays. Jake is feeling too close to this, to make the clear decisions needed to save his father from either death or infestation by the Yeerks, or to take out Tom before Tom's Yeerk can get to their father.

Jake's narration sounds less solid to me than Marco's did in the last book, which plays to how differently they are handling the similar situations they have been put in. Marco was calm and collected about what had to be done to save the many, but Jake, in a strange twist, is anything but calm and collected about what has to be done to save the many. I think this is also one of the first times Marco and Jake are pretty much pitted against each other insofar as how far they are willing to go to win this war, the sacrifices they are willing to make.

We're the ones with the nightmares and the old souls.

I know how the guys fighting in the Civil War felt, North against South, brother against brother.

Living with the dark, ugly fact that if you met your brother on the battlefield, he would kill you.

Unless you killed him first. – page 4 – This is a very ruthless thought coming from Jake, but it also sounds somewhat detached, like it's not really what he *feels* so much as *acknowledges* as a fact.

I was about to leave when Grandpa G [who had fought in WWII, a few years earlier] said, "You know, I see myself in you, Jake. You've got an old soul."

An old soul? Was that supposed to be good or bad? – page 5 – It's nice that we're starting to get some more fleshing out of the Animorphs before they were the Animorphs. It will remind us even more of how much they have changed since that night, too. And Grandpa G's comment rings truer than he might have known it would at the time. (It also is rather relatable to me, as I've been told I have an old soul too.)

Starve, Yeerk. Die in agony, die screaming, Yeerk!

"Shut up," I said [to Tom]. "I'm not the one who's being a big baby about leaving."

I said it to annoy him and to bring us back to the rhythm we knew, the kind of normal sniping I could handle.

Because the hatred in Tom's eyes when he'd looked at my father had scared me.

And the hatred that had flared up in me, the hatred of the Yeerk, the sick thrill of anticipating its pain, had scared me, too. – page 12 – I guess after Marco's book, so far this seems a little less... intense? Even though it's really not, in theory.

[After Jake finds a note from his dad in the trash saying that he's accompanying Tom to a sharing meeting.]

My father hadn't thrown away the note. Tom had. He'd been covering his tracks. – page 20 – I fail to see why Tom's Yeerk would feel the need to hide this from Jake... unless he suspected Jake of something. Otherwise, as far as Tom's Yeerk is concerned, Jake is just his host's kid brother, and no threat. It's natural for family members to leave notes when they leave the house, as Tom's Yeerk would know from Tom's memories. Also, I wonder if bringing a portable Kandrona ray ever crossed Tom's Yeerk's mind? If Visser One in her fugitive status had access to one, why wouldn't Tom's Yeerk, given he's part of the main Yeerk initiative? If the portable ray could be compacted into a (suit)case which also provides a restraining harness, a small pool, and a one-use Kandrona emitter, all Tom's Yeerk would need to do would be to get an hour or two out of the cabin alone to use it and be fine for the trip. After all, with how many Controllers there are, some of them are bound to have to take business trips for their cover. This is the days before Skype and Go To Meeting. They'd have to take some trips, and some of them might need a one-time use portable Kandrona.

/You know, maybe I'm not getting it, but why didn't Tom just tell your father he's not going and that's the end of it?/ Tobias interrupted.

I looked at him.

So did the rest of us.

/What?/ he asked, sounding defensive. /I used to do that whenever one of my aunts or uncles wanted me to go somewhere I didn't want to. They never made me go./ He was quite a moment. Then, abashed, he said, /Oh. Duh. They didn't care what I did./

"Your relatives are jerks and they didn't deserve you," Rachel snapped. – page 42. Poor Tobias. And good job, Rachel; you took an awkward/painful moment and turned it into something sweet.

/I believe I see your father, Prince Jake. Are you with him?/

Ax calls me his prince. It's an Andalite respect thing.

/Yeah, Ax. Barely./

/You have completed two circuits of the open spiral and have ascended./

That took a couple of seconds. /Oh. Yeah, it's a ramp. The cars use it to get to higher levels./

/Yes, Prince Jake, it was not overly difficult for me to deduce the purpose of the open spiral structure,/ Ax sniffed.

I'm Ax's "prince." But I guess the whole respect thing only goes so far. – page 54-55 – Haha, very nice. A good little dose of humor. I have a feeling my quote selection will be a mix of tough/thought-provoking quotes, and some of the humor to lighten things up.

I was playing a defensive game. It's easier to attack. On the attack you can pick the time and place. On the defense all you can do is wait. Wait for the enemy to pick his time and place. And wear out your resources and your people waiting, waiting, knowing all it takes is for the enemy to get lucky and all your tense, cramped-up waiting will be for nothing. – page 57 – The words of a battle commander, indeed.

He was a good guy, my dad. Not just because he was my dad. Because he was a good person. Because he did his work as well as he knew how and wasn't a jerk to the people around him. That doesn't make you a saint or anything, but I guess when I think about it, that's what I hope I'll do when I'm older: treat my family right, do my job well, not be a jerk to the people I meet. Maybe that's not a huge, ambitious goal, but it would be enough for me. I've done the hero thing. You can have the hero thing. Me, I wanted a day when all I'd have to do was be a decent human being. – page 58 – And the words of the innocent boy who just wants to be kind and a "good guy."

But in our present morphs, we'd be helpless.

What should I do?

Lose everyone?

Or just my father? – page 59 – The basic dilemma. He faces it all the time with Tom, but it's harder to get someone back from being a Controller than it is to prevent them becoming one in the first place. In theory.

(view spoiler)

[Chapman says he will get Melissa for Ax so they can do homework together]

“Good,” Ax said. “She is my close friend and also classmate and thus this is a perfectly normal thing for me to do.” – page 87 – I’m glad Ax had a script to follow...I can only imagine what he might have said otherwise...

(view spoiler)

I lifted out the small box that held Grandpa G’s Silver Star and his Purple Heart. “He was a brave guy. He believed in honor. All that stuff out of old movies. Honor and courage and all.”

“Yeah, well, that was all a million years ago,” Tom said. “Honor and courage aren’t what matters, not in the real world. What matters is whether you win. After you win then you start talking about honor and courage. When you’re in battle you do whatever you have to do. Honor and courage and all that? Those are the words you say after you’ve destroyed all your enemies and anyone else who gets in the way.”

“You’re wrong,” I said flatly.

He rolled his eyes, bored now. “You’re a kid.” – page 114 – Sometimes I wonder just how much the Yeerk conceals of himself in his host – I mean, this stance alone. Jake makes a point to mention several others times that he is keeping his and Tom’s conversation in the ‘safe zone’ of what one of their normal conversations would be like, but here, it almost seems like the Yeerk is kind of saying Screw the act, I’m going to let a few of my true colors show. Or maybe I’m just reading more into it than Jake would be expected to read into it based on the Yeerk not knowing who Jake has become.

[Tom said,] “You’re still such a kid. You think everything is so simple, don’t you? That it’s all either right or wrong, black or white. A good guy, a bad guy, and nothing in between.”

No, Yeerk, I don’t. Not anymore. I used to. But I’ve been across the line; I’ve done things I can’t let myself think about. I know all about the shades of gray.

I said, “Sometimes even the good guys do bad things. Doesn’t mean there’s no difference between good

and evil.”

“Good and evil,” he said with a tired smile. “Strong and weak. That’s the reality. Winners and losers.” – page 115-116

The others had followed me to the cabin. They’d backed me up even though I’d said not to. They’d taken the decision out of my hands. – page 126-127 – (emphasis added) I have a feeling that this idea, of one team member taking the decision out of another’s hands, is going to start coming up more often. It came up in Rachel’s conversation with Marco in the last book, and it is coming up again now.

(view spoiler)

Oops, ran out of room. A few more quotes under the cut in the first comment. (P.S. You were right, Julie!)

Jonathan Grant says

This was kind of disappointing because of how strong the last one was.

Savannah says

I really don't know what to say about this book. I loved it, but this series is becoming darker and darker.

In this book and the last, a horrible decision has had to be made and in both cases that decision has been taken out of their hands. It happened with Marco and the decision to kill his mother and here with Jake, deciding whether to reveal the Animorphs for his father's life. It makes me wonder about the course of the series. Throughout these books the Animorphs have been trying to stay on that moral high ground, trying to be *good* in the face of war. However, there isn't an end point in sight. They are putting duct tape on the cracks and trying too hard to see only those small cracks, not the way those cracks are joining. Can they remain honourable? Will they become something monstrous? Or will the decision be taken out of their hands? And when it ends, what's going to be left of the world?

Bunni says

I love the Animorphs. But Jake is such a hypocrite in this one after Marco's problem. I feel like this whole series has so much potential, especially this book - his BROTHER is trying to commit PATRICIDE for goodness' sake!! - But while I feel sad for Jake, I don't really feel that much for his dad or even any anxiety about the moment. I think because we never really get to know his dad well. These books are short and I think this is the first one where you find out his dad is a doctor. We aren't attached to these characters. But for a kids' book, come on, that's kind of a big deal. Geez.

Jared says

Loved reading this book. The tension built steadily over the whole book. There were a few thrilling points

where, as a reader, you thought something intense was going to happen, but nothing did. It all lead up to the climax, which was intense. Nice resolution.

Julie says

More family feelings from Jake, as his family is forced to go on a four-day trip -- longer than Tom's Yeerk can survive without access to Kandrona rays, and so his Yeerk-infested brother sets his sights on possibly killing their father, and Jake has to choose between them and how to manage the situation. My description sucks, but god, this was a feelsy one.

So what I *love* about this book is the fact that it comes immediately after #30 The Reunion. The contrast between Jake and Marco's approaches to dealing with a compromised parent is stunning, their friendship tested and driven on the rocks -- it starts making you wonder if they're still going to be best friends by the end of this war, if their relationship is going to survive this. Because this war is transforming them, and they're starting to realise just how much, as they keep crossing the line over and over.

The fact that Rachel would vote to save Jake's father instead of sacrificing him is a great followup to one of my favourite lines from the last Megamorphs: it's proof of the fact that she gets fired up about the small things, hyper-focusing on the intimate & personal small picture rather than the bigger picture. She can't see the forest for the trees.

Marco, on the other hand, is all forest. He calls the shots again in this book, turning on the cold and impersonal strategy when Jake can't -- he reasons his way to the probable death & sacrifice of Jake's brother (the whole reason for Jake joining the war at all) in order to save the Animorphs. He could put the mission first and pull the trigger on his own mother; Jake, for all his strengths, cannot. His family still comes first.

And in war, this is a problem.

He also pushes his friends to great lengths; Ax's cold fury at being forced to become a torturer is chilling, this compromise of his internal values.

One star docked for the cheesy dream sequence, but otherwise this is a stellar book. Jake is off the rails, for understandable reasons -- but it doesn't change the jarring feeling of betrayal when he looks around at all his friends and realises that he may be on the verge of being out-voted, that they're turning against him. That they might let his father or brother die, all for the greater good.

After a long lapse in posting quotes, I've finally sat down and typed up all of the ones I highlighted from The Conspiracy, because this was A Lot. I only typed up quotes during the first few books, so doing it again now is a strange realisation in how much things have changed -- the light-hearted antics of the early books are almost completely gone. This one is painful.

Spoilers for the entire book abound:

(view spoiler)

laura says

this was wild
