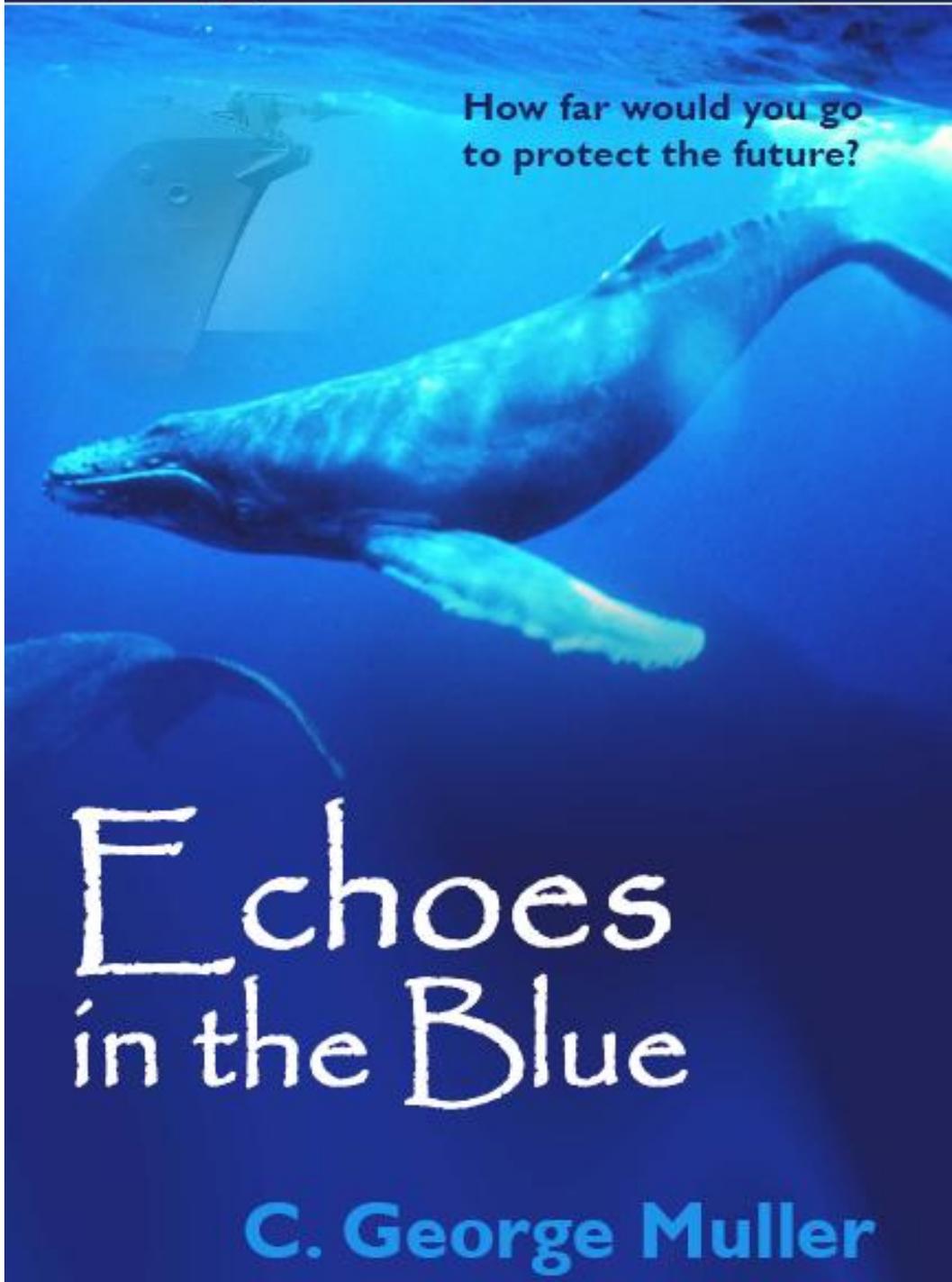




Donation from every book sold goes to save the whales!

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**How far would you go
to protect the future?**

A large humpback whale is shown swimming underwater in a deep blue ocean. The whale is the central focus, moving from the upper right towards the lower left. Its body is dark blue with lighter patches, and its long, white pectoral fin is visible. In the background, the faint outlines of other whales can be seen, suggesting a pod. The lighting is soft and diffused, typical of an underwater environment.

Echoes in the Blue

C. George Muller

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Muller, C. George
Echoes in the Blue

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This novel is a work of fiction. Names, characters, and organisations are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Prologue

The Great Whale was suddenly afraid. She hung in the water for a moment, listening. The high-pitched whine seemed to swell around her, echoing through the undersea sound channels. She sensed terrible danger. She hastily called her calf to her, rebuking his playful attempt to engage her in a game. This was not the time. Something was drawing closer. Something terrible.

She called out, a high, piercing song that resonated through the depths of the ocean. She called again, listening desperately for the reassuring call of her kind. But there was no reply in the cold blue emptiness. They were utterly alone...

Her calf had been born nine months before, in the warm embrace of the tepid northern waters. Through the winter she had nursed him, watching him grow from a timid newborn into a playful and mischievous youngster. He was now fat and healthy, but she had used much of her own reserves to produce the rich milk which nourished him, and sustenance was harder to come by in the warm north. They were journeying now to the summer feeding grounds far to the south, in the shadow of the Great White Land. There she would recover her condition, gorging on the plentiful swarms of krill that bloomed in the fertile southern summer. She rumbled in anticipation of the juicy bounty that awaited them, encouraging her little one onwards.

The calf was slow though. His little flukes could not propel him at the speed of a fully-grown adult, and he needed many rest stops on this, his first migration. Their passage was justifiably slow, and they were trailing many days behind the wake of the Herd.

Over their heads, a strong wind was blowing in the World Above. The rolling swells buffeted them each time they rose for their obligatory breath, but the little calf fought bravely, struggling forward with a determination that outweighed his lack of strength. The mother whale was proud. He would grow to be a fine whale one day. Perhaps even a herd bull, a leader among whales.

But she was confused as she hustled her calf onwards.

The history of the whales was long, and their knowledge of the Blue Realm was ancient and intimate. Their kind had been ocean voyagers for countless millennia, a memory stretching perhaps even to the very dawn of the seas. During that time they had amassed a vast knowledge and

understanding of life. They were known as great travellers, and undisputed lords of the vast ocean realm. But their rule was peaceful and benign. Rarely did they trouble themselves with the affairs of another kind, living out their long lives simply, content in their own solitude. But lately, in the merest blink of an eye in their timeless history, they had begun sharing the oceans with a new entity; the strange ironclad individuals. They were like whales, large and ponderous, journeying the world's oceans. But the new travellers had no songs, although the harsh noise of their passage filled the waterways just the same. They never responded to a greeting and never deviated from their course, consumed by some vital purpose known only to themselves. So the whales eventually gave up attempts at friendship and learned to ignore the ships that crisscrossed the oceans.

But this ironclad was different. This one was behaving strangely, in a way the mother whale had never seen before. This one had been heading directly towards the duo, brash and aggressive, as if challenging their right to pass by. That was when she began to feel the first prickle of alarm. She had moved aside, changing their course, hustling her weary calf away from the path of the impatient steel monster.

That had not placated it. The whine of the high-speed propellers increased as it swerved towards them again, cutting a wake through the swells as it bore down on the mother and her calf.

Already she could feel the throb of the diesel engines coursing from its hull as it charged towards them. And in a world which held little fear, she was suddenly afraid.

The mother whale was young, and this was her first calf. But the instinct to protect her offspring was strong. As soon as the fear first gripped her, she sounded, calling for him to follow. The calf was confused, still wanting to play in the waves, not understanding the danger. She called again, urgently, and suddenly he recognised the fear in her voice. He came to her at once, a frightened child seeking comfort. But there was no time.

She led him on a shallow dive, aiming to cover as much distance as possible before they would have to surface for another breath. The mother whale forged ahead through the featureless blue, keeping her calf close by where her slipstream would aid his passage. All the while the terrible high-pitched noise reverberated around them. Terror lent speed to the calf's little flukes now, and he swam strongly beside her. But all too soon he began to tire. It was barely a quarter hour later when he veered to the surface for a gasp of air. Though she could have gone on, the mother joined him, determined to protect her baby from whatever danger might lurk above the waves.

She surfaced, a cloud of vapour marking the spot as she exhaled. Beside her, the calf struggled for breath in the rolling sea.

Abruptly, she felt the horrible noise surge all around her as the ironclad accelerated, thundering towards them. In all her life she had never experienced anything like this, but she knew instinctively that this ship threatened mortal danger for both of them.

As if to confirm, a sudden thunderclap brought a whistling projectile her way. It lanced into the water nearby, the steel cable whipping across her back. She panicked at the alien touch, wrenching her body clear in a surge of water. She dived beneath the waves again, the familiar embrace of the Blue World little comfort through her desperation. She knew they had to flee, but where? How could they escape from a hunter that stalked them on the surface? There was no place in the vast ocean they would be safe. Not even the crushing blackness of the Deep could offer them solace. No matter where she led her calf, no matter how far or how fast they swam, eventually the need to breathe would drive them upwards, back to the World of Air where the hunters waited.

Shepherding her calf, she raced on through the empty expanses of blue, fear driving her forward. But the whirring propellers followed her blind rush, and the hunters kept pace above.

Within minutes the youngster was exhausted, and as he clawed for the surface again to breathe, she knew they were done for. She called again, a low mournful sound that would travel the great migration paths, resonating underwater for hundreds of miles. Her voice was frantic, and filled with fear and loneliness. She called for her bull, and the comforting assurance of the Herd.

But no songs came back to her. Only the silence of the Deep.

It was as if the ocean had been emptied of Travellers, and there was no one to share her anguish.

As her calf's narrow back broke the surface, the mother whale knew the Hunters were only moments away. Summoning all her courage she turned to face them, determined to protect her baby. Or die trying.

She thrust aside her natural instinct to flee from the danger and lunged back towards the ship, putting herself between the Hunters and her baby. She rushed straight toward the enemy, hoping to head them off. But her charge was a bluff and the ironclad saw through it. The ship forged ahead without check. At the last moment the mother whale's courage failed her, and as she burst through the crest of a wave toward the ship she veered away to the side, hoping to lure them away instead. In the wild sea she cut directly across the ship's bow, offering them a brief view of her flank before slipping back beneath the churning waves.

But the Hunters refused to be fooled. The ironclad never hesitated from its course, bearing down on the helpless calf like a hunting Mako scenting blood.

The mother whale looked back and saw her baby wallowing weakly in the swells.

Then a thunderclap split the air.

The cruel steel plunged into the calf's tiny back and he squealed in agony as the harpoon tore deep into his flesh. He struggled and thrashed, desperately trying to get free. But he was held fast. With every movement the barbs bit deeper, and his blood soon mixed with the sea. He lay exhausted, whimpering for his mother.

The mother whale was distraught. In whale society she understood and accepted death as a natural progression of life, yet she had no concept of murder. The metallic tang of blood in the water terrified her, heightening her distress. She raced back to his side, trying to comfort him as the life drained from his body. The little calf foundered, too weak to swim. As he sank beneath the waves she lifted him tenderly back to the surface, just as she had done when he was born, helping him take his first breath.

He spluttered weakly as water washed into his blowholes, too weak even to close them.

Then the thunderclap sounded again.

The mother whale felt the shock of the impact as the heavy steel slammed into her side, driving the air from her lungs with a sledgehammer blow. A moment later the pain hit. Waves of searing agony chewed into her flesh like a live thing. She screamed, bucking and thrashing, churning the water to white foam with her struggles. But the barbed harpoon held tight, refusing to relinquish its grip. She shivered at the piercing sting of its touch, tearing at her from the inside. She dived deep into the Blue, trying to escape the pain, but it followed her down. Then the cable came up taut, jerking the cruel steel teeth in her side, stopping her cold. Faint from the pain, and the loss of her lifeblood seeping away into the water, she turned and headed for the surface again. She charged upwards and breached in a shower of spray, launching her entire body into the air. But still she could not escape the harpoon's relentless grip. She crashed back into the sea, and the pain washed over her like waves breaking on a distant shore.

The thunderclap roared again.

The mother whale shuddered as another blow slammed into her back, and a fresh burst of agony tore through her body. But this harpoon was different, and moments later its explosive tip detonated deep within her. The pain was excruciating as the shockwave tore through her body, smashing bone and pulverising her internal organs. She lay on the surface, stunned and broken, unable to command her shattered body to move. Already she could feel the tension on the harpoon cables as she was slowly dragged towards the ship.

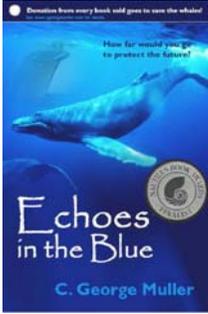
The pain seemed far away now. Just a dull ache at the end of a long channel.

The mother whale knew she was dying.

Her last breath was a weak gasp, the vapour cloud as she exhaled was a pink spray of blood.

She moaned softly, trying to comfort her calf to the end. Then she felt the darkness of the Deep rushing up to meet her.

END OF PROLOGUE...



Ignoring a 20-year moratorium on commercial whaling, Japan continues to send its whaling fleet deep into the Antarctic to kill whales under the guise of ‘scientific research’. Thrust into this volatile situation is Richard Major, an unlikely hero accompanying a whale research expedition. On the High Seas he must confront a terrifying adversary – a ruthless fishing industrialist who would wipe out entire species to satisfy an insatiable lust for money and power. From the windswept Southern Ocean to the opulence of corporate Japan, the battle has many fronts. Mirroring a real-life tragedy looming in our own lifetime, this is a haunting exploration of mankind’s continual conflict with nature, and the heroism of those who would risk everything to defend a future threatened forever.

How can one man possibly make a difference... and what price will victory demand?

Praise for *Echoes in the Blue*:

“Very well researched including some extremely insightful observations about the nature of international politicking in the ongoing fight to protect whales.”

Scientific Advisor to New Zealand IWC Commissioner

“Finally, a book that incorporates real-life concerns with edge of your seat adventure.”

Marine Mammal Research Scientist

“Uncanny real-life parallel” and a “Tense and compelling read”.

The New Zealand Herald



Echoes in the Blue was a Finalist in the 2007 Nautilus Book Award, which recognises international authors and titles that promote conscious living and positive social change, with the motto “Changing the World One Book at a Time.”

Want to read the rest of the story?

Visit www.cgeorgemuller.com/buy to purchase a copy.

Every book includes a **Donation** to ‘Save the Whales’ causes (donations already presented to Greenpeace, Sea Shepherd, and IFAW).

See www.cgeorgemuller.com/donation for details.

Want to know more about illegal whaling?

Sadly, the whale slaughter described in this story is inspired by real life circumstances.

The Japanese Pelagic Whaling Fleet is real, as is their complete defiance of the Moratorium on commercial whaling and the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary. Every year they continue to slaughter hundreds of whales in the Southern and North Pacific Oceans under the guise of “scientific” research – the kill taking place perhaps even as you read these lines.

At the time of writing, other nations are beginning to follow the example set by Japan and are reinstating commercial whaling operations of their own – Norway and Iceland already setting themselves similar quotas in the northern hemisphere. Other countries, while not actually undertaking whaling themselves, nevertheless use their vote in the IWC to support the continuation of whaling in the oceans around the world.

To find out more, visit: www.cgeorgemuller.com/whaling

If the wanton slaughter continues it is only a matter of time before more species join those already on the Red-list, and cetaceans may be exterminated, one by one, from the oceans of our planet.

Forever...

The future is in our hands.

C. George Muller, 2006