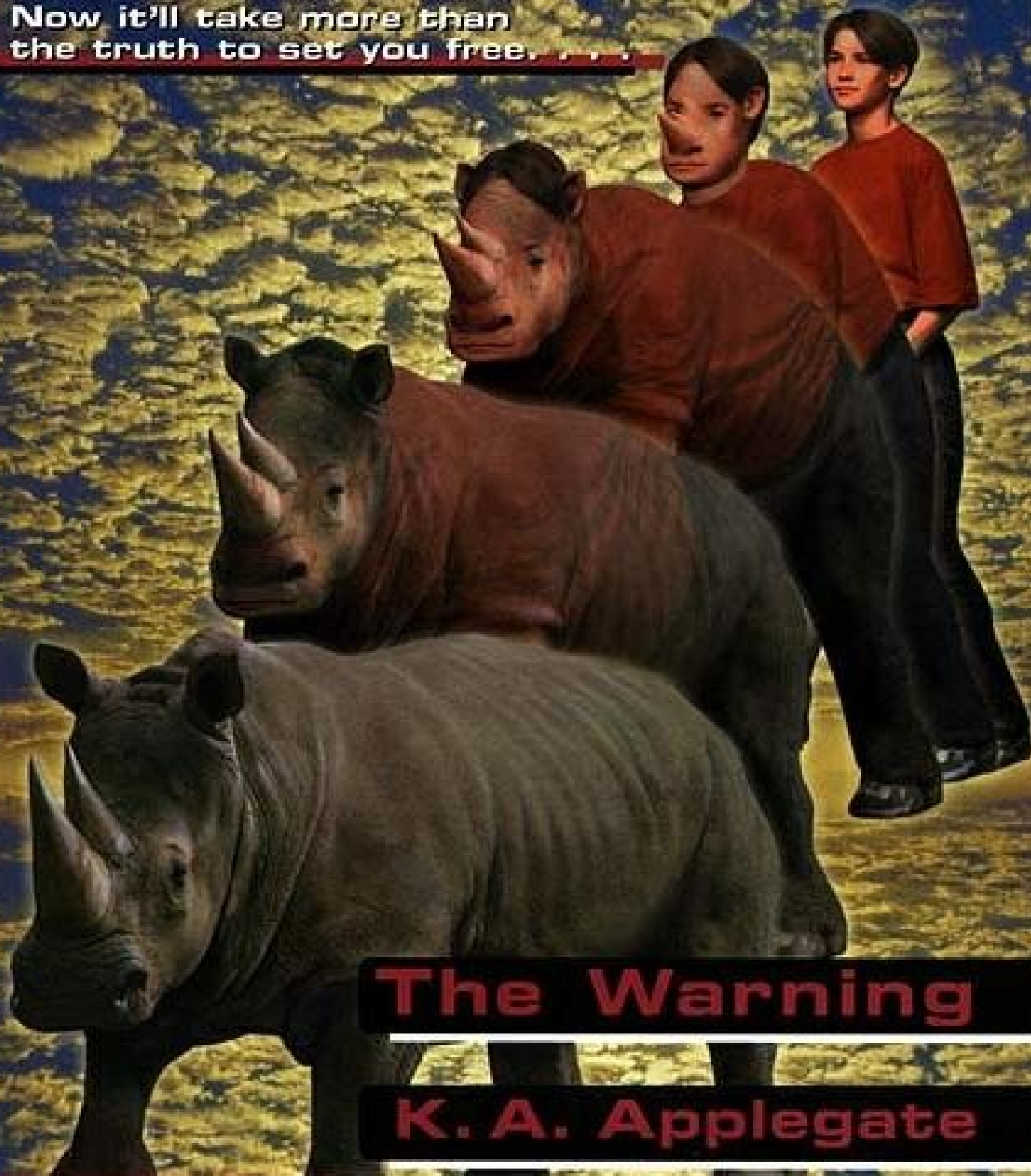


# ANIMORPHS™

Now it'll take more than  
the truth to set you free. . . .



**The Warning**

**K. A. Applegate**

**SCHOLASTIC**

# The Warning

Animorphs #16

K.A. Applegate

## Table of Contents

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

# Chapter 1

I typed "Bball24."

Then I typed in my code word, which is a series of letters and numbers.

I moved the mouse and placed the arrow on "Sign On." I clicked the mouse. And I waited while the modem dialed.

My name is Jake.

Just Jake. I can't tell you my last name.

My name online is Bball24. At least, that's close to being my real online name. I have to be careful, even about that. See, nothing is safe from the Yeerks. I could give you my actual screen name and they could find me.

That would be the end of Jake and Bball24. All my friends. And, just maybe, the entire human race.

You want to know what my screen name means? Well, I used to be really into basketball. I tried out for our team but didn't make the cut. But my best game ever I scored twenty-four points. So that's what Bball24 is about: basketball, twenty-four points.

Kind of dumb now, I guess. Basketball isn't all that important to me anymore. And not just because I didn't make the team. It's just that I'm playing a much more intense game now.

I'm an Animorph. It's a made-up word. You won't find it in any dictionary. My best friend Marco came up with it. It's short for "Animal Morpher."

It's what we are, thanks to an alien who died trying to save the people of Earth. He gave us the power to morph. To become any animal whose DNA we could absorb through touch. We use this power to fight the Yeerk invasion of Earth.

That's another word you won't find in the dictionary: Yeerk. But the word has a terribly real meaning. The Yeerks are a species of parasitic slug. Yeerks live in the brains of other species. They live inside Taxxons, inside Hork-Bajir, inside Gedds, and I guess inside a few Leerans. And, unfortunately for all the free races of the universe, they live inside the brain of one Andalite.

They live in the brains of humans, too. Human-Controllers. That's a human who isn't exactly human anymore. A human-Controller is a slave to the Yeerk in its head.

How many humans have the Yeerks infested? We don't know. Too many. My brother Tom is one of them. Marco's mother is one. Our assistant principal at school is one. We've seen human-Controller cops, human-Controller teachers, and even a TV star who wanted to become a human-Controller - weird as that may seem.

They are everywhere. They can be anyone.

And that's why we fight. That's why we undergo the nightmarish transformations into animal form again and again. Because our only weapons are the animals we become.

I connected at 38,400 bps. I wish I had a faster modem, but at least this one is better than my old 14,400.

Some offers popped up on the screen. Would I like to apply for a Web Access America Visa card? No. Would I like to buy a new antivirus program? No.

"You've got mail," the computer said with a sort of mechanical excitement. Like it cared that I had E-mail.

I clicked on the mail icon. Three E-mails. One was a chain letter. I dumped it. One was from some guy who must have thought I cared about politics. It was some stupid conspiracy theory. I dumped it, too.

The third was from "Cassie98." I opened it and read it.

"Jake, oooh baby, you are the man for me. I love your big manly shoulders. I love your piercing brown eyes. (They are brown, right?) But most of all, I love the macho, manly way you boss us all around, snapping out orders left and right. I think of you as the new Clint Eastwood. I must have you all to myself. Signed, Cassie. XXX."

I sighed. Marco, of course. Cassie seldom goes online, and never sends E-mail, and would certainly never send me such a stupid E-mail. Kind of a shame, actually. But this was definitely the work of Marco, using one of his many fake screen names.

I clicked on the "Create Mail" command. I thought for a moment, then typed.

"Cassie, you know I like you, too. But I have vowed not to get involved with any girl until my best friend, Marco, gets at least one girl to like him. And since we know that's never going to happen, I guess we'll never get together. Signed, Jake."

I sent the E-mail, feeling pretty pleased with myself. Marco would get a laugh out of it. Marco always looks for the humor in any situation and he doesn't mind if the joke is on him. As long as it's funny.

I was going to sign off because, as usual, I couldn't really think of much to do online. But then I had this weird urge. I don't know why. I clicked on the Internet icon and brought up the Web browser.

In the search space I typed the word "Yeerk."

I clicked on "Search Now."

It took a few seconds to get the answer back. I expected to get nothing. There was no reason for there to be a Web site using the keyword "Yeerk." Like I said, it's not a word in any dictionary.

But then, to my utter amazement, up popped the list of hits.

There was exactly one.

I clicked on the blue hypertext link.

And suddenly I realized we Animorphs were not as alone as we'd thought.

## Chapter 2

"There's a Yeerk home page?" Marco asked incredulously. "What do they have there? JPEGs of Yeerk slugs? Links to other alien invaders' Web sites? Ads for Yahoo's alien parasites selection?"

I'd gotten everyone together. Not in any of our usual places, like Cassie's barn or the edge of the woods. I needed access to a computer. And Marco's was better than mine, so we all went over to his house.

Marco's dad works with computers, so Marco has all the latest, coolest stuff. At least by human standards. Ax was with us, in his disturbingly attractive human morph. Ax's real name is Aximili-Esgarrouth-Isthill. He's an Andalite, which means that his own body is a mix of deer, human, and scorpion, with blue fur and a pair of extra eyes mounted on stalks.

"Why is it working so slowly? Lee. Sloooooow-lee?" Ax asked.

I forgot to mention that in his own body Ax has no mouth. When he's in a human morph with a human mouth he finds it very entertaining to play with sounds. The rest of us find it very annoying, but hey, we each have our faults.

"Look, Space-boy, this is the fastest modem around, okay?" Marco said defensively. "Fifty-six thousand bits per second."

"Fifty-six *thousand*? Not millions, at least? Mill-yuns. Millie-yuns." He laughed. "I like that word. It makes nice sounds in my human mouth."

Rachel rolled her eyes. "Yeah. It's a swell sound. Sometimes I just lie in bed for six or seven hours doing nothing but saying 'million.'"

Ax was totally unfazed. "That is a sarcasm sound, right?"

"Sarcasm. Asm. Casm. Yeah, that was sarcasm, Ax," Rachel said. But she laughed in a nonsarcastic way and shook her head, causing her volumes of blond hair to shake silkily.

Rachel is my cousin, so I don't think of her as beautiful; but every other person does. She's not just beautiful; she's one of those people who always seems to have a special spotlight on them wherever they go.

But Rachel isn't about looks. I know this sounds corny, like something from a sword-and-sorcery game, but Rachel is a warrior. I don't know what she'd have become in her life if this war with the Yeerks hadn't happened. But once it did happen, it was like Rachel had found her place in the universe, you know? Like it was all some inevitable part of her destiny.

Personally, I don't feel that way. I'd be happy to go back to being a normal guy. But I don't know about Rachel. There's something fierce inside her.

"So, let's see this famous Web page," Tobias said. "I have to get home. There's some guy trying to move in on my meadow. I have to be there to keep up my claim."

"Another red-tail?" Cassie asked him.

Tobias jerked his head toward her. It was a very birdlike movement. "Yes. And he's tough."

The Tobias I was looking at was the same Tobias I'd first met with his head in a toilet and two bullies holding him upside down. But that was an illusion. Tobias had broken rule number one of morphing: Never stay more than two hours in a morph or you stay permanently.

Tobias is now a red-tailed hawk. He lives as a hawk, hunts as a hawk, and eats as a hawk. But he was able to recover his power to morph. He is still a hawk. But he can morph into his old human body for two hours at a time.

If he stays longer, he's back to being human. But he'd lose his morphing powers forever. And he wants to stay in the fight.

Tobias has been changed more than any of us by all this. Not just physically. He's lost more. Given up more.

"Okay, here it is," I said as the Web page filled the monitor screen.

Cassie leaned over me to see better. She pressed her hand on my shoulder to support herself.

"This page is devoted to letting the world know about the Yeerk threat! This is not a joke. This is not the usual Internet nonsense. This is serious. This is deadly serious."

I looked over my shoulder at Cassie. "See? Yeerks. A Web page about Yeerks. Do you believe this?"

She shook her head. "No. It's bizarre."

The page had four icons. "Facts about Yeerks," "Suspected Human-Yeerks," "Types of Yeerks," and "Chat About Yeerks."

"Have you already checked all these out?" Tobias asked.

Before I could answer, Marco grabbed my shoulder. "You disabled your cookies, right?"

"His cookies?" Cassie asked. "Disabled cookies? Excuse me?"

Marco rolled his eyes. "You really need to think about joining up with *this* century, Cassie. A cookie is a Web browser tag that can give a Web site some information about you. Not *you*, you. But your screen name."

"I disabled it," I said, with a wink for Cassie.

"Disabled cookies," she said with a derisive snort. "Computer nerds have this ridiculous need to make up stupid terms for everything. All they want to do is make normal people feel . . ."

She went on about it for a while. Cassie believes in real things like people and animals. She's not exactly a big fan of technology.

"So. What did you look at, Jake?" Marco asked me, giving Cassie a disdainful, pitying look, which she ignored.

"Well, I looked at Types of Yeerks.' There's a drawing of something that looks kind of like a Hork-Bajir. But there are two other drawings that don't

look like anything we've seen."

I clicked to that page. Up came the drawing of the Hork-Bajir.

"Not bad," Rachel said.

"Obviously, whoever drew that had a pretty good idea what a Hork-Bajir looked like," Marco said.

The other drawings appeared jerkily on the screen. One looked like a standard, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* type of alien. The other two looked like a Cardassian from *Deep Space Nine* and a Narn from *Babylon Five*.

"Someone's been watching too much TV," Marco said with a derisive laugh. "Ax, have you ever seen any real aliens that look like those?"

"Like that one, yes." He pointed at the fetal-looking *Close Encounters* alien. "It is similar to the mature phase of a species called Skrit Na. The Skrit, the immature phase, is like a giant cockroach. This could be a Na. Only Na usually walk on all fours like sensible creatures. Rea-tures. Cuh-reee-chers. My brother, Elfangor, once had some big adventure involving Skrit Na. But he never told me much about it. The other species are all unknown to me."

"So. What does this tell us?" I asked.

"The accurate Hork-Bajir picture could be a coincidence," Marco said, "or maybe it's a mix of real information and bogus information. Or maybe someone out there knows more about Yeerks and the various species they've conquered than Ax knows."

Cassie nodded her agreement. "A mix of truth and lies, or else a coincidence."

"A 'mix of truth and lies' is like the definition of the Internet," Rachel said. "Equal parts reality and delusion."

"It's the same thing in the 'Facts about Yeerks' and the section about human-Controllers. Not that they use the term 'Controllers,'" I said. "Some of it may be true. But most of it is bull. I mean, it's like supposedly every politician in the country is a Controller. If that were true, the Yeerks would have already won."

I clicked on the list anyway and the others all crowded in close to look over my shoulder.

"The President," Cassie read. "Yeah, right. And the Vice President. Speaker of the House. Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Good grief."

"Hey, wait," Marco said. "John Tesh is listed. That I can believe. Snoop Dogg? I don't think so. The Spice Girls? They suck, but I don't know if they're Controllers."

"This is ridiculous," Rachel said. "This is a waste of time. Some typical Internet wacko picked the word 'Yeerk' out of thin air and decided to make a Web page. It doesn't mean anything."

"That was my reaction, too," I said. "Then I saw this name." I used the

mouse to point.

"Chapman!" Rachel said. "Huh."

Chapman is our assistant principal. He's also a high-ranking Yeerk and a major supervisor of The Sharing. The Sharing is a front organization. They pretend to be a sort of coed Boy Scouts or whatever, but they are a Yeerk organization.

Which made me wonder. "So if whoever put this page together really knows anything about Yeerks, why isn't there anything about The Sharing?"

Cassie nodded. "Good question. Maybe they don't know about The Sharing."

"Or maybe this whole thing is nothing but a Yeerk trap," Tobias said.

"Exactly," Rachel agreed. "Then they wouldn't want anyone knowing what The Sharing really is, would they?"

"So why mention Chapman?"

"It's a pretty common name," Marco pointed out. "Could be random. Could be coincidence."

I pushed back from the computer and looked at my friends. "If this thing is real, then maybe we have allies out there who could help us."

"But if it's just a Yeerk trap then we could be the mice, and this stupid Web page could be the cheese," Rachel said.

We all just kind of looked at each other for a while, shrugging.

Then Cassie said, "What about the chat room?"

"There's supposedly a scheduled chat starting right about now," I said. "But I wasn't sure if it was safe for one of us to go there. A chat room goes beyond just disabling cookies. How secure are screen names?"

Marco grinned. "A lot more secure after I get done. See, I have the access codes for the system at my dad's work. So I can hack in through -"

"Excuse me, Prince Jake," Ax interrupted, "but if you would like I can encode Marco's software in a way that will make it impossible for anyone to trace you. Why is it called software?"

I glanced at Marco. He's proud of his skills. But the truth is, Ax is about three centuries ahead of us in computers.

Marco threw up his hands. "Fine. Go for it."

"There is only so much I can do with this very primitive system," Ax said. "Two-dimensional screen, an actual keyboard instead of a decent psychic link, rigid codes . . . I'm not an archaeologist. I don't know much about ancient types of computers."

Just the same, he sat down and in three minutes had typed in a code that made Marco's system hack-proof.

"Okay. So. Do we chat about Yeerks?" Cassie asked.

"Yep. We chat about Yeerks."

## Chapter 3

If you've never seen a computer chat room before, it's kind of confusing. It's like a conversation between people who aren't really listening to each other.

Plus everyone can only type about ten words at a time, so it gets pretty confusing. But you get used to making sense of it after a while.

The six of us watched, fascinated, as the conversation went scrolling down the screen. A conversation about things we thought only we knew about.

```
YeerKiller9: there's no way!  
GoVikes: You have to chop them up to be sure they're really  
Chazz: Why don't we get serious here? The Yeerks are  
GoVikes: dead.  
YeerKiller9: Listen to me, I was infested by a Yeerk. It  
Chazz: Only getting stronger. And instead of using this Chat  
to plan  
YrkH8er: Kill all Yeerks!  
Gump8293: I think my dad is one. What can I do?  
Chazz: some action, we end up doing nothing.  
YeerKiller9: was only by a miracle that I escaped.  
Gump8293: I mean it's weird because my dad actually seems in  
some ways. But  
GoVikes: Yeerks are like worms. If you just cut them in  
CKDsweet: can anyone help me? There's this organization  
called  
GoVikes: half they just grow again.  
Gump8293: he is too nice. He's got all these new friends  
suddenly and  
YrkH8er: Kill all Yeerks!  
CKDsweet: the sharing, and I think they are all Yeerks
```

I looked at Marco. He nodded.

"The Sharing," he muttered. "Interesting. See if anyone stomps on that." Sure enough, someone did. The supposedly enthusiastic Yeerk hater.

```
YrkH8er: The sharing is okay. I checked them out.  
Chazz: Wrong. The sharing is a Yeerk front organization.  
YrkH8er: No way. They're like Boy Scouts.
```

"Whoa," Rachel said.

"This Chazz guy seems fairly serious," Tobias offered.

"YrkH8er may be a Controller himself," I said.

"Or he may just be mistaken," Cassie pointed out.