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Journalist Susan Casey joins a strange band of surfer-scientists on a remote island off the California coast for some close encounters with the jaws of the world's most mysterious and fearsome predators in the *New York Times* bestseller, *The Devil's Teeth: A True Story of Obsession and Survival Among America's Great White Sharks*.

Susan Casey was in her living room when she first saw the great white sharks of the Farallon Islands, their dark fins swirling around a small motorboat in a documentary. These sharks were the alphas among alphas, some longer than twenty feet, and there were too many to count; even more incredible, this congregation was taking place just twenty-seven miles off the coast of San Francisco.

In a matter of months, Casey was being hoisted out of the early-winter swells on a crane, up a cliff face to the barren surface of Southeast Farallon Island-dubbed by sailors in the 1850s the "devil's teeth." There she joined Scot Anderson and Peter Pyle, the two biologists who bunk down during shark season each fall in the island's one habitable building, a haunted, 135-year-old house spackled with lichen and gull guano. Two days later, she got her first glimpse of the famous, terrifying jaws up close and she was instantly hooked; her fascination soon yielded to obsession-and an invitation to return for a full season. But as Casey readied herself for the eight-week stint, she had no way of preparing for what she would find among the dangerous, forgotten islands that have banished every campaign for civilization in the past two hundred years.

The Devil's Teeth is a vivid dispatch from an otherworldly outpost, a story of crossing the boundary between society and an untamed place where humans are neither wanted nor needed.

The Devil's Teeth: A True Story of Obsession and Survival Among America's Great White Sharks Details

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America's Great White Sharks Susan Casey

From Reader Review The Devil's Teeth: A True Story of Obsession and Survival Among America's Great White Sharks for online ebook

Ana says

Y'all know me. Know how I earn a livin'. I'll catch this bird for you, but it ain't gonna be easy. Bad fish! Not like going down to the pond and chasing bluegills and tommycods. This shark, swallow ya whole. Little shakin', little tenderizin', down you go.

Sorry. I just had to.

To borrow a quote from BBC Wildlife Specials Great White Shark, narrated by Sir David Attenborough, 'The great white shark is the only predator that has never been tamed or caged.' They can't survive in captivity and they're way too gangster to ever be tamed.

Let me elaborate. Great white sharks are known as obligate ram breathers. They constantly have to keep swimming to keep water passing over their gills. They don't stay in the same place for very long, and they need a lot of space to freely move around. Great white sharks usually die within a few days of capture (for the reasons mentioned above). Some refuse to feed altogether, and some develop wounds from repeatedly bumping in to the sides of the aquarium. In 2016, a great white shark captured by a Japanese aquarium died after just three days in captivity. In 2004, the Monterey Bay aquarium managed to keep a female juvenile great white shark alive for about 6 months before returning it to the ocean. They are the only aquarium in the world to keep a great white shark alive in captivity for more than 16 days. They used to collect and hold juvenile great white sharks for a few months before releasing them back. The practice, however, was risky for both the marine scientists and the animals. Captivity has taken a toll on the sharks in terms of their health.

The point is, no grown great white shark has ever survived in captivity.

You sure as hell don't want to go in for a dip. When all the impediments are taken into account, there is really only one reason to visit the Farallon Islands: because it is the spookiest, wildest place on Earth.

In many ways, great white sharks have taken an underserved bad rap. They are not as vicious nor bloodthirsty as depicted in movies. In fact, they're not even the scariest creature of the ocean. That title belongs to the killer whales. A great white usually kills relatively quickly. Orcas, on the other hand, like to play with their food. They also kill for fun. (Astrid knows a lot more than I do, and I'm sure she'll correct me if I've not remembered something correctly).

Maybe I am biased. It's just that I love sharks. I freaking love them.

For as long as I can remember, I've been interested in great white sharks and their behaviour. I think I must have been a shark in a past life. Or a cat. Definitely one of those two. A Catshark? (This little dude is adorable. Plus, he can walk).

About the book

The Farallon Islands. Off the coast of San Francisco, California. Wild, untamed waters. A group of researchers. And the most fearsome predator on earth.

In a world where very little is known for certain, they knew that below them a great white shark was orbiting. It might be Betty or Mama or the Cadillac, one of the huge females that patrolled the east side of the island. These big girls, all of them over seventeen feet long, were known as the Sisterhood.

The two men stood at the stern holding long poles capped with video cameras. There were several beats of the kind of absolute silence that you hardly ever get in life, eerie moments when time seemed to stop and even the birds became quiet. Then, fifty yards away, the ocean swirled into a boil.

The dorsal fin of myth and nightmare rose from below and came tunneling toward them like a German U-boat, creating a sizable wake. The shark made a tight pass around the boat, pulling up just short of the stern. Its body, which was almost black as it broke the surface, glowed with cobalt and turquoise highlights underwater.

“It’s Bitehead!” Scot said. He broke into a full-face smile beneath his wraparound sunglasses.

“Ah, Bitehead,” Peter said. There was a moment of pleased recognition, as if greeting a fond acquaintance they had just happened to run into on the street. “We’ve known this shark for ten years.”

The Farallon Islands are home to some of the world's most exotic birds, thousands of seals, several sunken ships, and the largest living great white sharks in the world. All animals on the Island are protected by law.

The Farallon Islands is one of the last places on Earth where great white sharks are relatively undisturbed. Chumming is prohibited. The researchers observe the animals' behavior as it occurs naturally.

Documentaries have the ability to change your life. No one knows this better than Susan Casey. The 1995 BBC documentary Great White Shark, also known as Great White Shark: The Truth Behind the Legend, changed her whole perspective on life. Susan had to go there. To seek adventure, to meet the biologists who have devoted their lives to studying the great white shark, and, perhaps foremost, to witness the wild beauty of the island and its creatures.

I have so much admiration for Scot and Peter. They're incredible. Doing research in such a harsh environment, being out there in a small boat in the company of giant sharks... that takes courage.

I fell in love with the Farallon sharks. Each of them has its own personality and characteristics, even a name. As described in the book, another thing they weren't supposed to have is a personality. And yet one of the most intriguing discoveries of the Shark Project was that they did. There were aggressors and there were clowns; there were mellow sharks and peevish sharks and sharks that meant absolute bloody business.

The more you learn, the more you realize they're not mindless killing machines. They're complex. Inquisitive. Reserved. Mysterious. Frighteningly beautiful.

You just can't be close to a creature like this and not be affected. How big they are, how they glide around you. You see their eyes, and you know they're looking at you.

This is more than just a shark book. It's a book about the creepily beautiful Farallones. It's about history. It's about various animal species. It's about the people. It's about survival. It's about death. And it's about life.

Stumpy the legendary great white shark. Queen of the Farallones. Stumpy had an immense hatred for surfboards.

Interesting great white shark facts:

- Juvenile great white sharks feed on fish and rays. As they grow older, their diet broadens to include sea lions, seals, small whales and other sea mammals.
- They can be found on every continent in the world except Antarctica.
- Their life expectancy is around 70 years.
- They are solitary creatures.
- Male great white sharks reach sexual maturity at age 26, while the females are not ready to mate until they are 33 years old.

Even to the most dedicated control freak, white sharks represent the terrible, powerful unknown. They live in a different element than we do, they're not cute, they're not at all cuddly, and on some level they seem like the closest thing we've got to living dinosaurs. Their otherness is what both compels us and scares the pants off us. That, and their several sets of teeth. It's a complicated relationship. The biologist Edward O. Wilson summed it up beautifully when he wrote, "In a deeply tribal way, we love our monsters."

P.S. The book ending has stirred up a good bit of controversy. I've noticed many reviewers dissing the author, accusing her of ruining the project. You'd think she'd killed someone or something. Nothing's ruined. Chill out.

Stephanie says

I am really torn about this book.

On the one hand, I really enjoyed being introduced to the incredible history, both natural and otherwise, of the Farallon islands. I also really enjoyed hearing all the anecdotes about shark behavior and the unique group of animals that spend fall at the Farallons. I would have liked to hear more about the results of the tracking project that is mentioned briefly towards the end of the book.

On the other hand, I really could not understand the arrogance and fool hardiness that dominates the last part

of this book. Being a wildlife biologist I was extremely irritated by the choices that led to a non-scientist, who knows little to nothing about boats, and whose only qualification is that she thinks sharks are neat, getting a (unofficial) place on a highly exclusive research team and being put in charge of a 70 ft yacht anchored in the very roughest of seas. Oh and the seas? Also infested with some of the largest sharks in the world. How was that supposed to end? It is not shocking that it ended poorly and while I understood the initial motivations of both parties involved (the author and one of the researchers), when it became clear that things were not going well, they should have cut their losses. And really Susan needed to admit defeat, realize that she was nothing more than a liability and go home. To her credit she admits as much and it probably took something to lay the whole scenario out there. But I definitely enjoyed the first part of the book a good deal more than the last.

Erin says

I loved this book. There is no doubt that Susan Casey is an incredibly talented writer and it shows here. While it's hard to make a subject like great whites and a forbidding set of nearly uninhabitable islands boring, she could have very well written a bad book. She didn't. I'm torn about being judgy here because it's well worth the read and my details are going to make it sound like *Shopaholic Takes Manhattan*, which it's not.

Casey is certainly not your everywoman - in the beginning I would empathize with the brief foray into her emotional life as tied to the islands, and as the book went on it got harder and harder for me to do so. At first I wondered why, and by the end it was pretty glaringly obvious. You're not going to connect with the reader with lines about roughing it like "I always felt sexier than I'd ever felt walking around Manhattan all cleaned up and wearing Gucci heels or La Perla underpants." Yes, well. Then there's the time where she details shopping preparations for the big trip and blows \$160 on an antique Ouija board to take with her. I felt like this was supposed to be a bonding moment between she and the reader gone horribly awry. She's sitting there, saying in between the lines "Aren't we so silly sometimes?" Instead of sharing the moment and laughing along with her I could only think "Yes, wow, that was rather stupid."

I was annoyed by the ending, and the more I think about it, I'm just boggled. Forgive this for being awkward, as I want to give as little away as possible: I suppose given the events that occur, it could not be glossed over in a paragraph or two. But I picked up this book to read about the sharks, and I want to continue reading about the sharks, and what she did really doesn't square with journalistic integrity. Oh, and I have to laugh, because another reviewer commented on the subject of underthings - how she takes care to note the **SMALL** size of her (some brand name, probably ridiculously expensive!) thermals as they're floating out to sea. This line in the book also struck me as *so* odd. A major catastrophe happened, and your way to describe it is by zeroing in on brand name/size?

And is it necessarily wrong to not be the everywoman? Of course not. Just have some finesse about it. Mistakes happen. Shit happens. But I found it so difficult to empathize with her given her delivery, and her justifications so pat that I could only shake my head.

David Carr says

I read this several years ago, before or after a book about grizzly bear attacks, during a period of too many

faculty meetings.

Hannah says

The Verdict: Frightening and Beautiful

I enjoy memoirs.

I enjoy sharks.

I really enjoy memoirs concerning sharks.

"The Devil's Teeth" is quite possibly the most enjoyable memoir that I have ever read. I know that the expectations of literary society are to love memoirs of classical authors and even great politicians but expectations be damned. Susan Casey has written a phenomenal story.

My love of sharks aside, I feel that this story reads almost like a well written fantasy. From page one we are sent on a journey that we will most likely never have in our own lives. We are introduced to characters that are colorful and beautiful and ridiculous to the point of being fictional. Yet, the idea that they are real people living in this world makes it all the more exciting.

The sharks are neither the antagonist or the protagonist but rather the mission itself.

Casey's exploration and discovery of these creatures is carefully and lovingly documented.

"A great white so big that she blocked out the light: I couldn't get that notion out of my mind, and I had dreamed about her last night...white caps salted the surface and every few yards a white shark would thrust its head up. Sharks everywhere, the ocean was thick with them." (pg.160)

If a writer creates a world so enticing that a reader wants to live in that world regardless of how dangerous and impossible that world is, then that writer has done his or her job well. Susan Casey has done her job well.

Rocci Doria says

A friend recommended this to me (at the same time he recommended *Into the Wild*, which throws his trustworthiness into ambiguity), I think partly because we're both from the Bay Area and the Farallon Islands are a sort of ghostly, mythical landmark known to surprisingly few of the natives. I knew them because my whole family used to fish, and when you go rock fishing out of the SF Bay in a party boat, there's a reasonable chance you'll end up bobbing around those jagged rocks for a few hours. Even when you're just there to fish, it's sort of creepy-cool.

I didn't know about the bird sanctuary, the great white connection (except for an anecdote of my dad's that leaves me wondering how our clan ever made it this far), the one-time military outpost or the weird history of egging during the gold rush. It's all fascinating, but let's be honest: we came here for the sharks.

Without anthropomorphizing, this book is the best work of marine life advocacy I've ever seen. The biologist studying the sharks know them by size, scar and face, and have named a number of them – apparently lots of the males come back year after year, while the females – in particular, the big females – tend to reappear every other year. The book closes in 2003, and as of that time, the research was only starting to reveal where they go the rest of the time, much less why. They're sleek, adaptable, and they've been around, more or less, since the dinosaurs. Even beyond that, they're mysterious as hell.

The research itself is also an adventure. A frequent method of observation is to spot a blood slick where an elephant seal has met its end, and then to winch a sixteen-foot Boston whaler into the chop and scoot out to the carcass... and wait. Sometimes nothing else happens. Other times, several sharks show up to eat, some of them eighteen and twenty feet long. Yeah. Bigger than the boat, right under the boat. Occasionally, even interacting with the boat.

I dug this because we wouldn't know this story without the slightly cracked, obsessive characters it's full of. Imagine the leap it took to inch your way up to feeding great white sharks, simply in order to observe (and in an even smaller boat when they first tried it, an eleven-footer dubbed *The Dinner Plate*), then imagine what it takes to stay out there in the middle of nowhere on a jagged set of rocks really wants you gone, for months at a time.

Oh, and the author, along with most of the biologists, seems to think it's haunted.

If the book suffers from anything, it's a lack of a story arc. It's got a beginning and a slipshod middle, and peters out into an epilogue that only ties off a couple of the loose ends. Be okay with that going in and you're going to have a good time. This is actually reporting, remember; the nature of the author's experience was what brought the story to a close, not the story itself. The sum is still greater than the parts, and there are a lot of pretty good parts here.

Cindy Brown Ash says

I am very irritated with Susan Casey. I think she is a self-centered, self-important, self-deluded wreck.

Ruined not only someone's life, but also caused tremendous damage to shark research. Would not read anything by her again.

J.C. Antonelli says

This book gets five stars from me because I found myself thinking about it for weeks after reading it. Susan Casey's book starts out as an interesting non-fiction piece on the researchers who spend months of the year studying the great whites' congregation in the Farallones (about 25 miles west of San Francisco), but then it morphs into something more interesting and personal. Despite having been given what is basically a weekend pass to the island to stay with the researchers, she obsesses over the desire to return, and in the process wreaks havoc on the careers of the scientists. Essentially, it is two stories in one - the story of the great whites, and the story of the writer who finds herself drawn to a place where she is not allowed to go.

From comments I have read, I know people have mixed feelings about Susan Casey. I applaud her for putting herself on the line with this book - there were times when I felt uncomfortable with her admission of the extent to which she had gone in order to return to the islands, and I definitely squirmed at her manipulation of the scientists whom she compelled to violate their contractual obligations.

Definitely worth the time to read it!

Jeannie Walker says

I couldn't agree more with John Steinbeck's words - "An Ocean without its unnamed monsters would be like a completely dreamless sleep."

Not many of us have had the opportunity to smell a shark attack - and yes it does have its own odor just like the smell of death has its own odor.

To be honestly frank with you - non-fiction books are my favorite to read.

I really liked the realistic and descriptive way the author pulls us into her world - what she saw - what she experienced. Susan Casey gives us worldliness in a real aquatic world that humans are still trying to learn about: The alphas of the waters of the world. It is a world that cannot be tamed - but can be destroyed by humans.

I don't know it for a fact - I believe it is just human nature for us to be restless and curious - and I think those are good traits. Columbus was restless and curious too.

I love the photos in this book ... it takes you on an adventure without getting out of your easy chair or leaving your private space.

"The Devil's Teeth" can open up a new world for readers. There are new universes and ancient buried worlds swirling around. I hope you become a de facto intern and take a boat ride into this engaging adventure that is well worth your time.

Jeannie Walker (Award-Winning Author)

Jeremy Forstadt says

THE DEVILS TEETH is an exceptionally well-written account of the Farallon Islands and, in particular, the white shark research project that has been based there over the past several decades. Susan Casey profiles Peter Pyle and Scot Anderson, two biologists who have been leading shark research at the islands which are located just 27 miles due west of San Francisco. She also documents her own (ultimately disastrous) experiences gaining access to the islands which are largely prohibited to the public. The stars of the story are the sharks themselves, who turn out to be far more individualistic and personable than you would probably ever imagine.

The white sharks of the Farallon Islands are perhaps the best studied in the world in their natural state. The circus atmosphere which surrounds white shark research in places like Australia and South Africa have largely compromised the sharks natural habitat making it difficult to observe sharks behaving naturally. The Farallon Islands, known to 19th-century mariners as "The Devil's Teeth," are a dangerous and foreboding locale, but one that lends itself well to scientific investigations. Casey takes us through the history of exploitation, inhabitation, and research that has taken place on the islands over the past 150 years, and she includes a healthy amount of information about the other wildlife in evidence on and around the islands. But she clearly (and admittedly) developed an obsession with the sharks, and the narrative of the book is continually steered back toward them.

The thing that struck me the most in THE DEVIL'S TEETH was the description of the individual white sharks' strong personalities. I would never have thought that a white shark could be described in terms of being "gentle and maternal" (Whiteslash) or "happy-go-lucky and somewhat goofy" (Half Fin). Other individual sharks, of course, had more sinister reputations. Still, one can come away from reading this book with the impression that the great white shark is truly a likeable animal, if not exactly huggable. Another revelation (to me, at least) was the evidence that at least some white sharks, like whales, apparently have fixed migratory routes that can take them thousands of miles through the course of a year. Some (the females) appear to have two-year migrations since they only show up every other year in the Farallones.

Susan Casey takes us into an exclusive place, to be sure: a world where cage divers and eco-tourists are looked down upon with disdain. In a way, it hardly seems fair that the experience of witnessing the thrill of a white shark kill should be so restricted. As Peter Pyle himself said, "I feel sorry for anyone who hasn't seen one." Of course, it is understandable. As in nearly other place in the world where white sharks congregate, the delicate ecosystem of the Farallon Islands would suffer tragically and research effort would be compromised from increased human intrusion. THE DEVIL'S TEETH is a glimpse into the world of two committed biologists and the truly majestic animals they study.

Lisa James says

Freaking AWESOME. Susan's experiences suck the reader right into the book, & the way she writes, you feel like you are right there with her. It's exciting, funny, makes you smile, makes you cringe, & makes you go oh WOW, I never knew that! This book was just COOL. It made me want to see them too! I was SO glad she included photos from the history of the islands, as well as color pics of the recent activity that she saw. They brought the book to vivid life.

Elizabeth A says

From promo material: A journalist's obsession brings her to a remote island off the California coast, home to the world's most mysterious and fearsome predators, and the strange band of surfer-scientists who follow them.

This was our read aloud book on the boat this summer, a perfect time and place to read it. Remember that emotional checklist: happy, sad, mad, glad? Well, I experienced that entire range while reading this one. This is narrative non-fiction at its best - we learn about the environment, the sharks, the researchers, historical events, and the personal journey of the author coming to terms with her place in the world.

If you are a sailor, shark fan, surfer, or simply an armchair adventurer, this book is a really great ride.

Eric_W says

The jaws of a megalodon could open so wide that a modern quarter-horse could stand upright in them and not nick his head on teeth that were estimated to have been over 7 inches long. The ancestor of the great white shark, they survived at least four mass extinctions and evolved into a perfect predator.

Great whites have “an aura of gentleness” when they are not feeding. That’s not an assertion I would personally like to test out. Then again, perhaps our genes have an innate fear of dark things that inhabit alien environments, and perhaps our genetic remembrance is a remnant of our ancestors flight from the seas and the megalodon.

There are many hundreds of shark species, yet only four have been known to ingest humans: the Bull shark, White Tip, Tiger, and Great White. Not indiscriminate foragers, contrary to popular lore, great white eyes discriminate and studies have shown they will ignore shapes that don’t resemble one of their favorite meal: seals. A surfboard resembles a seal. Great White congregate around the Farallon Islands and it’s there that Casey went over a period of years to investigate the scientists studying the sharks, seals and birds who congregate in great numbers on these remote and forbidding islands located just west of San Francisco. The researchers came to recognize many of the sharks as individuals with different personality traits: some were clowns, some peevish, others consistently aggressive. They did not engage in the distinctive “feeding frenzy” long associated with sharks, rather they formed a sort of buffet line with the females having the right-away.

Humans have long had a love-hate relationship with sharks. Some civilizations venerated them; others damned them. While working on Pearl Harbor workers discovered large pens that archaeologists determined had been used for gladiatorial-like combat between sharks and local natives. (“Pearl Harbor was the home of the shark goddess Ka’ahupahau and her brother (or son) Kahi’uka who lived in caves at the entrance to the harbor, rich in pearl oysters, and who guarded the entrance against sharks. The construction of a Navy dry dock starting in 1919 enraged the local populace who believed the gods’ caves were being destroyed.) I decided to do a little fact-checking and found this entry in a book entitled *Maneaters: Hawaiian kings threw living people into specially built enclosures containing sharks, and gladiatorial contests were staged between people and sharks that had been starved. The enclosure was a semi-circle of lava stones enclosing an area of about 4 acres at the edge of the sea. There was an opening to the sea where sharks could be lured*

in. During a contest the entrance was closed off. The gladiator was equipped with nothing more than a shark-tooth knife - a stick with a shark's tooth at the end. When the shark rushed in for the attack, the gladiator had to swim quickly below and try to slice open the shark's stomach with the single tooth.

Casey was granted a week-long permission on the island, ostensibly to study the mating habits of the hundreds of thousands of bird who reside there, some of whom were so eager to peck the back of one's head that helmets were mandatory. This was at the time of massive interest in sharks, so everyone wanted to go to the Farallon's and those researchers on the islands were under a great deal of pressure as they were seen as taking away the right of hordes of tourists who wanted their chance to see a great white disembowel some other creature. Her disingenuousness and mendacity about the real purpose for the trip lead to consequences for the shark research project.

Getting to the Farallons, home to numerous wrecks and lost ships, was hardly a walk in the park as the 27 miles from the Golden Gate, tended to be often nasty and even the most experienced captains had stories to tell of close calls. Everyone assumed there was nothing to it so they didn't bring the bare necessities and the weather could change rapidly.

The Farallons is all about death, animals killing each other constantly and that can have a weird effect on those who work there. It drives many away almost immediately. Food supplies are not always delivered regularly, relationships develop, others break up, sometimes one is the cause of the other. And there is the constant noise of the birds, bird shit all over everything and scientists have to wear flea collars on their ankles to keep the bird vermin off them. Forget wearing any clothes you wish to keep.

Nicknamed the "Devil's Teeth" because of the way they look, the Farallon Islands have an interesting pedigree. They were pretty much left alone until the early 1800's when Russian fur traders discovered the thousands of seals who resided there and virtually wiped the seals out. The slaughter was so bad that the population dwindled from an annual kill of 40,000 to just 54 by the 1830's. It wasn't just seals who lived there but millions of sea going birds, in particular gulls and Murres. For whatever reason, California had no chickens in the mid-19th century, so when someone discovered that Murre eggs, an egg the size of a softball, could be used in place of chicken eggs in baking, there was a stampede to collect eggs and sell them in San Francisco. (The eggs were not any good for omelets or plain as they had a distinctly fishy taste.) Collecting the eggs was not easy on the slippery, guano-covered mountain sides and scalp wounds from gull attacks were common as was death from slipping off the side of the mountains.

The Farallons were the site of the first lighthouse (1853) along the California coast, and desperately needed as shipping traffic increased for the Gold Rush. The lighthouse had to be built twice. The first time they discovered the architect had measured wrongly and the Fresnel lens did not fit, so the building had to be torn down and rebuilt from scratch, not an easy task since bricks had to be hauled up the mountain manually. Manning the lighthouse was a lonely business: the weather was usually terrible and the conditions miserable, not to mention antagonism from the Farallon Egg Company which insisted it had claim to the island, a claim not recognized by the government.

One could argue that Casey does not pursue with enough vigor the relationship between the animals and the scientists who study them. She does spend a lot of the book examining the relationships between the scientists themselves. Many reviewers have complained about her infatuation and overemphasis on the people. I like books about people's idiosyncrasies (and Casey, herself, has many, writing of them self-deprecatingly) and this book has a nice balance of scientific information, geography, and characters.

SPOILER: The last third of the book has engendered considerable criticism. The tone changes and the focus

is more on Casey herself than the animals. I quote at length from a review in ScienceBlogs: "It made me wonder if the untold obsession was on the part of the "shark guys" since they inexplicably risked their careers to invite a silly, superstitious drama queen into their midst on the islands -- illegally. Curiously, Casey does such a poor job developing the scientists' personalities beyond describing their perfect muscle tone and passion for surfing that Pyle and Anderson were sadly interchangeable throughout the entire account -- like furniture, actually." Perhaps a bit harsh, but Casey is unsparing of herself, too. (Ref: <http://scienceblogs.com/bookclub/2009...>)

More info at: <http://www.calacademy.org/webcams/far...>

Marian Deegan says

I'm the girl who, for decades, couldn't lower myself into a swimming pool without sending my heart into erratic lunging spasms. Because, you see, I never got JAWS out of my head.

Over sushi one night with a group of supremely self-confident photographers and producers from New York, I listened in disbelief to one producer's plans to pay exorbitant amounts for the privilege of being lowered into the waters off the Farallon Islands in the fall, when great whites congregate in inexplicable throngs. He'd already produced every national campaign of note, roughing it on shoot locations at far untrammeled tropical corners of the earth {always with his 1000-count sheets, hypoallergenic mattress, pure white 100% cotton wardrobe, personal artwork, case of select microbrew, portable air conditioner and generator shipped in via FedEx, naturally}, and dated Prada models until the dreary predictability of the New York club scene forced him to marriage in a last ditch effort to banish ennui. He owned every techno-whiz-ma-bob gadget currently on the market. He'd drunk dry the well of life's meaning. No universal mysteries remained unplumbed by him, no sirree.

What further challenge could the world serve up to satisfy his indomitable restless spirit?

That was the question.

A shark cage in the Farallons was the answer.

I would like to tell you that this search for meaning stirred me to my sympathetic core. It did not. As he pinched up hunks of quivering fish flesh and gulped them down with relish, this pilgrim in pursuit of novel stimulation spoke of the thrill of taunting great whites from his side of the shark cage bars. His plan struck me as madness inviting wanton gods to take notice and lay their own plans accordingly. Personally, I'd sooner be lowered into a pit of vipers with my pockets full of live mice. But it seemed prudent to keep my thoughts to myself. We each choose our own path to self-actualization. And hey, who was I to suspect that transcendence wasn't hanging out in the maw of a really big shark emerging out of the watery depths?

Anyway. I may not share a compunction to lock eyes with a great white up close and personal, but that doesn't mean I'm not prey to fascination with the mythic predator of the deep. When I spotted The Devil's Teeth on bookstore shelves, and connected it to my spring dinner companion's mention of the Farallons, I had to pick it up. Thanks to Susan Casey, we can experience the smelly treacherous windswept world of the Farallons without forking out a spoilt prince's ransom. Even better, we can do it from the comfort of our favorite cozy reading chair, with clean hair in a bright warm lice-free room, sipping wine or slamming a cold beer as it pleases us. Most important, we never have to surrender so much as a toe to the roiling dark

saltwater surrounding those toothy crags.

This true story of Susan's multiple trips to the Farallons to hang with the scientists who know great whites best reads like a compulsive addictive thriller. Think Into Thin Air with a plucky but ultimately disturbingly self-involved Nancy Drew. Though I can't say I admire Casey, she is a terrific storyteller and a keen observer. In her hands, the threatening mystery of great white sharks and the rugged dedication of the men who study them leap off the page and into imagination. In the course of her tale, Casey mentions a brash opportunist who extracts huge sums from reckless business nabobs clamoring to be stuffed into a shark cage and dumped into the Farallons' infested waters. The smart scientist types didn't think much of him. I recalled my brush with that NYC producer. Was he one of these very nabobs, and how had his dip into the Devil's Teeth deep gone? Was he onto something? Might some soupcon of enlightenment lurk under the waves with all those speedy greedy teeth? One never knows. I have no wise words about the human *raison d'être*.

But I can tell you that this is a book to devour in one breathless night.

Perrin Pring says

The first part of this book is amazing. Absolutely amazing. Casey's concise but creative language takes you to the Farallones. You can feel the humid cold, you can smell the bird shit, you can taste the salty and sharp wind. It wraps you up and makes you want to do anything to get out to the Farallones and experience their absolute misery because it sounds down right invigorating.

You also learn a fair bit. From some basic shark facts (I would have liked a lot more science about the islands and the sharks, but alas) to the pretty interesting human history of the Farallones, you don't want the book to end, and then it doesn't.

That's the problem. While you, the reader, are thinking of creative ways to get to the Farallones and stay there, so is Casey, and she does it before you and screws it up, royally. Reading the second part of this book is like watching an overly long video of a drunk cause a terrible car wreck. You know that what Casey is doing is going to pan out badly. You know that she shouldn't be there, and in the end, things don't work out. No, no one dies, but, well, read other reviews if you want to know exactly what happened.

I also originally didn't like the title - The Devil's Teeth - because I didn't like how it demonized the sharks. Then I started to read and learned that Devil's Teeth is what sailors used to call the Farallones. I thought, oh, that's creative because Devil's Teeth means so many things! Now I'm back to my original sentiment. The title is purposefully referring to the sharks and the islands, and that is the exact opposite of what the Shark Project was trying to do. From what I learned of the Shark Project, none of the researchers would name a book, the Devil's Teeth, just for shock value, but Casey did, which to me, is just one more way Casey showed me she used the Shark Project rather than truly believed in it.

If you can't tell, this is a conflicting book. I have to say, I'm glad I read it, even the second half (although I wonder what really happened). It was great to learn about a place I hardly knew existed. I just wish Casey had stopped after the first half.

Kate says

Having seen that amazing documentary about the Farallones sharks, I started reading for the acquaintance subject matter, and got totally sucked in -- couldn't put this book down. The first half is absolutely riveting -- if there is such a thing as "adventure research", this is it. Made me want to be on the islands (an impossibility), made me feel like a workday spent in front of the computer is a soulless and lifeless choice, made me want to be out there in the thick of it watching life in all its primitive, exhilarating, risky glory. I also learned quite a bit about Farallon history, about white sharks, about birds, about boats...

The first half of the book gets five enthusiastic stars. But I knock off a star and take things down to four stars because Susan Casey is an ass -- by the end of the book I hated her voice, her irresponsible behavior, her impact on the islands and the career of Peter Pyle. Pyle isn't a martyr here and is responsible for his own choices, but it's a shame that getting voluntarily tangled in Casey's web caused such a fracas. The last bit of the book is a total downer -- I'd almost recommend stopping your read before Casey returns to the islands on the *Just Imagine*... but then you don't get her side of the full story.

It's a good book, a thrilling book, a frustrating book. It hammers home the fragility of existence, the power of nature, the stupidity of human behavior, and the complex, fascinating beauty of the Great White Shark. Overall, I'm glad I read it.

Jaclyn says

I don't usually read a whole heck of a lot of non-fiction; however, I mediate the non-fiction book club at work, so I've necessarily had to branch out from my genre junkie ways. Happily, I loved my most recent foray into the non-fiction world and I can't wait to discuss with my book club.

The Devil's Teeth is part investigative journalism and part travelogue. On the surface this book promises to be a fascinating look at great white sharks. I was expecting bloody shark attacks, and to an extent I found what I was looking for. What I did not expect was the setting itself to take on a character of its own. The Farallon Islands, located off the coast of California, took centre stage, which makes me want to label this more of a travel memoir over anything else. Readers learn about this desolate and harsh hub of shark research and its fascinating history. I was completely drawn in by Casey's description of these islands and the lengths that researchers would go to study the marine life as well as the unique birds that would flock there. The history of these islands was totally engrossing and it was fascinating to learn about the previous inhabitants of the islands; my personal favourite was the "eggers" that decimated the bird population at one point in an effort to supply the demand for eggs when chickens couldn't be found. Ironically, it's not only sharks that have become endangered at the Farallon Islands, but rather a whole host of creatures over the islands varied history.

Now with regards to sharks; they were what initially drew me to this book. I've long had a fascination with sharks, as I am sure many have considering the popularity of Shark Week. I have to admit I was expecting more about the great white sharks at the Farallon Islands and about sharks in general. I would have thought there would have been more of an overview or historical perspective of sharks; however, the anecdotes that Casey shared from the island's researchers more than made up for this lack. The short snippets that Casey shared about the shark encounters at the islands was interesting and readable and I found myself flying through the pages.

What was also engaging about *The Devil's Teeth* was Casey's presentation of the researchers on the island and other people her paths crossed with. Since I'm a fiction reader I tend to like more character driven type stuff, so I think part of why I liked *The Devil's Teeth* so much was because Casey filled her writing with characters; specifically, Peter Pyle, Scot Anderson, the Browns, Ron the diver and so on. These characters were well drawn out, to the point where readers are given complete physical descriptions. From reading other reviews of *The Devil's Teeth* I can understand why there was some criticism of Casey's emphasis on the "rugged good looks" of the men she encountered, but from my perspective, this attention to detail was what made this book more than dry, scientific tome on great white sharks.

Lastly, I think I have to address the ethical concerns of this book. Casey becomes completely obsessed with the Farallon Islands, to the extent that she jumps at the chance to return there despite the fact that she'll be breaking lots of rules to do so. On one hand, Casey's actions are hard to understand, especially when she decides to captain a boat with very little nautical know-how. To me this seems foolhardy and you could see that it wasn't going to lead to anything good. In fact, the head of the shark project ends up losing his job after Casey's interference; it was a blatant disregard of the rules for Casey to return to the Farallons. What wasn't addressed was Casey's take on how she feels about being part of the reason that someone lost their job. When this was related it seemed a tad cool blooded and I wonder how the author truly felt. On the other hand, you can't place all the blame on Casey since she certainly wasn't sneaking onto the island by herself. At the end of the day, we're only getting a written account of what went down during that last shark season, so in a sense readers need to keep their perspective. What I do know, is that this controversy with Casey will generate some great book club discussion, so I'll be happy about that.

Review with read-alikes available [here](#).

Ice says

In a post-Jaws/Discovery Channel world, unearthing fresh data on great white sharks is a feat. So credit Susan Casey not just with finding and spotlighting two biologists who have done truly pioneering field research on the beasts but also with following them and their subjects into the heart of one of the most unnatural habitats on Earth: the Farallon Islands. Though just 30 miles due west of San Francisco, the Farallones--nicknamed the Devil's Teeth for their ragged appearance and raging inhospitality--are utterly alien, which may explain why each autumn, packs of great whites return to gorge on the seals and sea lions that gather there before returning to the Pacific and beyond.

That Casey, via her biologist buddies Peter Pyle and Scot Anderson, can even report that sharks apparently follow migratory feeding patterns is a revelation. Throughout *The Devil's Teeth*, Casey makes clear that year upon year of observing the sharks have given Pyle and Anderson (and by extension, us) insights into shark behavior that are entirely new and too numerous to list. The otherworldly Farallon Islands, meanwhile, also dominate Casey's engaging tale as she charts their transformation from ultradangerous source of wild eggs in the 19th century to ultradangerous real-life shark lab and bird sanctuary today. Despite the plethora of factoids on offer, Casey's style is consistently digestible and very amusing. She also has a knack for putting things into perspective.

Take this characteristic passage:

The Farallon great whites are largely unharassed. They might cross paths with the occasional boatload of day-trippers from San Francisco, but they're subjected to none of the behavior-altering coercion that nature's top predators regularly endure so that people can sit in the Winnebago... and get a look at them. This is

important because despite their visibility at the Farallones, and despite the impressive truth that sharks are so old they predate trees, great whites have remained among the most mysterious of creatures."

By book's end, it's hard to know what's more captivating: The biologists' groundbreaking data, Casey's primer on the evolution of the Farallones, the islands' symbiotic relationships with the sharks, the gulls and sea lions they attract, or the outpost's resident ghosts. Frankly, it's a nice problem to have. --Kim Hughes

Getting to Know the Great White It was a BBC documentary on great white sharks visiting California's Farallon Islands that turned Susan Casey from an editor of adventure and outdoors stories in such magazines as *Outside* to a journalist obsessed with an outdoors adventure of her own. In her Amazon.com interview, Casey recalls the fascinations and the follies of her time with the sharks in the Farallones and discusses everything from the ethics of adventure journalism to the stunning silence and size of nature's perfect predators. And in her answers to the Significant Seven (the seven questions we like to ask every author), she reveals her admiration for both Joseph Mitchell and Johnny Knoxville (once you've read her book, both choices seem appropriate).

From its startling opening description of scientists racing to the bloody scene where a shark has decapitated a seal, this memoir-cum-natural and cultural history of the Farallon Islands—"the spookiest, wildest place on Earth"—plunges readers into the thrills of shark watching.

Casey, a sportswriter with recurring dreams about deep-sea creatures, "became haunted" by the 211-acre archipelago 27 miles west of San Francisco when she saw a BBC documentary about Peter Pyle and Scot Anderson, biologists who study the great white sharks there. The islands are the only place on Earth where scientists can study the animals in their natural habitat. These evolutionary ancients (sharks lived 200 million years before dinosaurs) can be as large as Mack trucks, eat suits of armor, are both fierce and friendly, and, according to Casey, are an addictive fascination for those lucky enough to encounter them. Casey's three-week solo stay on a yacht anchored in shark waters is itself an adventure, with the author evacuating just hours before the yacht disappeared in a storm. Her suspenseful narrative perfectly matches the drama and mystery of these islands, their resident sharks and the scientists who love them.

Dean Hamilton says

"When a two-ton animal takes a taste of you, it doesn't do much good to apologize." - Peter Benchley

25 miles from where customers order tall lattes and casually sip cappachino's in Ghirardelli Square amid the noisy commerce of Fisherman's Wharf, a 400-million year old predator hunts.

The Devil's Teeth is a gripping and voraciously readable piece of work that looks at the Great White Sharks of the Farallon Islands, nicknamed The Devil's Teeth. A ragged, storm-tossed and desolate set of islands located 27 miles due west of San Francisco, the Farallons are home to innumerable seabirds, a large colony of sea lions and one of the few known migratory gathering places for Great White Sharks.

Written by Susan Casey, The Devil's Teeth is one of the very best books of 2005. Captivated or obsessed, depending on your perspective, Casey ventures to the Farallon Islands to report on the Great White Shark study of biologists Peter Pyle and Scot Anderson. Venturing daily into the choppy environs that is the

Farallons, the author joins the biologists in their dangerous work, tagging along after predators "so old they predate trees". Here's a brief excerpt:

"The killing took place at dawn and as usual it was a decapitation, accomplished by a single vicious swipe. Blood geysered into the air, creating a vivid slick that stood out on the water like the work of a violent abstract painter. Five hundred yards away, outside of the lighthouse on the island's highest peak, a man watched through a telescope. First he noticed the frenzy of gulls, bird gestalt that signaled trouble. And then he saw the blood. Grabbing his radio, he turned and began to run.

His transmission jolted awake the four other people on the island. 'We've got an attack off Sugarloaf, big one looks like'."

Casey's strings prose together in an intelligent, brisk and highly readable style, dropping elegant nuggets of shark lore, background on the Farallon's history (an "egg-station" where seabirds eggs were profitably gathered for years), and details on the Farallon shark study into a well-researched, well-written tome that draws a reader in and refuses to let them go until they too, start to wonder obsessively about these sepulchral denizens of the deep.

Reading the book, it occurred to me that I still didn't have a really good grasp on the sheer size of the Great White, so my seven-year old son and I took our measuring tape and his colored chalk and sketched out a life-size shark (based on Casey's measurements of "The Sisters", a group of older Farallon female Great Whites) on the sidewalk in front of our house. The scale was daunting to say the least and generated a new appreciation within me for both the biologists who daily ventured onto the sea to study the beasts, and a new respect for the author's obsession.

Just for fun, we added a life-size diver at the mouth end...passerbys were duly impressed.

I highly recommend *The Devil's Teeth*, it is a great read.

John says

Oh, Sharks. You are so very cool.

The only problem with this book is that I care not a whit for anything that happens to Susan Casey that does not involve watching Great White sharks decapitate seals. I would have rather read a book called "Stories of Shark sightings over the years at the Farallon Islands". Those are the most compelling parts of this book, when the shark researchers recount stories about the sharks. The rest of it is mainly about what a pain it was for Casey to live on a boat, moored just off the islands during shark season. I'm sure it was a trial, and I understand that she has a lot of pages to fill, but I just don't care.

The 2/3 of this book that's just cool stories about sharks is great though. It's about these islands just outside

of San Francisco, which are apparently a hotbed of activity for huge great white sharks. There are tons of seals, and the same 15 to 20 foot great whites come back year after year. This has given researchers the chance to really examine behavior over a long period. Some of it is amazing. Like, for example, did you know that great white sharks will lift their heads up out of the water and look around? Crazy! Or that they are much smarter than we would think: they can learn to follow a boat that has given them food before, and they know not to attack things that are boxy, as they are probably not food. One time, after a Killer Whale had attacked and killed a great white (which is pretty cool in and of itself), every other great white in the area left town the next day. Just beat it. Somehow they knew that the whole area was now unsafe, even though typically they would have stayed for weeks longer. They had a radio tag on one of them, and right after the one shark was killed, they recorded the tagged shark just making a beeline for the south pacific. These are smart sharks, which makes me less inclined to think of them as mindless killing machines, although that would be cold comfort if one was chewing on your leg.

I wondered sometimes during this book about whether the researchers on the islands appreciated Ms. Casey's presence. She makes it sound like they were all buddy buddy about everything, but it seems like she would have been a pain to have around. For a while, rules and regulations prohibited her from leaving her boat and standing on the islands, but she was constantly whining about the boat and begging them to let her sneak ashore. This would get them in trouble, but she doesn't seem to care, the boat is smelly and she's seasick and she doesn't have enough food, etc. What an ungrateful jerk. You just want to tell her, shut the hell up and look at the sharks.
