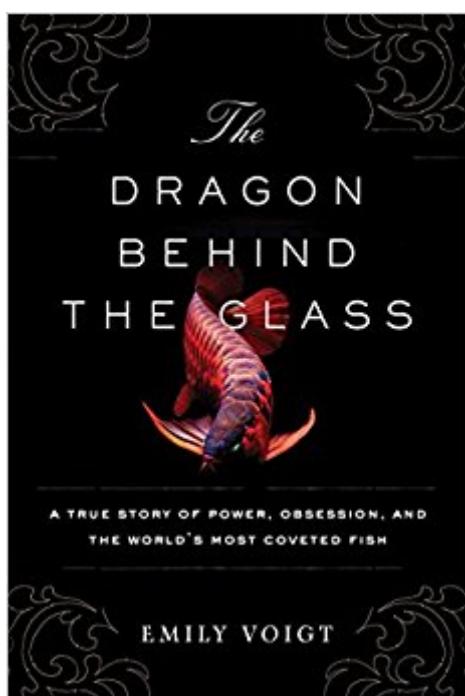


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# The Dragon Behind The Glass: A True Story Of Power, Obsession, And The World's Most Coveted Fish



## Synopsis

A FINALIST FOR THE 2017 PEN/E. O. WILSON LITERARY SCIENCE WRITING AWARD  
LONGLISTED FOR THE ANDREW CARNEGIE MEDAL FOR EXCELLENCE A LIBRARY  
JOURNAL BEST SCIENCE BOOK OF THE YEAR

“[A] curiously edifying book.”

“With the taut suspense of a spy novel, Voigt paints a vivid world of murder, black market deals, and habitat destruction surrounding a fish that’s considered, ironically, to be a good-luck charm.”

“[An] immensely satisfying story, full of surprises and suspense....Things get weird fast.”

“A riveting journey into the bizarre world of the Asian arowana or ‘dragon fish’...the world’s most expensive aquarium fish...reveals a surprising history with profound implications for the future of wild animals and human beings alike.”

A young man is murdered for his prized pet fish. An Asian tycoon buys a single specimen for \$150,000. Meanwhile, a pet detective chases smugglers through the streets of New York. Delving into an outlandish realm of obsession, paranoia, and criminality, *The Dragon Behind the Glass* tells the story of a fish like none other: a powerful predator dating to the age of the dinosaurs. Treasured as a status symbol believed to bring good luck, the Asian arowana is bred on high-security farms in Southeast Asia and sold by the hundreds of thousands each year. In the United States, however, it’s protected by the Endangered Species Act and illegal to bring into the country...though it remains the object of a thriving black market. From the South Bronx to Singapore, journalist Emily Voigt follows the trail of the fish, ultimately embarking on a years-long quest to find the arowana in the wild, venturing deep into some of the last remaining tropical wildernesses on earth. With a captivating blend of personal reporting, history, and science, *The Dragon Behind the Glass* traces our modern fascination with aquarium fish back to the era of exploration when intrepid naturalists stood on the cutting edge of modern science, discovering new and wondrous species in jungles all over the world. In an age when freshwater fish now comprise one of the most rapidly vanishing groups of animals on the planet, Voigt unearths a paradoxical truth behind the dragon fish’s rise to fame...one that calls into question how we protect the world’s rarest species. An elegant exploration of the human conquest of nature, *The Dragon Behind the Glass* revels in the sheer wonder of life’s diversity and lays bare our deepest desire...to hold onto what is wild.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Praise for The Dragon Behind the Glass: "Voigt relates her continent-hopping adventures as she struggles to make sense of a modern paradox: the mass-produced endangered species . . . . What follows is an immensely satisfying story, full of surprises and suspense." — The Wall Street Journal "The Asian arowana, also known as the dragon fish, ranks among the world's most expensive aquarium fish, and in this engaging tale of obsession and perseverance, journalist Voigt chronicles her effort to study and understand its appeal. . . .

Voigt's passion in pursuing her subject is infectious, as is the self-deprecating humor she injects into her enthralling look at the intersection of science, commercialism, and conservationism." — Publishers Weekly \*Starred review\* "Voigt's passionate narrative perfectly conveys the obsessive world in which [the arowana] swims." — Publishers Weekly Best Summer Books of 2016 "Not since Candace Millard published The River of Doubt has the world of the , Borneo, Myanmar and other exotic locations been so colorfully portrayed as it is now in Emily Voigt's The Dragon Behind the Glass." Fascinating and must-read. — Library Journal \*Starred review\* "A spirited debut . . . A fresh, lively look at an obsessive desire to own a piece of the wild." — Kirkus Reviews "With the taut suspense of a spy novel, Voigt paints a vivid world of murder, black market deals and habitat destruction surrounding a fish that's considered, ironically, to be a good-luck charm." — Discover "Who would've thought the history of a rare fish could be so enthralling? Voigt traces the bizarre story of the world's most expensive aquarium fish, the Asian dragon fish, in a story that reads more like fiction, what with all the murder, smuggling and general intrigue."

Ã¢â€”â€•PureWow, "The Ultimate 2016 Summer Book Guide""Many a true-crime study could be attributed to an author's honest enthusiasm for weirdness. (I'm thinking of "The Orchid Thief," Susan Orlean's wondrous strange book about an orchid poacher's bizarre search for the rare ghost orchid that grows in the swamplands of Florida's Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve.)Ã¢â€” The Dragon Behind the GlassÃ¢â€” is the same kind of curiously edifying book."

Ã¢â€”â€•Marilyn Stasio,Ã¢â€” The New York Times Book ReviewÃ¢â€”Ã¢â€”"This book starts with a Ã¢â€”ÃœebangÃ¢â€”â€¢Ã¢â€”â€œ a murder to be exactÃ¢â€”â€œ and the momentum just keeps going from there.Ã¢â€” The Dragon Behind the GlassÃ¢â€” is a gripping blend of investigative journalism, science, international crime, travelogue and historyÃ¢â€”Ã¢â€”|You don't need to know anything about tropical fishes or fishkeeping to be totally riveted by this informative page-turner.Ã¢â€”Ã¢â€”â€•Ã¢â€”â€•Forbes,Ã¢â€” The 10 Best Conservation And Environment Books Of 2016Ã¢â€”Ã¢â€”"A masterpiece! Emily Voigt has raised the bar for anyone who thinks they can tell a good fish story. What an extraordinary and extraordinarily well-told tale. Voigt brings such wonderful humor, adventure, and hard science to this subject, I found myself unable to put the book down. Never has science been so much criminally good fun. I will never look upon a goldfish the same way again.Ã¢â€”Ã¢â€”â€•Bryan Christy, author of *The Lizard King: The True Crimes and Passions of the World*Ã¢â€”â€¢'s Greatest Reptile Smugglers"Few writers can match the intelligence, charm, wit, and sheer audacity that Emily Voigt brings to bear in this highly readable and important book. From the bleak housing projects of the South Bronx to the steamy jungles of southern Myanmar, Voigt takes us along on a journey of adventure and discovery in her quest to find an increasingly rare fish in the wild. With a page-turning plot and a cast of vivid characters, *The Dragon Behind the Glass* shines a powerful light on the international trade in endangered species."Ã¢â€”Ã¢â€”â€•Scott Wallace, author of *The Unconquered: In Search of the 's Last Uncontacted Tribes*

Emily Voigt is a journalist specializing in science and culture. Her stories have appeared in the New York Times, OnEarth Magazine, Mother Jones, and Isotope: A Journal of Literary Nature and Science Writing, as well as on the programs Radiolab and This American Life. The recipient of a Pulitzer Traveling Fellowship, she holds degrees in English Literature and Journalism from Columbia University.

I never thought I could be captivated by a book about fish, but how wrong I was. Emily tells some amazing tales of history, evolution, geology and ichthyology. Introduces us to an hilarious cast of

characters including explorers, breeders, researchers and traders. Intermingled with fascinating stories of the Victorian explorers who travelled the before her, including my now own personal favorite, Ida Pfeiffer. A funny easy read, which makes you think about your place in nature... it might also make you think that you need a night out in Singapore with Kenny the Fish.

The Dragon Behind the Glass is part exposé, part travelogue, part scholarship, and part descent into madness. It's a combination as addictive as a skillfully made desert. Ahab had a great white whale. Emily Voigt had a great red fish. Voigt is pursuing the arowana. She first hears the name from a law enforcement who is talking to her about the exotic pet trade in New York. She learns that the arowana is a large fish prized by a certain kind of aquarium owner: usually Asian, male, and rich. The latter is the most necessary feature for many arowana owners, because single individuals are fetching hundreds of thousands of American dollars. The arowana is the center of an unusual market, often shrouded in secrecy and both threats and acts of violence. Again and again throughout the book, arowana are stolen, smuggled, and fought over, both in the professional and literal sense of the word. The strangeness of it all is compelling for the reader and Voigt, who ends up pursuing this fish through multiple countries and jungles.

She's accompanied by a memorable set of other people, who I found myself constantly googling to see by the time I reached the second half of the book. The Dragon Behind the Glass is not an academic work, but it almost could have been. Voigt's research on the pet trade and the science is flawless. There is lots of solid biology and scientific history. Voigt provides many thoughtful asides about the pet trade. She considers the pros and cons of collecting from wild populations, CITES listings, and the paradox of the arowana being a mass produced endangered species. While I was originally interested in this book because of its relevance to my own research, I kept reading because it was intertwined with the personal stuff, and her own jungle adventures, in such an entertaining way. Voigt is self aware enough to realize that her interest in this fish is... not normal. There's a recurring "Am I really doing this and is it worth it?" that I think anyone deeply invested in a project will recognize.

I bought this book because of a review in the Wall Street Journal. I know nothing about fish except as a meal or some guppies in an aquarium. I cannot recommend it highly enough. It's like reading a mystery novel. In fact, better than the last two I have read. It has to be a given that people close to the writer will give a great review. After one reads the book there can be no possible reason for

someone to write how great it was except for a relationship with the author. I don't know Ms. Voigt or have anything to do with anyone in the book or the publisher so my review is only on how interesting I thought this book was. But it!

Who knew a story told 'round the aquarium would be better than one told 'round the campfire. The dragon behind the glass is a mystery, a memoir, a travelogue, and an engaging exploration of science, conservation, and the environment. I definitely recommend this book, from prologue to epilogue. A fun summer read with memorable characters where you will actually learn something too.

Dragon Behind the Glass by Emily Voigt This whopper of a fish yarn, is bolstered by intensive and revealing research. It's a fast-paced narrative spun by an intrepid young writer, Emily Voigt, who searches for the elusive, near mythical Asian Arowana. Voigt's quest criss-crosses 16 countries from the Bronx in the U.S. to the wilds of Borneo and the jungle. In her travels, she encounters characters that could be right out of central casting. Colorful, often predictable, sometimes self-serving and devious, the retinue includes guides, traders, poachers and Arowana authorities, and similarly obsessed tropical fish fanciers. The line between villains and the good guys, is often blurred. Pulsing with charm and wit, "Dragon" nonetheless has its darker moments of disillusion and disappointment. Voigt sounds a timely and urgent endangered species alert that hopefully will bear consideration by anyone concerned with the plight of our planet. The book finds me so caught up in the pet fish frenzy, that I've planned a visit to the Boston Aquarium to meet the Arowana, up-close and personal but not too close, as they are known to bite. DF - NH

A different and delightful kind of scientific travelogue I guess you could call it. The author becomes fixated with her subject and travels the world pursuing answers as to why this particular fish is so coveted. She also comes in contact with a number of very interesting characters in her pursuit of this fish.

I have kept fish since a boy in the 1970s, and have never fallen out of love with my true passions which are being an aquarist and naturalist. Reading Ms. Voigt's book, which is well-written and researched, highlights the struggle for natural history and its practitioners to survive in a technology

driven social landscape and is an outstanding contribution to the long-running story. Well done, Ms. Voigt.

I rarely read non fiction and I don't have a particular interest in fish, so when I started this book I wasn't sure if I'd finish it. I was completely taken by surprise with how much I enjoyed it though! With an interesting cast of characters and lots of travel stories, this book is making me re-think how I select books to read in the future!

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