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foreword
the final frontier
coral gardens
world of fish
warm blood, cold seas
life at the poles
the great explorers
hidden depths



The corals of Ribbon Reef on the outer Great Barrier Reef, Australia, are clearly visible at low tide, courtesy of Great Barrier Reef Marine Park
Len Zell

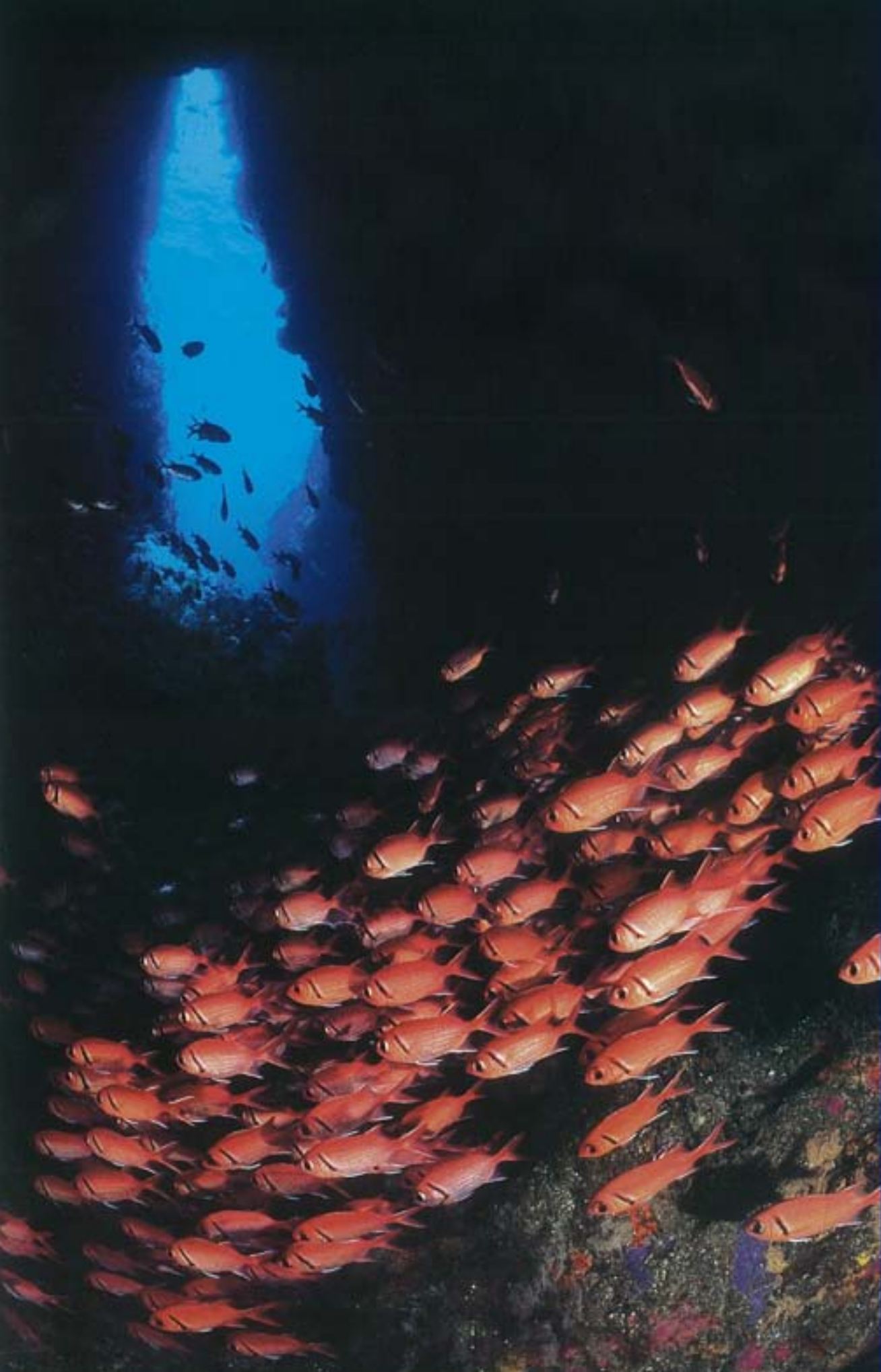


From the balmy waters surrounding the coral atolls of the tropics to the frigid drifting pack ice of an Antarctic summer, the world's ocean has many faces. Over two-thirds of the Earth's surface is covered in water but, until this century, humanity's interactions with the seas has been fleeting and superficial. Now, just as we are begin to understand their complex systems, we are in danger of damaging them beyond hope of recovery

Left Divers float
outside the entrance to
an underwater cavern,
San Salvador, Bahamas
Lawson Wood

Right A school of
blackbar soldier fish
congregate in a cave,
Dominica, West Indies
David Hall





Slashers Reef Australia,
courtesy of Great Barrier
Reef Marine Park
Julie Jones



Floating weightless above a coral reef, divers and snorkellers are the privileged voyeurs of an alien world. The infrastructure of this universe is provided by the limestone skeletons of minute animals and, within their folds and convolutions, colourful fish live in apparent harmony with venomous invertebrates. These reefs stretch for thousands of kilometres along some of the most beautiful coastlines in the world and, for many of us, images of their many wonders – as seen on TV – provide our first introduction to the worlds of the ocean's inhabitants

Left: A puffer fish takes
refuge inside a sponge.
Larsen Wood

Right: The branches
of a whip coral.
Michel Joron





A moon jellyfish drifts
gently through the
waters of the Red Sea
David Hall



Until the latter half of this century, humanity's relationship with fish was mainly restricted to that of eater and eaten. With our increasing knowledge of the oceans' inhabitants comes a growing sense of wonder as we realise that the lives of fish are as diverse and fascinating as those of the animals that inhabit dry land





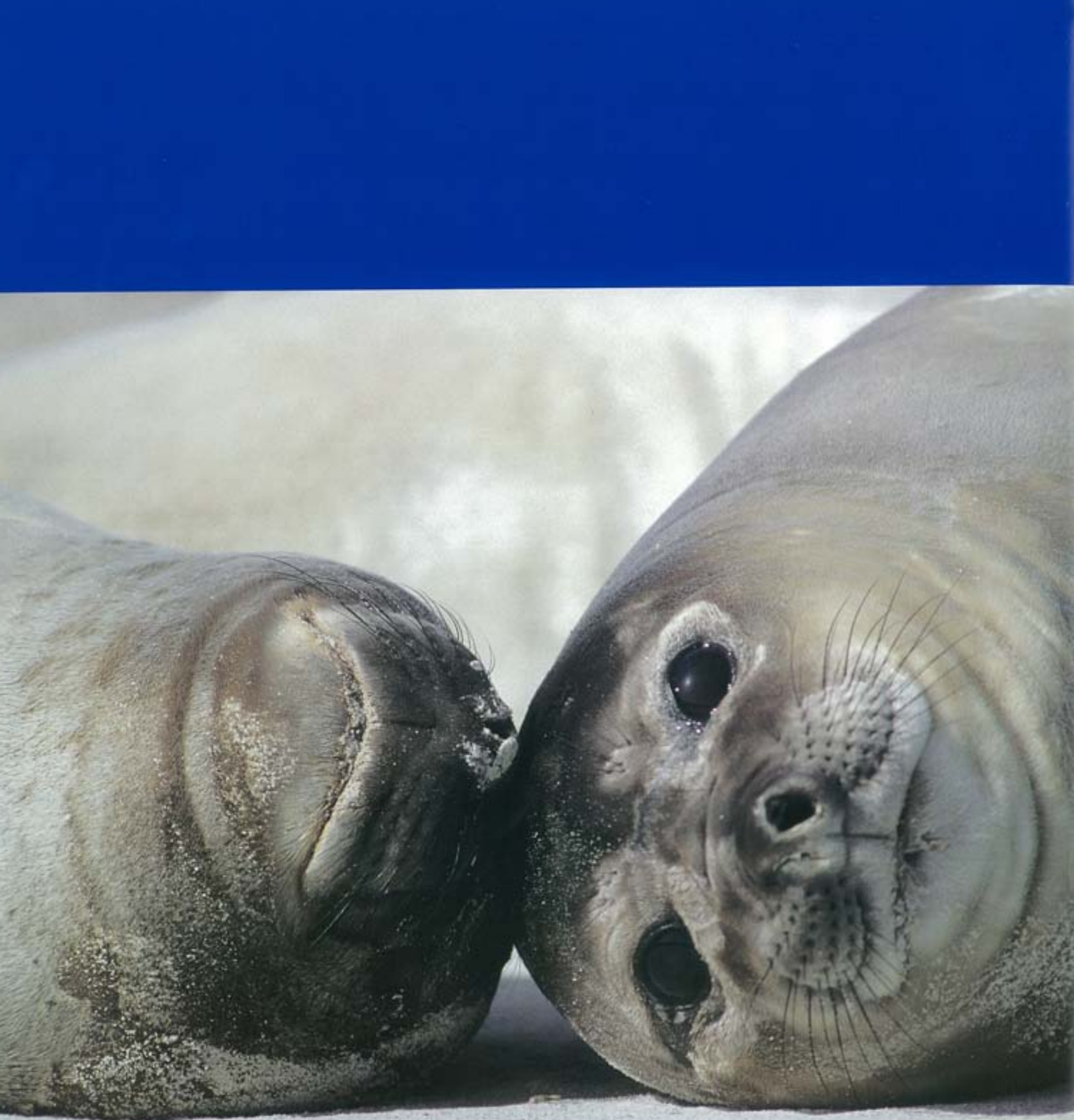
Left: A red Irish lord fish blends into its background despite its colourful pigmentation
Brandon D Cole

Right: A yellow mask angel fish displays the vibrant colours typical of a reef's inhabitants
Sergio Sarta

A rare sighting of a lone
bottlenose dolphin –
they usually travel in
pods, courtesy of Great
Barrier Reef Marine Park
Gordon Bull



While the various species of fish and crustaceans make up the bulk of the population of the oceans, the largest inhabitants of this watery world are, in fact, mammals. Recently, scientists have begun to ask some fascinating questions about the cetaceans – and have made some equally fascinating discoveries in response to those questions. As each answer comes to light, the difference between humanity and the rest of the animal kingdom narrows to an ever-tighter margin and raises issues about the uniqueness of human intelligence



*Left: A pair of
elephant seal pups
bask in the sunshine.
Alan G. Potts*

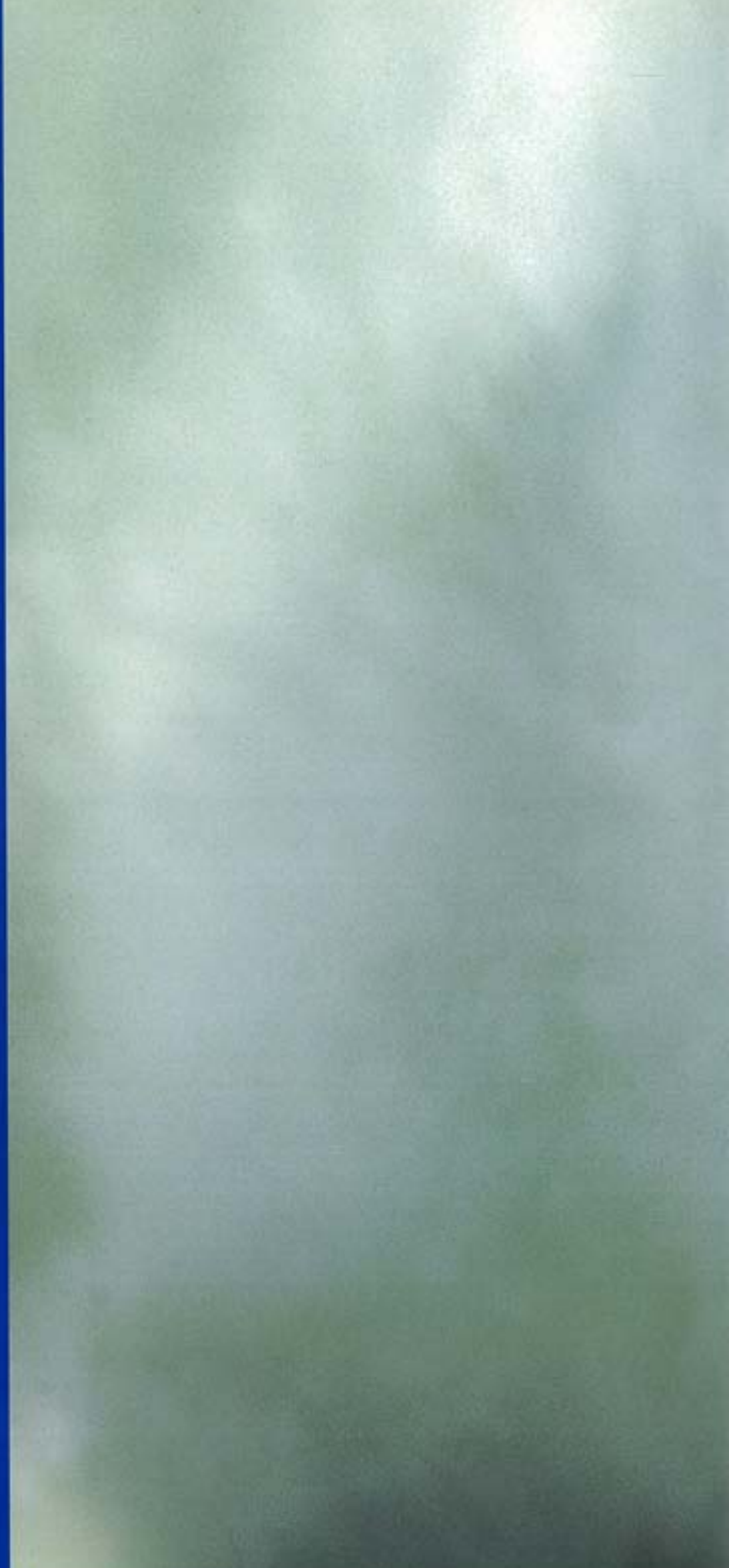
*Right: A southern sea
otter grooms itself after
an afternoon nap.
Brandon D. Cole*



The sculpted underside
of an iceberg is revealed
when it rises in the water
Martha Holmes



Despite the appeal of
harp seal pups, they
came close to being
wiped out by humans.
Brandon D. Cole



A jellyfish springs into
action, propelled by
its uncoiling tentacles
Justin Marshall



The crushing pressures and lightless environment of the deep oceans have provided a bar to their exploration for many centuries. It is only now, with the advent of increasingly sophisticated technology, that we are beginning to explore the inky reaches below the seas' surface. This world of alien life-forms and underwater volcanoes may hold the key to the origins of life on Earth, as well as being a source of untold mineral and animal resources





Left Not an alien, but a small crustacean which has carved a barrel out of its gelatinous prey and swims around ensconced within it.
Justin Marshall

Right Comb jellies are among the most transparent and delicate of animals.
Justin Marshall