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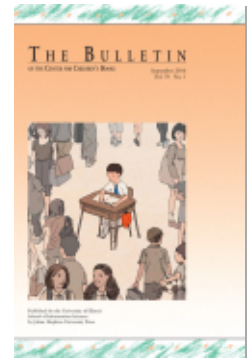
Beautiful Blue World by Suzanne Lafleur (review)

Amy Atkinson

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LAFLÉUR, SUZANNE *Beautiful Blue World*. Lamb, 2016 [224p]

Library ed. ISBN 978-0-375-99089-2 \$19.99

Trade ed. ISBN 978-0-385-74300-6 \$16.99

E-book ed. ISBN 978-0-307-98033-5 \$10.99

Reviewed from galleys

R Gr. 4-7

For twelve-year old Mathilde, her country of Sofarende's war with neighboring Tyssia means rations and nightly air raids; at least she has Megs, her lifelong best friend, to huddle with in the bunker. Then a government recruitment program seeks out the best minds among Sofarende's youth, promising to not only house and feed participants but also send money to their families regularly. Certain that high-achieving Megs will win a coveted spot, Mathilde is baffled to learn instead of her own selection to the program. She soon finds herself in a remote military outpost disguised as a school, where children break codes, anticipate Tyssia's maneuvers, and advise as tacticians, and where she is tasked with speaking with a prisoner of war housed in the school. As she learns strength and independence, she also learns the value of her interpersonal abilities in this poignant and inspiring examination of resilience and respectful celebration of soft skills. The Scandinavian-eque setting provides an atmospheric but unobtrusive backdrop to Mathilde's external and internal journeys; indeed, lack of elaborate description of the fictional Sofarende and Tyssia allows the reader to see the ambiguities and complexities of war and its effect on all involved. Though Mathilde makes much of her relationship with Megs, this book is really about her own self-discovery and inner resources—a gentle read, despite the wartime backdrop, for kids wanting a touch of adventure in their stories of friendship and personal growth. AA

LARIVIERE, SARAH *The Bad Kid*. Simon, 2016 [304p]

Trade ed. ISBN 978-1-4814-3581-9 \$16.99

E-book ed. ISBN 978-1-4814-3584-0 \$10.99

Reviewed from galleys

R Gr. 4-6

The term “hot mess” could have been coined specifically for eleven-year-old Claudeline. Her much-pierced and tattooed dad, considered the family weakling by his own now-deceased Chinese gangster father, is distracted; her steely mom vacillates between stand-offish and downright erratic; and worst of all, best buddy Brett is on hiatus from her drama, actually running away from her with his nose in a book of Chinese philosophy. Claude finds solace hanging with Phil and Rita, the bartender and aspiring screenwriter customer at the restaurant where Mom works. Claude's sassy mouth and wild stories delight Phil and Rita, but the tales provide thin cover for her inner emotional turmoil and self doubt. Enter Alma Lingonberry, a dying girl who wants to spend the final days of her illness cultivating 10,000 friendships—or at least that's what the fliers posted around town claim. Although Claude is skeptical, even holding in contempt the grownups who are falling for the probable scam, her email correspondence with Alma provides a new focus. In her pursuit of the truth, Claude reclaims faltering relationships with family and friends and solves a darn good little mystery into the bargain. Catching the rhythm of tall tales, defiance, and introspection that is Claude's narrative style may take a couple of chapters, but it's well worth the effort, and untangling the effect Alma Lingonberry has on Claude's circle leads readers not only to a satisfying conclusion but also to musings on the relationship between fact and truth. EB