



The Green Glass Sea

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It is 1943, and 11-year-old Dewey Kerrigan is traveling west on a train to live with her scientist father, but no one, not her father nor the military guardians who accompany her, will tell her exactly where he is. When she reaches Los Alamos, New Mexico, she learns why: he's working on a top secret government program. Over the next few years, Dewey gets to know eminent scientists, starts tinkering with her own mechanical projects, becomes friends with a budding artist who is as much of a misfit as she is and, all the while, has no idea how the Manhattan Project is about to change the world. This book's fresh prose and fascinating subject are like nothing you've read before.

The Green Glass Sea Details

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Author : Ellen Klages

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From Reader Review The Green Glass Sea for online ebook

Sheila says

I think we have a winner for my rarely given, 5-stars of love rating!

What a great book! What a great book for girls! I read this aloud to my daughter, and we both greatly enjoyed the story of Dewey, a science loving girl, who goes to live with her father, who is working on a government project for the war in Los Alamos, New Mexico, a place that doesn't officially exist.

The mystery and the secrecy that was Los Alamos, The Manhattan Project, "the gadget", and the Trinity test is brought to life through the eyes of a young girl, who doesn't fully understand everything that is happening with the mathematicians and scientists working on the hill, but knows that they are trying to do something that will stop the war.

This book continues through the test of "the gadget", the Trinity nuclear bomb, that was tested at White Sands in July 1945, causing the titled Green Glass Sea which Dewey is allowed to visit, and ends simply with a radio announcement of "...onto the Japanese city of Hiroshima this morning....", our only hint that the atomic bomb has now been dropped on that city in August 1945.

There is a second book in this series, White Sands, Red Menace, which continues this story, and we will be reading that one immediately.

Jane Lebak says

This book, it strikes me, is everything wrong with children's literature. As an adult book it would be a four-star book, but as a children's book it's a 2-star book.

OPINION-FILLED REVIEW BELOW:

Summary: two awkward girls meet at the army base in Los Alamos during the Manhattan Project and eventually become friends.

That's the whole plot, right there. ^^ The characters are good, but children who are reading stories aren't really in it for the lush landscape descriptions or the deep introspections on what adults might be thinking. The book survives at all because of the glancing references to things adults would know but children, the target audience, would not. Richard Feynmann shows up, and he's a nice guy. Do kids know who he is? Well maybe if they're reading this book as a companion to a unit on World War II. But otherwise, no, it falls flat. He shows up on the train in the beginning, is nice, and then never shows up again.

Without that kind of nudge-nudge-wink-wink at the adult reader, the book would have no reason to exist. Moreover, the author is working hard to create an idealized childhood in the confines of what we consider to be hellish and nonidealized (a good idea) but that's not something a nine year old reader is going to care much about. Nine year old readers want adventures, not a theoretical construct of idealized childhood. They want a clear ending, not the story kind of petering out to a stop because we've finally reached the location where the title takes place.

Who enjoys that? Adults do. Adults will say, "Wow, in the shadow of the bomb, these children are free and create something of their own paradise." And adults will say, "Oh, we know the horrors of the A-bomb" and "we get all these references." And when people are sitting around deciding literary awards for children's fiction, who's on the panel? A group of nine year olds and ten year olds who had to read this book as part of their unit on WWII? No, it's a group of editors, literary agents, and literary authors who discuss the consciousness-raising aspects of the work without saying, "If Grandma Julia wraps this up and gives it to Susie for Christmas under the tree, is Susie going to like it?"

And that's the kicker: an adult looking for a Christmas gift might pick out this book because it's award-winning etc etc, and then if the kid attempts to read it, the kid feels meh about it. Nothing really happens in the story as far as the kid is concerned because the real work is taking place in the subtext, the context, the themes, and the tone.

The main characters are eleven. I've been told repeatedly by editors that kids read upward (sigh) meaning they must think the ideal audience is nine or ten years old...?

Books like this kill children's love of reading. This is the reason people will come to me unprovoked and say, "I don't read, but I know I should." This is the reason people stare at me in line at the Post Office if I'm reading while waiting. Reading is a chore; it's something you do because it's good for you; it's like flossing or doing sit-ups. There are no hobby flossists, and they find it equally weird that there are hobby readers.

(BTW, the easy comparison here is The Book Thief, which is a great book. Also with a child protagonist; also set during WWII; also with adult themes etc etc etc; but not directly aimed at children even though I know children who've read it multiple times. The Book Thief also had more going on plotwise. That's a great book, so go read The Book Thief instead. The other potential comparison would be Lord of the Flies, except the childhood society the kids construct isn't developed enough to make it a sociological study of human nature. In fact, after Suze confronts the bully, nothing happens as a result of it. But I was forced to read Lord of the Flies in grammar school AND middle school, and I hated every minute of it both times. Hah.)

I read this as an adult and found it interesting; I will not pass it along to any of my kids even though they're readers.

Elisabeth says

A story of two little girls that's also the story of war.

Well written, vivid, sweet, exciting, and tragic at once. Like Judy Blume, if she'd told stories with Richard Feynman in them. Accessible to the very young - I'd have enjoyed it by 8 or 9 - and a worthy read for anyone.

Grace says

This book was more like 4.5 stars, but still really good! The story line was very intriguing, keeping my interest through the whole book. The topic of the book was something that we had never really learned about in any social studies class, and I found it to be very interesting. Overall, I think that this was a very good

book, and one that many people could easily enjoy.

Rebecca says

I need to read this book! The paperback version includes the author's Scott O'Dell acceptance speech, which has one of my favorite statements about historical fiction:

"A lot of people think history is boring. It's just names and dates and facts that you have to memorize for a test...Up until last October, I was primarily a science fiction writer. Which means I'm in a unique position to recognize that this -- [holds up *The Green Glass Sea*] -- is a time machine. Because that's really what we want out of historical fiction. We want to go there. We don't want to be on the outside, looking in. We want the backstage tour. We want to be there as the events of history are unfolding around us.

...If you accept that this [book] is a time machine, then there's one thing that you need to know, the one unbreakable law of time travel -- you cannot change the past.

But I hope that when you close the cover of *The Green Glass Sea*, and return to your own life, you may discover that the past has changed you."

J says

Dewey's dad is a scientist and ever since WWII began, he's been helping the government with a top secret project. When Dewey's grandma has a stroke, she travels by herself to a secret military base in New Mexico. Even though she's only ten years old, she has always liked math and science and making her own little projects from stray gears and nuts and bolts. Along with her leg brace and glasses, this makes her an easy target for other kids to pick on her.

At the new base where she lives with her dad, the other girls call her "Screwy Dewey" just because she's smart and different. Mostly she doesn't care, but when her dad is sent to Washington D.C. on official business, Dewey has to move in with another family and their ten-year-old girl, Suze. Suze and Dewey are not friends and this makes their living arrangement kind of hostile at first. But eventually other events happen that lead them to become friends. Then the worst thing in the world happens to Dewey.

While all this is happening, the scientists on the secret base have been working on a "gadget", a top secret project that will "end the war".

The "green glass sea" is a term given to the crater blasted into the desert ground by the first atomic blast in New Mexico. The gadget is a nuclear bomb and it does end the war, but at a tremendous cost to its creators and victims.

If you want to see actual photos of the green glass sea, just google it in the images search. You can even buy pieces of the green glass online. This book really covers the nuclear subject from a different perspective and I found it an enjoyable read.

Hanne T says

OMGNS THIS BOOK YALL

waves frantically in the air and shoves in everyone's faces

Never mind that it was a school book--it's now on my favorites shelf. Why?

Well...

It's historical fiction, WHICH IS OBVIOUSLY THE BEST

Then, it's WWII, which I'm a sucker for...

And then, it's sciency, which makes everything the bestttt

AND THEN, it's friendship and girls and people and wwii and EVERYTHING

And that ending was soooooo well planned and play omgns

And then the kicker.

It. Made. Me. Cry.

mic drop

AND GOODREADS JUST TOLD ME THAT THERES A SEQUAL TO THIS AND MY LIFE IS MADE

Lisa Vegan says

Some time needs to elapse for me to see if this book makes as much of an imprint on me as it now seems, but this is one I might consider for my favorites shelf.

In this novel everything so vivid: the feelings and thoughts and actions of the characters, the many descriptions of food, the train ride, the community, the terrain, the record albums, so much, all of it.

The author is a terrific storyteller, and this is a perfectly crafted book.

I loved the main character Dewey. In real life I would have hated being in that place at that time with those people, but as a reader I thoroughly enjoyed spending time with the people and at the places in the book.

There's a bibliography of suggested books written about the creation of the atomic bomb at the end of the book.

I'm glad that there's a sequel to this book. It's titled White Sands, Red Menace, but I'm a little afraid to read it because The Green Glass Sea might be in my top 100 favorite books of all time, that's how much I loved it, and I'm not sure I'll feel so positively about the sequel.

The author is local, living in San Francisco, and I'd like to see her become a Goodreads author – I messaged her and made that request.

OwlBeReading says

This was a pretty good historical fiction book. I don't know if I'm going to read the second book because this one ended on a very good note. All of the characters continued to develop throughout the story which was good. At times it was slow so that's why it has a four and not a five out of five stars. Overall easy read!

Kaylee says

I feel like this is a book that teachers in middle school make you read when you are learning about the home front in WW2 in America. It wasn't bad, but I never felt truly connected to any of the characters, the closest I got was the mom.

Also what was up with all of the "we aren't like other girls!" stuff?? It was such a big theme in the second half of the book. I understand that this book was trying to inspire young girls to get involved with arts and science, but shaming other girls because they are good in Girl Scouts or saying you're better because you feel smarter is not the way to go about it! (Side note: yes, I can see that the other girls were mean, but jeez, this doesn't inspire cooperation. I mean come on!)

Rachael says

When I picked up this book, I was SO excited to read it because while I've read a lot of novels set during WWII, I've never really thought about the scientists (or their families) who worked on developing the "gadget." The unusual nature of the setting, and the "casting" of Dewey Kerrigan, a techie little girl who has spent so much of her childhood alone, really intrigued me. And there were aspects of this book that I liked, but given my anticipation, I was disappointed in this book.

Why? I thought the ending was way too ambiguous, with no real explanation of the aftermath of the bomb being dropped on Japan. In reality, this event changed the whole world! The book jacket says that Klages is working on a sequel-- will she deal with that, or skip ahead? I also thought it strange that in 3 places, Klages switches from writing in past tense to writing in present tense. Is there some deep meaning in that or is it just bad editing?

Additionally, it's just a personal preference of mine, but I didn't like that Dewey had to endure so much tragedy while Suze's life, though not perfect, is not nearly so affected by the war. Dewey is such a likeable character, and I wanted her to have the happiness she deserved. Without giving too much away, Klages' handling of Dewey's emotional reaction to the biggest tragedy is sensitive and realistic, but the author really doesn't handle **any** of the legal or logistical/formal repercussions. To me, that hurt the credibility of the "plot twist."

I think this book is listed as YA, although the publisher lists it as for ages 9 and up. So as I read this, it was very striking how every adult in the book seems to smoke and/or drink alcohol on a regular basis. I've never noticed that so much in a children's or YA novel before. It felt jarring and strange, even if it fit the time period. Certainly my grandparents, who were close to the ages of the parents in this book, smoked and had their cocktails. But it just seemed really odd that so much attention was paid to it. Was she just trying to illustrate how stressed out all these scientists were?

Finally, it really irritated me how often Suze's parents took the Lord's name in vain. It just really didn't seem necessary to me.

Margaret says

It's November 1943, and budding inventor Dewey Kerrigan is on her way to New Mexico to live with her father. When she arrives, she finds that she'll be living in Los Alamos, where her father is involved with a secret project which has something to do with the war. I liked this a lot: the writing is lucid, and the depiction of the time and place is absorbing and convincing.

CLM says

It was foolish of me to think reading one chapter late last night was a good idea. I read the whole book, and sobbed. It was late enough when I started. Sigh.

What an unusual topic, and how vividly depicted and beautifully written. I loved Dewey's interaction with real people, not overdone but very convincing. Lots of little touches were fascinating, as for instance, the difficulty applying to college from a school that didn't exist, or the casual description of a five cent package of Koolaid as a treat. I also liked that Suze, although clueless about science, was closer to guessing what was going on than Dewey, and I appreciated the underplayed ending. Some authors, even talented ones, can't resist being cutesy - I am thinking of the talented Gladys Malvern in which some historical character in early AD mutters to another something like, "These Christians, they'll never constitute a critical mass, it's just a passing fad." That breaks the mood, by interjecting the author into the story.

Jess says

Dewey (11) lives in a town which can't be named. Her father, a scientist, works on a "gadget" (along with hundreds of others) that can't be discussed. Welcome to daily life in the Manhattan project.

Characters the reader can relate to with understandable and clear prose. Readers get the feel of what it's like for children living in Los Alamos while their parents build the Atom bomb.

Klaces has a good grasp on what it's like to be a kid when it comes to: not being privy to information, the relationships between Dewey and Suze, the use of patriotism as an argument for most things, etc. Well written but more could have been included at the close. Not sure if YA readers will comprehend the Trinity site.

One major complain: Where's the explanation note? I cannot believe Klages ends the book without one. Her list of further reading materials doesn't take the place of something on the topic in the book. What happened to the scientists and their families? How did they react to what they created (hinted at in the story) What about radiation poisoning? Etc. Etc.

There are dozens of additional questions readers could ask. Several have come to my mind since I finished

the book. I don't expect her to answer all of them fully but I do expect her to say something. What the scientists created changed the world. Surely this deserves more than a footnote's worth of explanation.

Morgan Dhu says

Ellen Klages' YA historical novel *Green Glass Sea* is a wonderful read. Set during World War II, it is the story of ten-year-old Dewey Kerrigan, whose mathematician father has been recruited to work on the top-secret program to develop a nuclear bomb.

Dewey's mother left the family when Dewey was a baby, and she has grown up being shuffled between her father and her maternal grandmother - but now that her father is settled for the time bring in Los Alamos and her grandmother has been incapacitated with a stroke, Dewey rejoins her father and tries to make a life with him in the closed community of scientists, engineers, technicians, military personnel and their families that make up the core of the Manhattan Project.

It's not easy for Dewey to fit in. She's short, needs glasses, and wears a shoe with a lift because one leg is shorter than the other due to a childhood injury. And she isn't all that interested in typical "girl" things - she's a born scientist and engineer, and spends her free time tinkering with gears, radio parts, and other useful things she finds at the Los Alamos dump.

Still, Dewey is happy to be with her father - until he's called away on business and she has to stay with the Gordons and their daughter Suze. Suze - tall and solidly built, with a creative mind and an artist's independent spirit - doesn't fit in either, but she wants to. She misses her home in Berkeley, and she resents the time her parents spend working on the project, something that affects her more than most other kids because both her parents are scientists. And she resents having to live with "screwy Dewey."

In *Green Glass Sea*, Klages portrays the reality of life at the heart of the war effort, where secrecy is paramount and building "the gadget" that it is hoped will win the war is on everyone's mind.

By telling the story through the uncritical eyes of a child, Klages is also able to explore issues of class, gender and race in the late 1940s, amidst the fervour of war. From the social distinctions on base reflected in who is housed where, to war propaganda that is focused on Hitler when referring to the European theatre, but on "Japs" as a group when dealing with the Asian theatre, to the peer pressure on Suze and Dewey to be "normal girls," *Green Glass Sea* is an unflinching look at wartime society in the U.S.

But it is in the characters Dewey and Suze that the book gives the young audience it is intended for its greatest gift. As they come to know and feel comfortable in the things that distinguish them from the other girls, and develop a friendship that empowers them both, they become role models for every girl who is drawn to a different set of interests and goals from those society sets out for her.

Arminzerella says

This work of historical fiction tells the story of the Manhattan Project through the eyes of some of the children who might have experienced it by proxy as their parents (scientists affiliated with the project) worked on it in secret.

Dewey Kerrigan comes to live with her father in New Mexico when she is eleven. She's small for her age and doesn't fit in well with other kids. Also, one of her legs is longer than the other due to a childhood accident. She's really smart, though, and fascinated by how things work – she's well on her way to becoming a brilliant scientist herself. Dewey eventually becomes friends with another girl, Suze, who's also lonely and excluded by the other kids. They end up living together while Dewey's father is in Washington DC on important (and secret, always secret) business.

The book is sprinkled with major events of the time period, and famous figures who worked on the Manhattan Project – Dewey meets some of them and gets help with her inventions. I was surprised to learn how many “big names” were contemporaries and that they had collaborated together on this (which, I guess, only shows how much I don't know). It doesn't explain, however, what the devastating effects of the bomb are. While the Project is disruptive for the kids in the story, it's more because it takes their parents away from them, and not because they really know much about it. The story is more about the kids, and the actual Project is in the background.

This was an ok read, but not amazing.

Sarah says

I really wanted to like this book. Really. Unfortunately, I didn't. The historical setting of Los Alamos was intriguing, but I had qualms with the plot and its predictability. It moved rather slowly for me and also didn't say enough about how devastating the Gadget was.

spoiler

I couldn't understand for the life of me why the Gadget's effects of creating the Green Glass Sea were supposed to be a fitting last connection between Dewey and her father. This turn of events didn't sit well with me as they seemed to negate the destruction and damage the Gadget could do.

Luann says

When I was in high school, I did an extra credit report on Oppenheimer, "Little Boy," and "Fat Man." It was all new to me, and so interesting and horrifying that I have always been very interested in that area of history. This is a work of historical fiction about the scientists who worked on the atomic bomb and their families. It is told from the point of view of the children, who were not given many details of the highly classified project and thus not many details make it into the story. The bomb is a looming presence in the story, though, only because the reader has knowledge that the characters do not.

Ultimately, the book is about its characters - who are written so well that I would immediately recognize

them if I met them. Especially Dewey! What a great character! Not only do I really like her, but I'm so happy to find a girl protagonist who is good at math and likes to build and invent things. There aren't enough of those in children's literature. Not that I'm good at math, necessarily, but I want girls who ARE good at math and science to be encouraged.

I liked this book a lot, and highly recommend it!

Shawna Shade says

I am a huge fan of Historical Fiction and I can easily justify my binge reading because I am also learning history, even though sometimes authors spend less time on the history part and more time on the fiction part in some books. Thankfully, the author of The Green Glass Sea did her research. The fiction element of the story I did not enjoy as much only because the story of Dewey - the main character- is so sad and I am a sucker for happy endings, however, there is rarely a happy ending when war is the main theme of a book. The history part of this book I enjoyed and learned a great deal about Los Alamos, the “gadget” and the events leading up to the bombing of Japan. The most interesting part for me were the conversations I had with friends whose parents or grandparents were involved with the bomb or had visited The Green Glass Sea site. I cringed when the characters visited the site and wanted to yell “no, don’t touch it!” Even though these characters are fiction, due to the real-life people who visited and were around the radiation we now have the knowledge of the risks and have taken precautions to limit those risks. I do wonder what people will be thanking us for 50-60 years from now, what’s our “atomic bomb”?

For me a good book is one that evokes emotion and makes me want to investigate the topic or themes further or wonder what the characters are doing now. I experienced various emotions while reading this book from sadness to anger and have started reading the sequel, White Sands, Red Menace to see what happens next.

Emily says

(Please note: since I'm assuming that only someone who has read the book would want to read a review hidden on account of spoilers, I'm not going to spend anytime describing the book's premise.)

Would have given this one 3.5 stars if I could have. The ending, with the trip to the green glass sea, and then the announcement on the radio turned off at the last moment, still haunts me. I've perused a few of the other reviews, and noticed that many people fault this book for not putting across more forcefully the devastation the atomic bombs wrought, but the fact that Klages barely touches on the horror of atomic warfare -- which the characters in the book are of course largely ignorant of -- ironically makes the book more powerful in its subtlety. Perhaps someone ignorant of the events of Aug. 6th (or Aug. 5th in the time zone in which the story is taking place) would glide right over the ending and be unmoved by it. It does require the reader to bring some knowledge to the book for it to really work. On a similar note, one reviewer thought it was wrong or at least inappropriate for Dewey to take a piece of the glass and to think of it as her father's last gift to her, but again, I found this to be subtle and heart-breaking. I didn't need to be told that atomic warfare is bad. I know that. And this is a story told from Dewey's point of view, and as chilling as the thought of that glass is, at the same time her father's genius and the abstract beauty of science are a part of it. It's complicated and devastating, just like life.

So why didn't I give this book more stars? Because I found the plotting quite predictable. When the good bye between Dewey and her father was so emotional and drawn out, I knew right then he wasn't coming back. When Suze flung her arm around Dewey as they rounded the corner with the wagon, I knew the mean girls would be right there, and bingo, there they were. Suze's sudden blooming into an artist also did not seem convincing to me. And sometimes I found myself wishing that the author had a lighter touch and just a glimmer of a sense of humor. For these reasons, and because the ending of this book was so utterly perfect in its chilling way, I'm not sure I'll be seeking out the sequel.
