



Waterfire Saga, Book One Deep Blue (A Waterfire Saga Novel)

By Jennifer Donnelly

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Deep in the ocean, in a world not so different from our own, live the merpeople. Their communities are spread throughout the oceans, seas, and freshwaters all over the globe.

When Serafina, a mermaid of the Mediterranean Sea, awakens on the morning of her betrothal, her biggest worry should be winning the love of handsome Prince Mahdi. And yet Sera finds herself haunted by strange dreams that foretell the return of an ancient evil. Her dark premonitions are confirmed when an assassin's arrow poisons Sera's mother. Now, Serafina must embark on a quest to find the assassin's master and prevent a war between the Mer nations. Led only by her shadowy dreams, Sera searches for five other mermaid heroines who are scattered across the six seas. Together, they will form an unbreakable bond of sisterhood and uncover a conspiracy that threatens their world's very existence.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Gr 5–8—Donnelly, perhaps best-known for her lush and emotionally resonant historical fiction, tries her hand at middle-grade fantasy. Not one to dip a toe into a genre, she dives right in with a four-volume underwater saga of the mer, complete with four thousand years of Atlantean history and magic. In *Deep Blue*, readers meet Serafina, a 16-year-old mermaid and heir apparent to the realm, on the day of her betrothal as part of her Dokimí ceremony. All goes swimmingly, despite her nervousness and qualms about her intended, until her mother, the ruler of Miromara, is felled by a sniper's arrow. Serafina's worries take a more serious, geopolitical turn as she and her best friend, Neela, are on the run and seeking to avoid an all-out war among the mer nations. The "merlfriends" have been summoned by the same magical dream and are drawn to search for four other mermaids who will join together and save the world from a dark, evil force. There's a lot going on, yet despite the convoluted backstory and the dreaded "terragogg" (human) degradation of the oceans, everything gets a light, surface treatment. There's little character development, beyond the protagonist, or sense of real danger, and even the spells that abound seem to exist for expediency and nick-of-time escapes. All that said, the story is appropriately cinematic, and perhaps with a few songs added to the mix, could be adapted into an animated Disney hit.—Luann Toth, School Library Journal

From [Booklist](#)

Just when Sera, the heir to the throne of a vast underwater mermaid matriarchy, is basking in the success of perfectly performing the rites of ascendancy, her city is ambushed, her parents are killed, and—now officially but reluctantly Regina—she's on the run from powerful forces seeking to destroy much more than just her city. If that weren't enough, Sera's been having terrifyingly vivid dreams, which summon her and five other teenage mermaids to a mysterious coven of river witches in order to decipher an ancient prophecy and unlock their hidden powers. Best-selling Donnelly (*Revolution*, 2010) builds an alluring mermaid civilization and history, filled with painterly descriptions of Sera's underwater palace and its unearthly architecture, her sumptuous wardrobe, and the menagerie of half-human, half-marine animal denizens. There's also plenty of romantic tension with handsome mermen, strife between merls (that's girl mermaids) from rival regions, and some powerful female friendships amid the fast-paced plot, filled with wondrous magic. This series opener raises far more questions than it answers, but it lays a promising groundwork for the forthcoming volumes. HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY: This \$500,000 marketing campaign features TV spots, a national author tour, and even an original song. This series will be a part of your world. Grades 7-11. --Sarah Hunter

Review

5Q 4P J S As the first in a planned series, there will be lots of buzz about this book, and that buzz will not be unfounded. Serafina is about to be crowned heir to her mother's throne. She knows what is expected of her, but is she really ready to rule? That is the question Sera must answer when tragedy strikes and her kingdom and parents are taken captive. Barely escaping with her life and her freedom, she is left with no choice but to seek out the ancient force—no more than a legend, really—that has haunted her dreams but may, at least, provide answers. A fantastic addition to the genre of mermaids, this book will also appeal to readers of action and those who appreciate usurped leaders taking back their kingdom. It starts with a common enough concept: a royal girl who is worried about her betrothal and about love. Donnelly then adds layers of complexity to the tale and weaves her story into that of Atlantis. Friendship, trust, and responsibility are major themes as Sera struggles to grasp that she is really her kingdom's only hope. Quick-witted, loveable characters and a well-planned fantasy world make this an all-encompassing book. Readers will eagerly await

future volumes and the answers they will provide.-Kristi Sadowski. VOYA"

Gr 5-8 Donnelly, perhaps best-known for her lush and emotionally resonant historical fiction, tries her hand at middle-grade fantasy. Not one to dip a toe into a genre, she dives right in with a four-volume underwater saga of the mer, complete with four thousand years of Atlantean history and magic. In *Deep Blue*, readers meet Serafina, a 16-year-old mermaid and heir apparent to the realm, on the day of her betrothal as part of her Dokim ceremony. All goes swimmingly, despite her nervousness and qualms about her intended, until her mother, the ruler of Miromara, is felled by a sniper's arrow. Serafina's worries take a more serious, geopolitical turn as she and her best friend, Neela, are on the run and seeking to avoid an all-out war among the mer nations. The "merlfriends" have been summoned by the same magical dream and are drawn to search for four other mermaids who will join together and save the world from a dark, evil force. There's a lot going on, yet despite the convoluted backstory and the dreaded "terragogg" (human) degradation of the oceans, everything gets a light, surface treatment. There's little character development, beyond the protagonist, or sense of real danger, and even the spells that abound seem to exist for expediency and nick-of-time escapes. All that said, the story is appropriately cinematic, and perhaps with a few songs added to the mix, could be adapted into an animated Disney hit. Luann Toth, *School Library Journal SLJ*"

Donnelly (*Revolution*) opens the four-book *Waterfire Saga* with a richly imagined novel set in an undersea world of mermaids descended from the lost citizens of Atlantis. Serafina is heir to the Mediterranean realm of Miromara, but just as she is about to be recognized as its future ruler in the high-pressure Dokim ceremony, a devastating attack throws her life into flux. Led by cryptic dreams they share, Serafina and fellow princess Neela try to evade the conquering forces while seeking four other powerful young mermaids. Donnelly blends references to ancient myth and human language (especially Latin), with a mermaid culture that has its own magic, lore, and slang ("currensea," "merlfriend") that may strike some readers as too cutesy. Themes of conquering fear and believing in oneself are woven throughout, along with an acknowledgment of humans' environmental impact on the sea and its inhabitants. Despite the high stakes and a few frightening moments, the story is never overserious; it's just right for readers who have grown up with, but aged out of, *The Little Mermaid* and the Disney Fairies franchise. Ages 10-14. PW"

The award-winning author teams up with Disney to deliver a book seemingly tailor-made for commercial success. Imagine an undersea world populated by mers of every type: Blond, blue-tailed seafolk exist, but the variety described goes far behind that stereotype; some are crab-legged or stranger. It's a complex world, created magically as Atlantis fell. Now, the evil behind the fall threatens again, and this time it's teamed up with a terragogg (human) bent on destroying ecosystems. Six mermaids have been summoned in dreams to save a world suddenly under attack. Exposition-heavy descriptions of a sometimes-nonsensical society (dresses and other human accoutrements that can't possibly enhance undersea life are described in downright cinematic detail, and mer-derived slang-for example, "merlfriend"-comes across as forced) dominate the beginning. They eventually give way to a plot-driven tale of prophesied saviors getting to know each other and preparing for an epic battle (and several more volumes). The merls have little to no personality (protagonist Serafina somewhat excepted), but then, this book is aimed at upper-preteen/early-teen readers who might enjoy finding themselves in the text. The diversity of the cast (white, black, Asian and Indian are all represented among the chosen) deserves some props. Readers who put aside the sense that they are being primed for products and just imagine the movie it ought to be may find it palatable enough. (Fantasy. 11-14) Kirkus"

As the heir to the underwater kingdom of Miromara, mermaid Serafina prepares for the ceremonial testing that will prove her fitness as a ruler and ensure her betrothal to the crown prince of a neighboring realm. Unfortunately, just as the successful ceremony comes to an end, Serafina and her people are attacked, her mother and father are killed, and Serafina and her childhood friend Neela are forced to flee. The girls realize

then that they've both been having prophetic dreams of a great evil disrupting the underwater world, and they follow the instructions in their vision to search for four other young mermaids who may hold the keys to defeating this new threat. A skilled hand in historical fiction, Donnelly (author of *Revolution*, BCCB 11/10 and *A Northern Light*, BCCB 7/03) incorporates elements of classic history and the myth of Atlantis into her construction of this fantasy under the sea, but she also makes room for modern touches, especially in the details of Serafina's daily life. The plot, however, is overly stuffed, with the girls facing off not only with several villainous creatures but also traveling through an alternate mirror world that is discordant with the rest of the underwater mythology; an increasingly unwieldy cast of characters also makes it difficult to determine who's a significant player and who's just emotional bait to add drama. Still, the relationship between the two friends is often touching, and their banter has a cozy intimacy that will likely resonate with young girls and their BFFs. Hand this to middle-graders who have outgrown Disney's *The Little Mermaid* but who aren't ready for the darkness of Porter's *Lost Voices* (BCCB 9/11). KQG BCCB"

Just when Sera, the heir to the throne of a vast underwater mermaid matriarchy, is basking in the success of perfectly performing the rites of ascendancy, her city is ambushed, her parents are killed, and-now officially but reluctantly Regina-she's on the run from powerful forces seeking to destroy much more than just her city. If that weren't enough, Sera's been having terrifyingly vivid dreams, which summon her and five other teenage mermaids to a mysterious coven of river witches in order to decipher an ancient prophecy and unlock their hidden powers. Best-selling Donnelly (*Revolution*, 2010) builds an alluring mermaid civilization and history, filled with painterly descriptions of Sera's underwater palace and its unearthly architecture, her sumptuous wardrobe, and the menagerie of half-human, half-marine animal denizens. There's also plenty of romantic tension with handsome mermen, strife between merls (that's girl mermaids) from rival regions, and some powerful female friendships amid the fast-paced plot, filled with wondrous magic. This series opener raises far more questions than it answers, but it lays a promising groundwork for the forthcoming volumes. HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY: This \$500,000 marketing campaign features TV spots, a national author tour, and even an original song. This series will be a part of your world. - Sarah Hunter Booklist"

Users Review

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