



# Above World

*Jenn Reese*

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Thirteen-year-old Aluna has lived her entire life under the ocean with the Coral Kampii in the City of Shifting Tides. But after centuries spent hidden from the Above World, her colony's survival is in doubt. The Kampii's breathing necklaces are failing, but the elders are unwilling to venture above water to seek answers. Only headstrong Aluna and her friend Hoku are stubborn and bold enough to face the terrors of land to search for way to save their people.

But can Aluna's warrior spirit and Hoku's tech-savvy keep them safe? Set in a world where overcrowding has led humans to adapt—growing tails to live under the ocean or wings to live on mountains—here is a ride through a future where greed and cruelty have gone unchecked, but the loyalty of friends remains true.

## Above World Details

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Author : Jenn Reese

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# **From Reader Review Above World for online ebook**

## **Livia Blackburne says**

A fun and imaginative middle grade fantasy adventure. I went into it knowing I'd love the martial arts, but it was the characters that really won me over. I loved how honorable Aluna and her friends are and loved seeing how they supported and helped each other.

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## **Page Passion says**

Above World was an action packed, adventure filled novel. Aluna and Hoku have lived under water their whole lives, in the City of Shifting Tides. They are Kampii, a breed of genetically mutated humans that are designed to thrive under water. Bu when Aluna finds her friend dead, she not only realizes that her technology is failing but that she needs to fix it by traveling to the Above World where all her answers will be found. Or so she thinks.

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## **Benji Martin says**

I loved this book. The idea was new. I loved the questions it made me think. Would it be possible for people to live permanently underwater with better technology?" Would they have to eat everything raw? Would their skin get all wrinkly? I loved the characters. I felt their fear, their love, their amusement. They were all very believable. I loved the action. Reese's martial arts training helps make all of the fighting scenes realistic and exciting. I loved the story. There was never a dull moment for me. And oh yeah. I loved the electronic raccoon.

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## **Ivy says**

I wish I could give this book four stars, but because of pacing and a logic question, I just cannot. It was a very delightful book, in any case, and much worth reading.

One of the reasons I really enjoyed it was that the immense world-building is so well done, I actually felt like I was there with the characters. The world is in the future, where many humans long ago got tech to help them survive in extreme places, as the world changed. Our main character hails from the Kampii civilization, which is underwater. We also meet Aviars (bird people who live in the sky) and the Equians (horse people who live in the desert). The other humans that are left on land are mostly savages, with vicious tech that turns them into brutal killing machines. The author described everything so well, and just enough. There

were no long-winded boring descriptions, but enough to help you build a picture in your head. I was impressed.

I also liked the characters. You could really see Aluna's fiery personality in everything she did. As for Hoku, his love of tech made him a fun character, and also quite helpful to his friends. The other people they meet later on, such as Calli and Dash, are also very well developed characters, especially for entering later in the book. The little hints of romance are also quite fun.

The plot was an enjoyable one--two kids off on a grand adventure in the broken world to save their people. The "good old story," and it still managed to be entirely unique, with all the tech stuff and the different sorts of people. However, the pacing was a little slow at times. The book started off quite exciting, with a shark and a dead friend of Aluna's, and that excitement kept up as Aluna and Hoku left for their quest. But I'd say it was probably when they reached the Aviars, things slowed down for me. I took a long break from the book, so maybe why it felt this was such a dramatic shift in the pace, but then I had to ask myself why I was taking a break in the first place. See, it wasn't entirely boring, but the plot wasn't going anywhere at that point. You could feel Aluna's frustration to get moving as well, but hers wasn't where mine was stemming from. After they left the Aviars, the plot picked up again, with full speed. From then on, I absolutely loved it, and was very happy that I'd continued reading.

Another thing that kind of bugged me was just a logic thing. I was really confused when they were underwater, as shifts from water to an underground room were not very clear. It was hard for me to picture fight scenes during the climax in HydroTek, because I didn't know if they were in water or in a room. It seemed that the people with fish tails were swimming, but then it also seemed like the fight would not work underwater. I don't know; maybe I missed something.

As for the climax, it was very exciting, and though the end left a few ties hanging, it was still fairly satisfying. Definitely worth a read, and don't let my minor complaints scare you off!

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## **Elisabeth Jewell says**

Clever imagining of a future world, where the human race has escaped to extreme habitats and have learned how to modify their bodies (done at puberty or at birth) to survive. Aluna lives in a underwater city of Kampiis (mermaids) where their breathing necklaces. Having lost the technological knowledge across the centuries, Aluna puts off "growing her tail" (she still has the legs she was born with) disobeys the Elders' isolationist orders and travels to the surface and land in search of technological help from the surface dwellers. She and her smart buddy Hoku find themselves in the midst of a war for freedom between other modified species (Winged women, centaurs, mermaids, shark-men) and the enslaving "owners" of the technology who are eager to carve their captives up for spare body parts.

Despite the potentially heavy nature of the story, this is a non-gory, gripping story with a strong heroine and a clever supporting actor, suitable for fourth to seventh graders. Older readers will be less charmed by the simplistic plot devices and adorable animal friends, but this was just the sort of book that would have captivated me as a child, and spawned hours of make-believe in a fantastical world.

Received this as an advance review copy from Candlewick Press, for review purposes.

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## **Tara Hall says**

I was skeptical about this story when I picked up the ARC. But it won me over with a fantastic dystopian world, strong, unique characters, and great suspense. This is a must-read for fantasy and scifi fans of all ages!

Somehow Reese has managed to combine The Little Mermaid with an action dystopian. It sounds crazy, I know. But it works oh-so-well. It's not just mermaids, though, there are harpies, centaurs, even half-dolphin half-human creatures we don't even have a name for. All have their own unique society and culture that blends seamlessly without being overwhelming. There's almost a Gulliver's Travels vibe at some points as our main characters move from place to place into different worlds.

The characters themselves are phenomenal. Aluna reminded me a lot of Tris from Divergent. She has an innate strength and self-sufficiency that cannot be dominated. Her need to protect the people she loves sees her through incredible trials and dangers. She is an admirable role model for young women readers. At her side is the adorable, geeky Hoku, a young absent-minded professor who possesses the same strength of character and heart that Aluna does. I related to him instantly as the kid who's too smart to have friends his own age, but he proves his strength over and over again. The secondary characters are never lacking in development, and the romance is understated and perfectly young in its depiction. Boys and girls alike will find something, and someone, to love here.

The suspense doesn't let up for a page. The author's experience with martial arts enriches the fight scenes with just the right amount of detail. The world is at stake, and the story never loses sight of that, but there are also intense moments of one-on-one life or death battles. All of them written with a very readable style that is accessible to younger readers but never bores adults.

As with all good dystopians, this book has some significant things to say about the state of our modern world. In the end, this story is about the world coming together despite our differences. It manages to be a post-apocalyptic story with a message of hope.

Highly recommended for... basically everyone!

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## **Stephanie says**

I was incredibly lucky - I got to read this book multiple times in manuscript form, and it is AWESOME. Super-fun science-fiction adventure for kids, with genetically-engineered mermaids and girls with wings AND incredible fighting skills. Deep, important friendships and sweet first romance. This book has everything, and I love it so much.

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## **Greg van Eekhout says**

I was privileged to read Above World prior to publication and sent in this blurb, which appears (in part) on the back of the book:

Jenn Reese's richly imagined future teems with biotech mer people and mighty centaurs, but her characters remain so very human, driven by friendship, love, and courage. I'd choose Jenn Reese's characters as my companions on any adventure. Above World delivers thunderously exciting action worthy of a summer blockbuster, but the battles and perils never get in the way of its universal story about growing up.

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## **Christa Seeley says**

Originally reviewed at Hooked on Books

When I started reading Above World I was expecting a pretty basic middle grade title. A fun fantasy story that I could lose myself in for a little while. Something along the lines of Disney's The Little Mermaid. What I found, however, was a delightful fantasy mixed with some science fiction and a strong story I could really get behind.

Unlike many fantasy stories, this book takes place in a futuristic version of our world. In the future, over-population has led humans to find more creative places to reside – the ocean, the mountains, the desert. Various advances in technology have allowed humans to adapt to these environments and for awhile everything is fine. However, when the technology begins to fail, one young mermaid (or Kampii) Aluna makes her way to the surface to find the solution to the problem and save her underwater people. I was fascinated by this futuristic society and the unique ways humans adapted.

I also enjoyed that this novel revolved around a full, strong cast of characters. Though Aluna is a key character, it is not simply the case of one amazing do-it-all heroine, surrounded by a bunch of side kicks. All four characters – Aluna, Hoku, Calli and Dash – are unique, they come from different worlds and they all have something important to contribute.

I found there were some important messages in this book – in particular the dangers of relying to heavily on technology. This is a particularly relevant and insightful message given how “plugged in” the younger generation (as well as my own) has become. Above World is an enchanting and inventive middle grade title, with a stunning cast of characters and an interesting way of looking at the future. I may have been expecting a standard mermaid tale but instead I got something much more complex and engaging.

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## **TheBookSmugglers says**

Originally reviewed on The Book Smugglers

Aluna has lived her entire life - all thirteen years - under the sea. She is one of the Kampii, a water-born splinter group of humans that took to the oceans generations ago, to escape the death and wastes of the earth above. Aluna loves the water and her people, but she's frustrated with the future that has been set for her with the Kampii. Because their numbers are ever dwindling, all Kampii women are prohibited from the exciting and dangerous jobs (like hunting) and must focus on the important job of, one day, rearing children. At the same time as the Kampii's population dwindles, their tech also starts to fail at an increasing rate - every Kampii is given a "shell" that allows them to breathe underwater, powered by a mysterious source called HydroTek, created by wise and powerful ancestors many generations before.

Over the decades, the Kampii have lost the knowledge of their forebearers, trusting blindly that their technology will always remain in tact and provide for their needs - so when shells start to fail and people start to die, Aluna is terrified at the stagnant, passive stance of the Kampii Elders. Determined to fight for the future of her people, to stop others from dying needless deaths, Aluna decides to spurn the stance of her tribe leaders and searches for answers in the world above. With her best friend Hoku, Aluna sets off on an adventure filled with hidden truths, fierce warriors, new friends, and terrifying enemies.

The first novel in a planned trilogy, *Above World* is a truly fantastic start to what might just be a new favorite series. In other words: I loved this book. Set in a wonderfully imagined future world, solidly written, with memorable characters and strong central themes, *Above World* is pretty freaking awesome.

One of my favorite things about this book is the worldbuilding. Set in a future version of our own Earth, *Above World* is, in fact, a post-apocalyptic future dystopia of sorts. The human race has fallen to overpopulation, plague, and strife; in order to survive, humanity has used science to change their very physiology. Some have taken to the skies, becoming winged Aviars with hollow bones and accustomed to high altitudes; others have taken to the depths as Kampii, with fish tails, dense muscles and bones to withstand extreme deep, cold, and dark. These different splinter groups - adapted to different environments from desert planes to caves - are *fascinating*, and even more fascinating is the manner in which we learn about the fate of all these different groups and the ancestors who made the choice to embark on this post-human future. There are no huge info-dumps, no awkward or inorganic relays of this data - everything unfolds gracefully, smartly, over the course of the book. While I'm not sure that everything actually makes sense (the easy adaptation that Aluna and Hoku have on land from a life spent in the sea, most notably in their speech and ability to move feels a little off), it doesn't really matter because there are plenty of other nuances that make the experience worth it - Aluna discovering her speed on land for the first time during a sparring match, for example.

I also love that to these characters - Aluna, Hoku, Callie and Dash - technology *is* akin to magic. We see Hoku and Callie in particular struggle to understand the mechanics behind the tech (from electricity to audio/video, and a particular programmed robotic pet), but for the most part, the underlying principles of the technology that has shaped their different peoples and their future remains an advanced mystery. It's a rather elegant solution, really, and one I appreciated wholeheartedly.

From a character perspective, *Above World* also shines. I love, love, LOVE Aluna. She's impulsive and fearless, fiercely devoted to her people and to her friends - but that doesn't mean she's flawless. She acts without thinking and gets herself into a very big pickle by the end of the book. The best thing about this? She realizes that her constant rushing headlong into trouble can be a very bad thing. Thankfully, her best friend Hoku - the boy that tends to freeze in the face of danger, but has a huge heart and the brains to match - tends to bail her out in the nick of time. There's also Callie the Aviar, who struggles to fit in with her people and live up to her mother's legacy (but who eventually does, in spades), and Dash the Equine, who is perhaps the least fleshed out of the main cast, but still a strong figure and foil to Aluna.

Of course, there are villains galore, too. I don't want to spoil too much about them, except that they are pretty horrific - I'm talking borg-esque, hybrid human/mech/animal parts nightmares. And the identity of the villain? Also pretty cool. There are high stakes, and dark turns, and...well, I'm excited to see what happens next.

Suffice it to say, I loved this book and I eagerly await book 2, *Mirage*. Absolutely recommended, and a notable read of 2012.

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## **Pam Torres says**

If you're thinking that this is just another mermaid story you're knee deep in seaweed. Sit back, buckle in and get ready for an adventure that is full of innovative technology, out-of-the-box fight scenes and a twisty-turny plot with characters that reach out and resonate. This debut middle grade dystopian/fantasy is the first adventure in the series filled with adaptative invention, epic battles and incredible world building. Aluna is not your average heroine and shows no fear when faced with dismal odds. The imaginative tech and scary post-humans will appeal to the geek in all of us. This is one debut you don't want to miss. See the rest of my review at [www.soimfifty.blogspot.com](http://www.soimfifty.blogspot.com)

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## **Wandering Librarians says**

Aluna is a Kampii (don't call her a mermaid) who lives in the City of the Shifting Tides. The Kampii have lived under the sea for generations, having no contact with the above world of humans. But now, the breathing devices that allow the Kampii to live under water have begun to break, and no one knows how to fix them. The Kampii elders chose to ignore the problem and Aluna decides to take the problem into her own hands. With her friend Hoku, Aluna journeys to the above world in search of HydroTek.

The first scene in this book seemed right out of the Little Mermaid. We have the headstrong girl and her scared male friend going somewhere forbidden. People are called guppies as a fill in for scaredy cats, and then they are chased by a big shark. So sorry Aluna, you already have me in Little Mermaid mode.

There was some interesting world creation going on (you know I like good world creation) but the story itself was unimpressive. As things began to go to crap in the world and there's overcrowding and disease, technology allowed people to flee to other, less crappy places on Earth. Some went under water, some went to the skies, some went to the deserts and some became Upgraders, combinations of humans and machines. So I was interested in this idea of humans deciding to live in places that don't naturally support human life and that they drew on ancient myths to do so. Mermaids, harpies and centaurs, essentially.

I enjoyed being introduced to the Kampii, who have thick skin to keep them warm and eyes that can see in the dark, the Aviars, warrior bird women, have light bones and wings and are grown from eggs, and Equines, the horse people. The story itself, however, I didn't find myself especially interested in.

Aluna leaves the ocean (Kampii don't get tales until a ceremony when they're 13 where they swallow a pill) with Hoku to try to discover why her tribes' tech is breaking down. Aluna was kind of annoying. She always wanted to fight, never thought anything through, and had a really weird idea of loyalty. I know she was supposed to be acting nobly, but most of the time she was just a pain. Hoku was a little more interesting. He was interested in figuring out how things work, but still, not exactly a gripping character. I found I felt like that the whole way though. Callie, an Aviar joins them, and then Dash, an Equine that had to leave his herd because he'd been born without a horse's body. There's lots of running about and fighting the Upgraders and so on. The journey dragged (even though it was not a long book) and I wasn't really sure where it was going or what was the point.

Everyone neatly gets matched up. Callie and Hoku like each other, as do Aluna and Dash but neither admits



it. This is sure to be a series. The book ends with kind of a triumph, but there's plenty more to do to keep the world safe from the evil Upgraders. The fight is only just beginning. I have no interest in continuing on with this series. There are plenty of other much more engaging dystopias available.

Above World will be available February 14.

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### **Tammy says**

It's really almost a 4. Very entertaining and engaging. Has a lot of fighting but not much blood and gore. No language and nothing to make you blush. I will be passing along to my teenagers.

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### **ILoveBooks says**

This book has got to be one of the best dystopians I have managed to get my hands on. The world created by Author Jenn Reese is rich and extremely detailed as well as varied. The reader meets the main characters, Aluna and Hoku, right off the bat. They are both very likable and make nice foils for each other. Aluna is far more impetuous and inquisitive while Hoku is more cautious and shy. The two seem like an unlikely pair, but their differing personalities add to their charms.

Aluna and Hoku are part of the Kampii, a "tribe" of humans living underwater. The author describes a human history filled with error, one that caused humans to seek alternative living styles due to the overcrowded typical environment. Aluna and Hoku are off to a rough start at the beginning of the novel, Aluna's volatile temperament costs her several reprimands and the chance at a tail-at least until next year. Outraged, Aluna decides to take control over her own destiny and possibly help her people. There have been some strange occurrences regarding the Kampii breathing devices, they appear to be breaking down; Aluna decides to try to figure out the mystery behind them and why they are breaking.

The secondary characters in this novel are among the most memorable I have ever read. The author creates them to be incredibly dynamic and they each have stand-out characteristics that will make the reader want to get to know them. The events of this novel are exciting and innovative, the author puts the reader in a scary alternative world. The characters will act as the readers' guide to so many different places described so amazingly well by the author. Readers of all ages will love to delve into this novel.

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### **Rick Silva says**

Set in a world that mixes postapocalyptic cyberpunk with classical mythology, this story centers on Aluna of the Coral Kampii, a tribe of genetically engineered Merfolk. The Kampii are one of several familiar humanoid races that resulted from attempts by humans to alter their bodies to escape the pressures of an overpopulated world and live in places previously considered uninhabitable.

When thirteen year old Aluna learns that her people's water-breathing technology may be failing, she undertakes a daring quest to the "Above World" to find the way to save her friends and family.

Aluna is headstrong, fierce, stubborn, and determined. She's also very much a student of the martial arts, and the author's own martial arts background comes through nicely to smoothly mix real-world techniques with the fantastic elements of fighting under the sea and in the air.

In addition to the solid action sequences, *Above World* features a diverse supporting cast. Reese does a particularly job of juggling bunches of characters in a climactic battle scene while still keeping the spotlight clearly on the heroine.

This is a great start and I look forward to reading Aluna's next adventure.

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## **Kaede says**

### **3.5 stars; *History is not a fixed truth. It changes with the speaker.***

Jenn Reese's *Above World* is a story full of originality and creativity, turning the concept of underwater inhabitants into one with elaborate detail of diverse features.

But contrary to the previous statement, my biggest and sole problem with *Above World* was it's simplicity. While it serves satisfactorily as a transition from middle grade to juvenile young adult, any reader used to or accustomed only to complex pieces of literature might find their minds wandering from the premise, and potentially require several tries to be drawn back to the world Reese created.

I felt as if details that could have been spared were withheld, and the world - while intriguing - has yet to be fully developed and fleshed out to it's extent. However, the plot and characters did feel well executed and well planned, and the writing engaging. There were many times where I was so submerged (I HAD to make at least one lame water joke. I had too. It's like the world was begging me to.) in the story that I felt I actually belonged with Aluna and Hoku and was a part of their adventure.

Aluna and Hoku were two very loyal, very likable characters. A pair of best friends who were constantly traveling to new places, meeting new people - or new species, and fending off new creatures. I honestly grew quite fond of Aluna and Hoku by the end.

I did have minor issues with the telling-not-showing aspect of the book, but my complaints were kept at a minority because the problem did not have a strong hold on the entire novel. It was only at certain scenes where the trait would reveal itself.

I mentioned my regards on the simplicity of *Above World* earlier, and I'm going to touch upon that again, but in a more positive light. While I'm not the biggest fan of it, the simple nature of the story does help make understanding unfolding events and revelations easy.

The development of the characters was solid, and I think many young readers will enjoy this sort of

introduction to the vast containing dystopian genre. *Above World* isn't a book I can freely recommend to everybody, but I would push it for parents who are looking for an appropriate face-paced, entertaining, fun read for their child or children. Now *Above World* is part of a series, of which its sequel has been released, but I think I'll hold off on continuing so soon. I'll definitely be purchasing a copy of *Mirage*, the second installment, one day, because I am interested to see where Aluna and Hoku's adventures will lead them next, but I'm in no hurry. But don't get me wrong - I definitely enjoyed *Above World* and while maybe not right away, I will eventually get to the sequel to read and review for you guys!

And that's a promise.

*\*\*An advance copy of this book was provided for review. However, all opinions remain honest and my own.\*\**

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## heidi says

The past tense of "to tread" is "trod". This cranky note brought to you by aquatic humans who spend a lot of time staying still in currents. That said...

I enjoyed this book. It didn't blow me out of the proverbial water, but it was reasonably well-crafted and engaging, and I didn't check to see how much more book I had to get through.

You'll be shocked to learn that the rebellious princess is forced by her conscience to leave all she knows on the very eve of her adulthood, and venture out into the cruel wide world, armed only with a faithful technologically-able sidekick and the fighting lessons provided by her brothers.

I enjoyed the adventures and the different kinds of genetically modified humans Aluna encounters on her way. I can see this being an interesting trilogy if that's your scene.

Aluna is class-oblivious, as noted by her bestie, but I think it's easy enough to be oblivious if you are in the one percent.

Read if: You like a nice straightforward adventure story.

Skip if: You have too long a reading queue to read something unsurprising.

Also read: *The City of Ember*

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## Hallie says

From LJ write up.

Goodreads synopsis: Thirteen-year-old Aluna has lived her entire life under the ocean with the Coral Kampii in the City of Shifting Tides. But after centuries spent hidden from the Above World, her colony's survival is in doubt. The Kampii's breathing necklaces are failing, but the elders are unwilling to venture above water to seek answers. Only headstrong Aluna and her friend Hoku are stubborn and bold enough to face the terrors

of land to search for way to save their people.

But can Aluna's warrior spirit and Hoku's tech-savvy keep them safe? Set in a world where overcrowding has led humans to adapt—growing tails to live under the ocean or wings to live on mountains—here is a ride through a future where greed and cruelty have gone unchecked, but the loyalty of friends remains true.

I had a bit of trepidation starting this one, partly because it sounded a bit more "Under the seaaaa" (you all know the tune, right?) than I thought I was in the mood for, fun as that song is, and partly because it's middle grade instead of my usual YA. But neither of those proved to be problems once I was just a short way in, and even if Aluna hadn't left her ocean home (the clue *\*was\** in the title) very quickly, it would have been fine.

Or more accurately, if Aluna hadn't headed for land, followed quickly by Hoku. One of the nicest things about the book is the journey companions, and the way these two friends pick up new ones along the way. Hoku and Aluna are the classic polar opposite types of friends, with Aluna being the one who wants to be a warrior (but isn't allowed to be, though at least she can train because of her brothers' willingness to teach her), and Hoku utterly uninterested in fighting, but fascinated by technology. It's nice that there isn't just this fairly standard twist in the grrrl being feisty and keen on fighting though, as the next companion to be added is Calli, an Aviar (I'll get to the 'splinters' soon), who's just as mechanically minded and smart as Hoku. And with whom Hoku is immediately smitten, in a really sweet and funny portrayal of first love. Hoku's internal musings on kissing were delightful. Dash, who eventually joins the group, is - or should have been - an Equian word-weaver. And there's the utterly adoptable Zorro, a -- well, a very special raccoon, not to spoil anything.

The world is complicated and fascinating. As earth became over-populated and life there unsustainable, big corporations (including HydraTek) invented bio-engineering abilities to allow humans to exist under the sea, as with the Kampii and Deepfell; in the air high above earth; in the desert; and elsewhere. The Kampii refer to the Ancients, who gave them thick skin and strong bones to allow them to survive underwater, but also breathing shells, which attach to the necks and allow them to draw oxygen from the water. But the breathing shells need power to function, unlike their other adaptations, and the Kampii don't have the technological abilities to generate that power in sufficient quantities, when the breathing shells start to fail.

I thought this was all wonderful, and was quite happy to leave the details of the science aside for the most part - I'm happy to see the book as just as hybrid as the splinters, rather than being categorised as simply straight science fiction or fantasy. I did have some quibbles occasionally, however. One was about the group of Aviars Hoku and Aluna encounter and come to be allied with, Skyfeather's Landing. This group is all female, and though there are other groups which are all male, the separate communities appear to have little interaction - and there's nothing about men and women getting together for reproduction, let alone any kind of romantic interaction. And yet [mild spoiler alert] Calli's interest in Hoku is as immediate as his for her, and in fact she kisses him first.

This isn't a major point, and I suppose I only noticed it because of the evolutionary-science slant to the story. The other problem I have is harder to address, because it is absolutely nothing intentional, and I could well be misreading anyway. (It's entirely possible that things that seem quibblesome now will be explained in future books in the series too.) That problem is the depiction of the Upgraders. These are certain types of Humans, and in passing, despite our human-centric expectations, Humans are the beings with the least degree of 'humanity' to them. The name Upgrader comes from the fact that they make up for their missing or deformed body parts with a combination of techno-bits (generally adapted for violent purposes) and parts stolen from other creatures. It's not clear by the end of the book whether or not these Upgraders actually have

choice about the killing and theft of body parts for their own use, or whether it's all the fault of a few arch-villains. But lines such as these do seem disturbing: "One of the riders had no legs at all. Her torso seemed like part of the mechanical insect itself. Did these misshapen creatures really share the same ancestors as the unadorned Humans in the boat? The same ancestors as the Kampii?" and: "The Upgraders shuffled through the entrance corridor and into the room. [...] Another seemed to have bare feet, but they were made of dull-black metal. Even the toenails! If the Upgraders were Humans once, they'd left the legacy behind, as sure as the Kampii had left dry land." It comes close to reading as if the 'misshapen' bodies are indication of lack of humanity, though as I said, it's clear that nothing like that is intended, especially as one of the strengths of the book is the coming together of societies that have feared and even hated each other in the past.

I am very much looking forward to the next book. (By which I mean the next book in the Above World series, rather than the next book in my 48 Hour Book Challenge!) I do hope it won't be too long a wait.

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## **Brandy Painter says**

Originally posted at Random Musings of a Bibliophile.

I was a little hesitant to pick up Above World by Jenn Reese despite the numerous glowing reviews and comments for it I had read. It sounded dystopian, and I don't like dystopian. Finally all the praise had me curious enough to pick it up. (Also it has a beautiful cover.) Yes, it does have some shades of dystopian, but this is a book that is so much more than that. Reese sets her story in a futuristic world that is so foreign that it could be another world entirely. Into this she added myths and legends for the peoples she created. All of these elements combined with engaging characters to make an adventurous tale of bravery, loyalty, and friendship.

I was extremely impressed by the world building. Extremely. Reese created a future world in which pockets of humans who submitted to technological changes in their biology to adapt them to live in places humans normally couldn't inhabit. High altitudes, the desert, underwater. Centuries have passed since the pioneers of these colonies started them. Their descendents are reliant upon the technology that changed them and now that technology is failing. From the underwater home of Aluna and Hoku to the sky residence of the Aviars to the wild forests of the land, Reese did a phenomenal job describing them all and bringing them to life. She also gave just enough background to make the place believable and to demonstrate the motivations of those long ago pioneers who brought this world into being. I found it particularly interesting that, while this is a futuristic story and the civilizations in it rely on extremely advanced technology and science, the pocket groups that live in the various places have developed their own myths and legends for their people over the intervening centuries.

Aluna and Hoku are contrasting characters, and this story belongs to both of them. Aluna is a brave warrior who often leaps in before she thinks. Both in action and words. Hoku is cautious and strategical in what he does often to the point of inaction. Together they make a great team because they force each other to be less extreme in their personalities. Aluna's leaving Coral Kampii causes Hoku to leave as well. He may never have been moved to action but for her rebellion. At the same time Hoku's critical thinking saves Aluna from her own reckless heroics more than once. I loved this part when they were being pursued and cornered by enemies:

**"Then I'll stay," Aluna said. Besides if anyone was going to sacrifice herself for the greater good, it was going to be her.**

**"How about none of us stay," said Hoku.**

He then proceeds to create a distraction that enables them to escape. This short interaction perfectly sums up both of them and how they work as a team. I really enjoyed the fact that their relationship was 100% a friendship. Not that there is no hint of romance. There is, just not between the two of them. They meet in their journeys Calli, a young Aviar, and Dash, an exiled Equine, who provide them with romantic interests. I felt this was yet another strength of the novel. This is a MG novel and the characters are 12-13 (Dash may be a little older-I'm not sure) and Reese did an excellent job of describing the innocent giddy stirrings of young love and-all its confusion-experienced at this age:

**She hobbled over and sat a foot or so away from Dash, close enough but not too close. At least that's what she hoped he would think. Had he wanted her to sit closer?**

and

**He sat next to Calli, grateful that she never seemed to mind. Her hand rested on the ground just a few millimeters from his. And yet...those millimeters meant everything. Would he ever be brave enough to cross that distance.**

These feelings of young attraction and romance are kept to a minimum and never overshadow or detract from the greater conflict playing out. And Calli and Dash are both interesting characters with fascinating backstories in their own rights, separate from their romantic functions. They are both important members of this team that has formed and bring their own strengths to the quest to save the Kampii.

The conflict faced by Aluna and Hoku started out small as the world they came from, and grew bigger as their world grew bigger and they realized the importance of needing and working with others. There is a lot of food for thought about ethics in technology and bio-engineering here. The story does not force this on the reader, but a thoughtful reader will certainly have much to chew on after reading this.

Most of all it is an enjoyable adventure about kids who are brave enough to challenge their world and fight for the future and hope. I'm very excited to see where the story will be going in the second book, which is called Mirage and is expected to be published in 2013.

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## **Jessica (Books: A true story) says**

Above World was an interesting mix of mythological creatures and our modern world of technology. You'll find mermaids and computers in one breath. I was pleasantly surprised by the dystopian undertone to it all that gave it some wonderful depth. In this fascinating world that Jenn has built, there are several cultures based on mythological creatures that descended from humans when there wasn't room left on the earth for them to live. These new cultures live in the sea and the sky and other places that humans couldn't live. Some little details from our current world are mixed into the story which gives it a post-apocalyptic feeling and it also lets you see our world in a different way. My favorite example of this was Hoku talking about his "magic" plate but he says it used to be called "magnets." You come across several fascinating cultures on the journey and they were so creative and distinct. Curiosity about this world is what kept me reading. I liked this book overall, but the writing felt stiff and the story was a little over-told if that makes sense. The writing just didn't flow well and it didn't pull me in. The ending has some closure, but there's a lot left to tell and a lot of the world is still unexplored. It was an enjoyable read and I think kids will especially like this story.

This book is also reviewed on my blog [Books: A true story](#)

