

Blue Mar

Francesca G. Varela

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Two sisters find very different destinies in Francesca G. Varela's novel *Blue Mar*.

Laurel and Paloma have never been to El Salvador, where their beloved Abuelo grew up; gang wars fueled by climate change have made Central America too dangerous to visit. After Abuelo's unexpected death, they decide to go anyway. While spending the summer on their family's farm—now endangered by flooding and extreme weather—both women find new perspectives on climate change, and new dreams to fight for.

The relationship between Laurel and Paloma is complex. While not estranged, they struggle to connect. Laurel is enthralled by a corporation's failed attempt to turn plastic waste into an island resort, and how the place has become a rallying point for environmental activists seeking to build a self-sufficient utopia. Meanwhile, Paloma, who thought she had her future all figured out, now questions her plans in light of worsening climate change. The gap between the sisters widens thanks to their differing views on cultural identity, the human toll of climate change, and what humans owe to each other and the world.

The story's poignancy is enhanced by its familiarity: though set in an unspecified future, the picture it paints of a world choking on plastic, droughts, wildfires, new diseases, and rising ocean levels is an eerie echo of current events. The world Laurel and Paloma inhabit—and the decisions they make—will very soon be a reality for too many people. *Blue Mar*'s ultimate message, however, is not one of despair. On the contrary, it shows that, even in hopelessness, there is hope—but it must be earned, not given.

Filled with poetic turns of phrase and foreboding visuals, *Blue Mar* is a science fiction novel about awakening to the reality that everyone is responsible for humanity's well-being.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (March / April 2021)

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