



Liquid Diamond

Sebastien Blue

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The first of a planned series, Sebastien Blue's novel *Liquid Diamond* is an epic adventure reminiscent of a Grimm fairy tale. In keeping with that forthright style, the author doesn't hold back on chilling and gory moments endured by his engaging young protagonists. The result is a compelling and unique tale, creatively written and likely best appreciated by older readers.

Ten-year-old Natalia is drawn from a dreary, poverty-stricken life in Russia into a whole new world filled with malicious elves, Bigfoot-type creatures, and dangerous adventure. The glimmering pool she discovers in a cave turns out to be a portal to this strange place, and Natalia and her new friend, Catalyst, are tasked with finding out who unlocked the door that kept humans separate from this alternate world.

As Natalia and Catalyst hunt down an elusive crystal that holds the key to the mystery of the open portal, they find themselves in a series of scary, often life-threatening circumstances. Occasionally helped by Catalyst's benevolent and powerful mother, Anastasia—a vampire-like "dark angel" called a Krusnik—and constantly pursued by a malevolent elf who wants to literally devour them, the two make their way toward their goal with a dogged determination.

The story is imaginative, and Blue's world-building is effective. Natalia and Catalyst's adventures are exciting, though frequently gruesome. The beings the two children encounter range from a small and cute woodland fairy to a huge, deadly water creature reminiscent of the Loch Ness monster. Particularly disturbing is a horrific creature called a Blemmye, a relentless, flesh-eating monster that smells like the rotten carrion it prefers to consume, so much so that its odor causes Natalia to vomit each time it's near. A vicious elf who ruthlessly pursues the children is perhaps the most ghastly of them all, and certainly capable of inspiring a nightmare or two.

Liquid Diamond is an engaging and creative story, likely able to keep readers interested all the way through. There are, however, a number of novice errors in grammar, sentence construction, and dialogue. Point of view frequently shifts back and forth within a scene, making it difficult to keep track of which character's view is prominent, and Natalia is portrayed with too much maturity to make her young age credible. There are also many names and terms that younger readers may find difficult, such as creatures called Basajaunak and a town called Svartalheim. There are times when the elf's pursuit becomes repetitive, and some of the concepts of time and alternate worlds may be challenging even for older readers.

Despite these missteps, the novel flows smoothly toward a satisfying ending that leaves the door open for the next part of Natalia and Catalyst's adventure. The old-style fairy tale tone of the story may be more appropriate for an adult audience, and parents should be strongly cautioned regarding the level of disturbing images and descriptively violent moments. The author may find it beneficial to soften the more disturbing images to reach a wider audience, but overall, *Liquid Diamond* is a unique tale from an imaginative author.

JEANNINE CHARTIER HANSCOM (December 31, 2013)

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