



The Belles

Dhonielle Clayton

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Camellia Beauregard is a Belle. In the opulent world of Orléans, Belles are revered, for they control Beauty, and Beauty is a commodity coveted above all else. In Orléans, the people are born gray, they are born damned, and only with the help of a Belle and her talents can they transform and be made beautiful.

But it's not enough for Camellia to be just a Belle. She wants to be the favorite—the Belle chosen by the Queen of Orléans to live in the royal palace, to tend to the royal family and their court, to be recognized as the most talented Belle in the land. But once Camellia and her Belle sisters arrive at court, it becomes clear that being the favorite is not everything she always dreamed it would be. Behind the gilded palace walls live dark secrets, and Camellia soon learns that the very essence of her existence is a lie—that her powers are far greater, and could be more dangerous, than she ever imagined. And when the queen asks Camellia to risk her own life and help the ailing princess by using Belle powers in unintended ways, Camellia now faces an impossible decision.

With the future of Orléans and its people at stake, Camellia must decide—save herself and her sisters and the way of the Belles—or resuscitate the princess, risk her own life, and change the ways of her world forever.

The Belles Details

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From Reader Review The Belles for online ebook

Emma says

disclaimer: I'm gonna call out something in this book that really pissed me off and has the potential to be pretty harmful, so if you don't want to know anything about the plot don't open this review ???

I've been anticipating this book since last summer. I was so ready to love and support this. So finding out that the sapphic lead character in this book gets killed off pretty much feels like a slap in the face. (**edit:** apparently it's both the only lead sapphic character AND the only sapphic side character?? this just gets worse???) I think this is something queer readers should know, and I'm so incredibly frustrated by this news.

I don't want this book to be blacklisted. A lot of people have already loved it, and I know it will offer representation for a lot more people. But please don't ignore this issue. It hurts to see the characters who represent you die unnecessary and tragic deaths in book after book, and queer readers don't deserve to be blindsided by that.

another update: I've seen on twitter that there's also misgendering of a trans character, and the specific line is mentioned in this review. I haven't read the book and can't personally speak on the representation and to what extent this is challenged within the text, so I'm just gonna leave this info here as a content/trigger warning for trans readers (and something to keep in mind/be aware of for cis readers).

Emma Giordano says

4.5 stars! I had a lot of fun with this story and cannot wait to see where things go from here!

TW: sexual assault, "bury your gays" trope

The writing style of *The Belles* is one of it's most prominent points. The prose is decadent, entrancing, and lavish. For me personally, it was a little too flowery at some points but all around unique and interesting. It's so sweet, full of detailed descriptions of vibrant and sugary imagery, I almost felt as if I could get a cavity from just reading. I do feel the pacing was quite slow in the beginning. With so much to set up in this fantasy world, it did drag a bit but as soon as the plot picked up and more significant events were happening, the pace improved.

The world is equally as individual – Set in a fantasy New Orleans where citizens are born grey, a group of women called the Belles bring beauty to the kingdom of Orlèans. Though there is no modern concept of race/racial tensions, color is beauty and changes as fast as any other fashion trend. It was an interesting take on the many conversations surrounding equality that we are already having today. Regarding the Belles, I did struggle to fully understand how their magic works in the beginning but it felt well developed by the end of the story and I am excited to see how their powers continue to expand in the following books.

I really enjoyed the cast of characters. Camille, Remy, and Edel are my favorites (I CANNOT wait to get to know Edel more in book two!) I would have loved more development on the other Belles as they are ushered

out of the story early in the beginning and only appear in short notes to Camille, but I am very hopeful for some powerful girl-squad action in the future. I also love the development of the villain(s) in this story. They are SO DARK AND CRUEL, the perfect antagonist, creating so many conflicts and difficult decisions all throughout the novel. While writing this review, I've decided the sinister elements of the story are some of my favorites. On the contrary, I feel the romance in this story was one of the weaker parts. I don't feel there was enough development of their relationship for me to feel real chemistry between the characters, and that lessened the impact of certain events throughout the story.

Overall, I had a fun time reading *The Belles*. If you're in need of a whimsical yet dark fantasy novel, this is the one for you!

I received a free copy of this book from Disney Hyperion at Book Expo 2017. I had no obligation to review this book and all opinions are my own.

Nenia ? Queen of Literary Trash, Protector of Out-of-Print Gems, Khaleesi of Bodice Rippers, Mother of Smut, the Unrepentant, Breaker of Convention ? Campbell says

Instagram || Twitter || Facebook || Amazon || Pinterest

I'm basically that one friend of yours who keeps threatening to delete their Facebook account but never does, only instead of "delete their Facebook account" replace that with "stop reading YA." After the utter disappointment that was CHILDREN OF BLOOD AND BONE, I decided that I was officially putting everyone's YA reviews on notice. I was tired of getting duped.

And then I read THE BELLES.

THE BELLES is not a perfect book. The first 100 pages or so are a nightmare-confection of hyphenated words, overuse of the word "Belle," and more pink, pretty, fluffy things than you would expect to see in the average seven-year-old girl's room. If you can stick it out, you should, because after the first 100 pages, THE BELLES strips off its ballgown to reveal machine gun bazongas, like those women in the first *Austin Powers* movie, and says, "WHAT UP MOTHERFUCKERS." Shit gets real.

The best way to describe this book is to imagine the Capitol from THE HUNGER GAMES. (Remember all that ridiculous makeup and those costumes?) Now imagine a world where their entire culture and economy revolves around all that conspicuous consumption and superficial beauty. Orleans is a fantasy kingdom that appears to be very loosely based off New Orleans, where magical girls called Belles use powers called "arcana" to make people beautiful (or ugly) - but at terrible cost.

There have been a number of books coming out over the past couple years that have taken this frothy-

fantasy-gone-wrong approach. Similar books are Melissa De La Cruz's *THE RING AND THE CROWN*, Amy Ewing's *THE JEWEL*, Richelle Mead's *THE GLITTERING COURT*, and Aprilynne Pike's *GLITTER*. Some of these books ran with the topic better than others, but it seems to be becoming a pretty popular subgenre of YA dystopic fantasy and I actually like that, because I think that sense of "othering", of being not good enough when weighed against society's ruthless standards, is something that a lot of people - men and (but especially) women - relate to. Peruse enough hashtags on Instagram and you'll see all sorts of tips and tricks (with sponsored products) about how to make your nose look smaller, your breasts look bigger, or how to slim down in time for summer.

What makes *THE BELLES* stand out more from some of these other books is that it is, in many ways, a lot darker, and isn't afraid to show that darkness rather than relegating it off-screen. It borrows techniques from chilling works of dystopic sci-fi, like *1984* and *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*.

You're probably thinking that this is a pretty positive review, and wondering where that "THE BELLES is not a perfect book" business comes in. Well, here's the thing - it's a tad predictable. There are three pretty big twists in this book and I figured out two of them from about twenty pages in. When it happened, I was like, "Aha." Instead of, "Oh noes!" I stuck around through that tedious first 100 pages because of the build-up, so I was kind of disappointed to have my suspicions confirmed.

This book also falls to the *Bury Your Gays* trope, where the sole LGBT+ character dies in order to spur on the plot. It's a pretty horrific death, too, and happens completely on-screen. Even I was disturbed, which says something if you follow me and know what kinds of twisted shit I enjoy reading. I can definitely see why so many people who read this book were upset because of that. There's also a bizarre moment where the book refers to a transgender (or at least non-binary) character in one of the "newsies" (read: tabloids) as "BOY TURNS INTO GIRL" via the arcana magic, which, okay. 1) If they're trans, they were never a boy, and 2) context, please? and 3) gender-reassignment magic seems to be opening up a whole kettle of fish this book isn't ready for.

Apart from that pretty awkward blip, I did enjoy *THE BELLES*. It's a strange creature, and kind of terrifying, but I found the story fascinating enough that I couldn't put it down. It would make a good movie, too. Just be forewarned that the author sequel-baits the hell out of the ending and yes, it ends on a total cliffhanger and no, *The Belles, #2* doesn't even have a publication date, yet.

...Fak.

3.5 to 4 stars

Heather 'Bookables' says

3.75/5

The writing was beautiful and I enjoyed our main character a ton. ?

?

I did feel like the plot was a little slow throughout the book but it really picked up towards the end of it. I enjoyed the aspect and the overall theme of the book and how it centers around beauty and what is beauty as well as how far people will go to be beautiful.

?

?

There were a few things I didn't like which is why ultimately I gave this book a ??????.75 but I still really enjoyed it.

There is a trigger ?? for attempted sexual assault in this book.

I will be filming a mashup review on this book very soon so look out for that to hear more of my thoughts.

Overall a solid start to an intriguing ya fantasy series!

Sabaa Tahir says

I will eventually leave a legit review for this, but first I have to pick up the pieces of my shattered heart, which, in case you were wondering, was shattered by Dhonielle and this book. Also I desperately wish post-balloons were real. Read the book and you'll agree. Also Remy. I need Remy to be real, too. NEED SEQUEL YESTERDAY. Pre-order this one, you will be so grateful you did.

Cesar says

3.5 stars

"I'd do anything to be beautiful."

The Belles has been on my radar the second I found out about the synopsis. It reminds me a lot of what Tyra Banks tried to do in her novel Moderland. Except, *The Belles* does it 10,000,000X better. The fictional world Dhonielle created is lush with beautiful descriptions of the world, it's contraptions, the food, everything about it was just so damn near perfect.

As the title says, there are girls known as Belles who can control beauty and can make a person beautiful by adjusting a person's body. Whether it be their hair color/length, body size, skin tones, etc. They can do it all. Camellia and her sisters are Belles. They have trained their skills to become the Queen's favorite. When Camellia is the favorite, she couldn't be happy. That is until secrets about what goes on in the palace are uncovered. And the truth about Camellia's abilities and her identity as a Belle will be revealed.

I had a lot of fun reading *The Belles*. Not only does it have a beautiful cover, (almost) everything about it is beautiful.

Pros

1) The world.

The world of the Belles reminds me a lot of **The Glass Spare** by Lauren DeStefano and while they do share some similarities technology-wise (such as cameras), they differ in both magic and hierarchy. They both have that Victorian-era look which I love. Anything that is Victorian-era/gaslamp fantasy is an automatic Yes for me.

Also, there are teacup animals. Teacup elephants, monkeys, dogs, cats, DRAGONS! *snap snap* Someone, get me a teacup dragon.

2) Descriptions.

Dhonielle does a fantastic job of making the world so vivid and real. Not only is there a gorgeous map in the book, but even without the map, I can imagine what Dhonielle writes. Aside from the environment, there are great descriptions of the characters.

3) The magic.

What the Belles can do is both fascinating and kind of scary. These girls can literally change a person. The people of Orléans are born grey, born with red eyes, and their hair is unkempt. The Belles are born with color and can bring beauty to the people. It isn't permanent fix as the people begin to go back to their original self and there is beauty appointment where the Belles can alter them again.

I did love how the magic was used in altering people and how it describes the dangers of using it.

As much as I liked the Belles, it is a diamond in the rough as it does have a few flaws.

Cons

1) Pacing.

Keep in mind, the plot doesn't pick up until about 50% into the book. I definitely did have some moments where I put down the book for a few hours because I wanted the plot to move forward. A good chunk of the book does talk about Camellia's life at the palace as a favorite. I didn't mind it at first because the descriptions did help somewhat. But I wanted more plot progression instead of having it in the last 50% of the book.

2) Camellia.

I did not hate Camellia. But I didn't love her either. She had her moments of where I did like her and cheered for her. But there were other times when I rolled my eyes at her rash mistakes. She's the type that doesn't follow rules. She does follow most rules but she has this stubbornness that is annoying, not the good kind of stubborn.

I do lean more to liking her because she does see beauty in people and there were times when doing her appointments where she compliments the person and doesn't see the need to alter them.

But then she does something stupid in which makes me sort of not like her.

3) Character/villain development.

There is some tension between Camellia and her friend Amber. A tension that was unnecessary. Their friendship felt false and Amber was seen as the jealous friend type. She's friends with Camellia at the beginning but she does a 180 and is like:

As for Camellia, she somewhat remains static as a character. She isn't a bad character, but she was lacking. Mainly, she was naive at some points. I kid you not when I say a 10 year old can pick up on when something is strange and does a better job at it than Camellia.

The villain here is also disappointing because the story doesn't give that much background on them. They're just evil for no reason.

Why?

4) Romance.

There is a love interest and I did not like him.

Dhonielle wants him to be this sort of wise-guy who makes jokes but it came off as bland because there was absolutely no development for this guy. It only makes it worse because, for some godforsaken reason, Camellia is smitten by him.

I just could not see the appeal of this guy whatsoever. He comes off as neither appealing or charismatic. He isn't like my precious cinnamon roll, Nikolai.

What makes it worse is that he did that it was "love at first sight" bullshit I fucking hate. This character literally has no development or characteristics other than he's just some random dude who fell for Camellia.

There's been talk about something that Dhonielle did to one of the side characters which looking back at it, I can see why some people may not like it.

What people are talking about is the Bury your Gay trope. One of the side characters (I don't know her name, that's how such a boring character she is) is killed for some reason that isn't fully explained. That character also happened to be a lesbian. Her death was just redundant and it only added to Camelia's development. That's a type of writing I hate if someone has to die for no reason and the main character. The girl wasn't even an important character to begin with. I fail to see why she was involved in the story.

Just to be clear, the character in question didn't die because of her sexuality. She died so she could be a plot device for Camellia to develop. It just didn't fit in the grand scheme of Camellia's journey. If this had gone down the road where the character died because of her sexuality, I would've docked a star and given it a 2-star rating.

Personally, I am not angered by this trope though I can understand why others would be angry about this.

Verdict

The Belles is a decent start to a fantasy series. It has strange yet unique use of magic, it's world is beautiful, and the descriptions were just so lush. Even with its minor flaws, I do think the Belles is a good book worth reading if you are interested in it.

Thanks for reading my review!

-Cesar

(This statement was posted a LONG time ago when someone said aspects of the book was ableist and queerphobic. Since reading the book, I have not seen anything regarding these aspects.)

Note: I have not read the book nor do I own an arc. I'm only going off on this based on reviews about the ableist part: Albinism.

(Since everyone seems to be confused and thinks I made this stuff up, a reviewer, who I will not mention their name to give them privacy, had gotten an early arc and said those things that they thought was ableist and queerphobic. I don't think the book is ableist or queerphobic in anyway based on other reviews I saw but someone else did. That person has since deleted their review and page and this statement was posted a LONG time ago before the release.)

There are other things people have mentioned about the book but I will be primarily focusing on the albinism. Any other issues with this book, there are other reviews talking about it so check them out. Whether you agree or disagree with me, that's completely up to you.

I will also be talking about the so-called 'queerphobia' because I read somewhere how a word was used and boy do I have a lot to say about that.

Also, check out this video by Francina Simone. This video is so spot on, considering the uprising of easily offended people leaving 1-star reviews.

Let's get on with the "controversies."

Part 1: The Albinism

There have been comments on how the author isn't painting albinism in a good way.

Albinism is a genetic disorder that leaves little or no pigment of color on a person and animal. i.e., eyes, skin, and hair.

From what the novel says, the people (the world? I don't know yet) are devoid of color. That does not mean everyone in the world is pale white with albinism. Think of it like a black and white photo.

Or in that episode of the Powerpuff Girls where the clown steals the colors of Townsville and the people. Notice how there is no color except for different shades and tints of black, white, and gray.

That is what the people are like in this book: gray. They're on a spectrum of color that has different shades. Any art student/professor/famous artist can say how colors are seen through our eyes and through light. It's basic science.

It's science, you guys!science. ?

Another science lesson: Our eyes have blood vessels in them.

Our eyes aren't completely white. If you look at someone who got a black eye or got an injury to their eye, you would see the sclera being red/pinkish. Even if a person didn't receive an injury to their eyes, the vessels do stand out. Think back to a time when you watched too much TV, played video games for hours, or even got shampoo on your eyes. Notice in the mirror how your eyes are red. It's because the vessels stand out against the sclera. And in regards to the people in the Belles who are gray, their eyes will stand out as red/pinkish. Not because of albinism, but because of something that happens to our eyes. Science. It's basic biology.

Plus, the eyes could just be something like red contact lenses.

This is a perfect example of something being gray with red eyes.

^^^^^^

This is not albinism.

Therefore, I really cannot see how it's ableist when the people are basically gray with different shades and tints of black, white, and gray. If the author had described everyone as albino and called them ugly, then yes, that is blatant discrimination on someone's skin and their disorder. But she isn't calling anyone albino. People are basically gray. The exception being Belles. I'm sure they were born gray but got their color back at some point either through a ceremony, trial, who knows. (Going on very little information about the world in this book)

I'd like to think the theme of the book is beauty in the eye of the beholder. Beauty is subjective to a lot of people and seeing how the people in the book are gray, it shows how society sees beauty. Those with color are beautiful and those without are ugly. The same goes for size, skin color, etc. That's what I think the theme of the book is, along with other things.

What astounds me the most is how people can't seem to differentiate between someone having albinism and someone being devoid of all color. White reflects light, therefore, it's a color. Why can't these people tell the difference between a genetic disorder and a color pallet? Why can't they put two and two together? Why do they assume it's albinism? I am genuinely confused.

Devoid of all color ≠ Albinism.

It's a good thing this book isn't getting one-star reviews based on this.

Part 2: The queerphobia

It came to my attention that apparently, "Dandy" is queerphobic or was used in a way in the book to insult queer people. Of all the derogatory things you can call a gay person, Dandy is the LEAST bit offensive. It's not even an insult! There are literally lots of derogatory words and names to call a gay person. Dandy isn't one of them.

Let's take a look at the definition of Dandy: *a man unduly devoted to style, neatness, and fashion in dress and appearance.*

Tell me how that is queerphobic? There are a lot of men who want to look good to the public. You see many of them wearing designer clothes and those shoes without socks (how do they walk in those?), their hair neatly cut, and wear cologne. That is not queerphobic. That's just a guy who is devoted to style, as the definition says.

Look up dandy men on Google and see for yourself (the handsome men).

There are plenty of straight and gay men who like fashion and take their time to look good.

Yet somehow, a man being dandy is queerphobic to some people who can't tell the difference between style and literal hate.

Don't jump to conclusions.

It's kind of sad how so many people nowadays find something offensive when it really isn't offensive. We are all individuals with different feelings. One person might find something offensive, while another won't. You are not society. You are not representative of a group of people because they can have their own opinions. Not to mention how so many people take things way out of context and make it seem worse when it really isn't. Check out December's Review.

Like I said, I'm only going off of what I've been hearing about the book. I did hear that Dhonielle is fixing some things with it. I still want to read the book because the premise does sound interesting. And I'll be sure to keep an eye out on some of the things other people had issues with, whether they really are an issue or not. For now, I think it's best to wait and see what others have to say. I'm not rating this book yet until I have read it myself, that way I can form an honest review.

Feel free to express how you feel in the comments, I only ask for respect and no rudeness to anyone.

Thank you.

Nicole says

I started reading this book right after I saw it for the first time on Goodreads. It promised an enjoyable YA read and gladly, it didn't disappoint. I didn't read the whole premise and I'm glad I didn't because it reveals events that won't happen till 50% of the book. Yes, the main events and the most relevant to the plot of the series as a whole are introduced at that point but still, we can do it without them and discover them along the way.

What you should know, and what you might need to decide if this book falls in your "interesting shelf" is this: this is a YA fantasy in which people are born with a gray skin, rotten hair, just ugly. So we have Les Belles who have magic that can change the person's appearance and beautify them. Whatever you need, colored hair, slimmer waist, fuller breast, they even can change people's emotions as in make them more patient, charmer, etc. Les Belles, who were born with color, train all their life to perform in front of the country and try to impress the queen to get chosen the "favorite". Our MC, Camellia, is a Belle who wants more than anything to be the favorite. So she has to compete against her sisters. I don't like to tell the outcome of such competitions even if they happen at the start. You might think the MC will, of course, end up the best but it's not always the case (let's face it) and it's fun to experience the tension and root for our hero/heroine.

Anyway, we also have a very wicked princess and her sister who has been coma for years, add some secrets, a charming boy to the mix, and an awesome so cute adorable guard. The summary reveals way more (like the outcome of the competition, something that might appear of little importance at the start, etc).

The whole setting is very interesting. In this society, where people (of course, with money) can change their looks whenever they want, beauty becomes something essential. Something obsessional. People are ready to experience so much pain just to look pretty. If you could change your looks all the time, would you do it just to look more good looking? I liked the topic Dhonielle Clayton handled and the way she did it. The world she created was unique and she did a good job in showing us what these beauty addictions might lead, how they can affect someone's personality, for the worse.

Camellia was an interesting character and I liked reading from her pov. The few moments she had with her sisters were very enjoyable. What I liked the most about them is that they were all likable and no meanie one (which is very common). Sure, they all wanted to be the favorite but it didn't affect their feelings toward each other ~~much~~.

I disliked August from the start, he just didn't appeal to me. Instead, I loved Remy (the guard) and ship with Camellia. It is true that he didn't show much interest in our heroine, but hey, when that did ever stop us from pairing characters.

The end of the book was partially predictable, that doesn't make it any less frustrating (in a good way, like I WANT THE SEQUEL NOW). It doesn't end with a cliffhanger exactly but rather a closure to the first arc.

The story was fun and a pageturner. It kept me interested from the start till the end. Yes, it was slow at first and things didn't get very intense until the last third of the book but I found the first part necessary. To be honest, it felt a bit boring at a time and I could do with fewer descriptions (yes this book about beauty I know but still), still, that didn't last for long.

The things I didn't like weren't that many but they are still there. Les Belles magic abilities weren't explained enough. Too many mysteries around them and their origin. Camellia didn't bother to find out more about them even though she wondered why their numbers are decreasing. When it was apparent that her teacher was hiding things from them, little she did to investigate. I would've fathered that these beauty appointments to be summed up and instead, she explores a few question marks about her past.

It's not clear technology's level in this world, we had screens and that might make you wonder if there's some technology. Yet, little was explained about that. Too many parts of the world were unexplored. I wish

it had more of backbone. It didn't feel constructed well besides the present and only events that relate to the plot. Yes, it becomes useless information when they become too much but they are so few. Furthermore, I felt the literal translation to French a bit uncreative. Sophie's monkey, for example, is called "singe" the French translation of monkey.

Briefly, this book is highly entertaining if you're looking for a good YA fantasy. Nothing memorable but it'll leave you wanting more. The author created an interesting world inspired from reality nowadays, where beauty is an unhealthy obsession. Looking forward to reading the sequel!

Adam Silvera says

LOVE LOVE LOVE LOVE. Cannot wait for THE EVERLASTING ROSE.

destiny ? howling libraries says

I first "wished" for an ARC of this on NetGalley last spring, when the hype started to peak. I was going to email in a request shortly after, when some things were brought to my attention that I'd rather not go into publicly, but made me lose interest pretty quickly. Then, right before the book was released, I randomly had my "wish" approved and cringed, because I didn't want to read this. But, I always promise to give ARCs an honest try, so I decided to go into this as open-minded as possible... until friends spoiled the ending for me in an attempt to keep me from being totally broken-hearted by the fact that in the year 2018, authors are **still** burying their queer women at these levels.

I'm not going to try and talk anyone out of reading this book, and I'm not going to give it a star rating, because I have not finished it. I DNFed it really fast, when I realized that there was no way it wasn't going to hurt me to watch queer women, yet again, being killed off just for the sake of a plot device. Please don't come at me with negative comments or try to dissuade me - after all, I'm not adding a star rating. I'm not hurting this book's ratings. I only am posting this instead of simply silently removing the book from my shelves because I know a lot of my friends and followers have been awaiting my review on this one, and I want to give them a heads up.

Any harassment will be removed and the users will be blocked, so don't come here looking for a fight.

Elise (TheBookishActress) says

[

there are a grand total of three sapphic character

Roxane says

I am guessing this is the first book in a series? A trilogy? All I know is that I want to know what happens next. The Belles is richly, gorgeously detailed in the accounting of the world of Orleans and the Belles, young women who are bred to create beauty amongst the citizenry. It took a bit to get into the book but the last third of the book is absolutely worth the world and character building it takes to get there. In the last third of the book, everything starts falling into place exquisitely and we finally begin to realize what's at stake for Camellia, her sister Belles, and the people of Orleans. At times, I was overwhelmed by all the description and struggled for a solid sense of place or what things looked like but that is likely my limitation. There is a really intriguing twist, a subtle romantic plot, and lots of moments where I found myself holding my breath and turning the pages so fast, wondering what would happen next. I really look forward to the next book in this series. Also, I want a teacup elephant. Meanwhile, Dhonielle Clayton is a whipsmart writer with grand, grand talents and the imaginative world she has created is memorable and intriguing, indeed.

Cait • A Page with a View says

I really don't think I've ever found another book like this. It was equal parts disturbing and alluring, so I think it succeeded with the social commentary on what beauty means and just how far we'll go to get it.

The world was absolutely gorgeous! (It kind of reminded me of Sofia Coppola's Marie Antoinette). Everything was described like some kind of delicious dessert (including the people), which just emphasized the feeling that beauty was something to be consumed.

Camille is one of the Belles who can use their special powers to alter appearances. She wants to be the court favorite, but soon finds there's a lot about her world that was hidden from her. She has to decide what's worth sacrificing and what kind of future she wants... there's lots of intrigue & betrayal.

The writing was strong and I never once wanted to skim. I really liked Camille's character, too. I'm not sure if I'd be *as* into this story in a reread because the mystery was a huge chunk of what kept me from putting it down, but I think the sequel is set up to be really good!

This is one of those books that would appeal to fans of fantasy, dystopian, contemporary... pretty much any YA genre. I really think fans of *The Jewel* and *The Selection* might love it, too!

Thank you to the publisher for sending me an ARC.

Lola says

This is a book that will surprise you.

From the outside, it looks like it was written for princesses-to-be, but the inside is different. Among the lush descriptions of dresses and beautiful people, there is darkness lurking.

I couldn't stop reading. Camellia has all the qualities a heroine needs: kindness, strength, empathy, determination, courage and the willingness to make a change. Quite evidently, it takes her time to realize the danger she and the other Belles are in, but when she does, she doesn't stay quiet.

The Belles exist to give people exquisite features; to make them beautiful. Even so, the citizens are the ones who need them the most, as they do not have enough money to pay Belles, but the rich tend to be the only

ones to use the abilities of Belles.

Like it isn't like that everywhere in the world? And ultimately, the rich overuse the Belles, which puts their health in a precarious spot.

Although Camellia doesn't need anyone to share her spotlight, she is better when she is with her sisters, who do not make apparitions often, but they are rather present in the heroine's thoughts. I loved the sisterhood.

The author has a lot to say about the definition of beauty and how we should never let others' perceptions of us create or shape our image.

I cannot wait to see where this is going.

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Samantha says

2.5 stars! This book was such an addictive, fast-paced read. But I did feel it fell apart towards the end, mostly because the "twists" felt very obvious. The characters also feel a tad flat at times, and some elements of the world building were weak. But overall, an enjoyable read if you want a page turner!

TW: sexual assault, bury your gays trope ft. side character

I will be doing a full review on my channel.

Emily May says

"Don't you want to be beautiful?"

Woah. **The Belles is a monster hidden behind a pretty facade of dresses, magic, and beautiful writing.** The world and story slowly build through stunning descriptions, as the author peels back the layers of society's obsession with beauty, revealing all the ugliness that lies underneath.

In the fictional world of Orléans, a small number of girls called Belles are able to use magic to create beautiful (or, indeed, ugly) looks to the paying customer's desire. Camellia and her sister Belles have been trained their whole lives for their job, and each longs to be chosen as Her Majesty's favorite - the one responsible for keeping the royal family beautiful and satisfied.

"You are to act as if you're an artist floating through this world. Your sole purpose is to beautify, and transform the Gris. You are a Belle."

The descriptions are lavish, an effective juxtaposition with the darker plot lines that unfold. The ugliness in this beautiful world creeps out slowly, though I still found the earlier chapters compelling. Clayton's world was unique enough, and the characters interesting enough, to keep me enchanted until it was time to learn what was lurking under the surface, but it is the last hundred pages where the book really shines. In a horrific

way.

Questions gradually arise about the origin of the Belles and their magic. Loyalties are also questioned. Camellia and the other Belles hear voices crying out in the night; voices of people who shouldn't be there. And there is a deliciously despicable villain whose desire for beauty, it seems, cannot be sated, and who made my blood pressure rise and my heart pound. **Nothing like a nice bit of nastiness to keep the pages turning.**

But, through it all, the real villain is society's obsession with, and expectations for, beauty. In a world where every part of a person can be changed - skin, hair and eye colour, bone structure, waist, breast and hip size, and more - no one is ever satisfied. In the insatiable quest for beauty, deep down, everyone hates themselves. Behind this mesmerizing fantasy of magic and terrible secrets, there is a sad tale, and one that many of us won't find completely unfamiliar.

Lots of originality and food for thought. Oh, and it's a damn good pageturner, too.

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