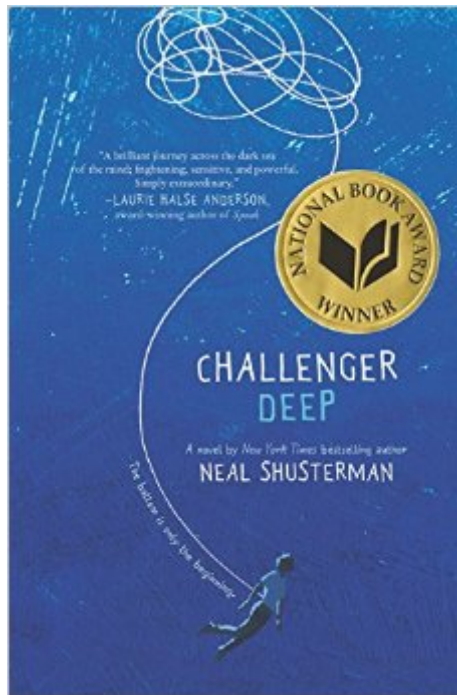


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Challenger Deep (Golden Kite Awards)



Synopsis

National Book Award and Golden Kite Award Winner A captivating novel about mental illness that lingers long beyond the last page, *Challenger Deep* is a heartfelt tour de force by New York Times bestselling author Neal Shusterman. Caden Bosch is on a ship that's headed for the deepest point on Earth: Challenger Deep, the southern part of the Marianas Trench. Caden Bosch is a brilliant high school student whose friends are starting to notice his odd behavior. Caden Bosch is designated the ship's artist in residence to document the journey with images. Caden Bosch pretends to join the school track team but spends his days walking for miles, absorbed by the thoughts in his head. Caden Bosch is split between his allegiance to the captain and the allure of mutiny. *Challenger Deep* is a deeply powerful and personal novel from one of today's most admired writers for teens. Laurie Halse Anderson, award-winning author of *Speak*, calls *Challenger Deep* "a brilliant journey across the dark sea of the mind; frightening, sensitive, and powerful. Simply extraordinary."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Challenger Deep is the type of book that you won't forget long after you've finished reading it. This book sheds light on mental illness in a way I have never seen done before (at least not so thoroughly and realistically) - putting you directly into the mind of the mentally ill character and taking you on an enlightening, but also somewhat perplexing journey through his illness. Normally, I

start my reviews with what I loved, but I'm switching things up a little because I feel like I have to get the negative out of the way first, before I can get to what I really loved. So, stick with me here!

The negatives: Prepare to be confounded. I had a hard time rating this book, to be honest. I kept hovering between four and four-and-a-half stars, even though I think it's brilliant in a lot of ways. Why? This book was very strange. In fact, it bordered on psychedelic in some places. Reading from Caden's perspective when he is having a psychotic episode is ... well ... psychotic. It kind of reminded me of listening to my dad's old drug-induced Pink Floyd albums (or maybe the Beatles' "I am the Walrus"). It was weird. And, honestly, I found myself wondering, if this had been any other author besides Neal Shusterman (who I have undying faith in), if I would have stuck it out at all because I just didn't get the twisted maritime world that Caden lived in - or the strange people around him - or just about anything that was happening. Did I kind of enjoy reading about this weird alternate reality? Yes, but I didn't understand it at all. At first. Until I got to about the mid-point of the book ... which is when ...

What I LOVED: It all came together.

I suspect this novel will appeal most to those who have either experience or interest in mental illness and those who suffer from it. That is a big group. I have spent time in psychiatric hospitals, but I have always been able to leave whenever I wanted to. In other words I know well what happens to those who suffer, but not at all what it is to be the one suffering. This book may be the closest I ever get to finding out, God willing. The story is told by Caden in the first person. He is already starting to fall victim to his demons when the story begins, but we know that he used to be normal with lots of friends and good grades. As he falls further and further into psychosis he leaves this normal world further and further behind, and he communicates more and more through a psychotic dream state peopled by characters whose real-world counterparts are revealed only gradually as he begins to interact more and more with reality and his fellow patients in a facility that is revealed to us in bits and pieces until at the end of the novel when Caden is well enough to know its name. This dream state is extremely hard to read at times, much as it is hard to deal with someone who is ill enough to need the kind of care provided by the facility. It is illustrated with line drawings that are strangely evocative. I suspect it is as close to experiencing it yourself as you can get on the printed page, so it is worthwhile if you care for someone who is mentally ill. I am not sure I'd give this to a teen who is in the same situation as Caden, though, as I'd be afraid they would give up before the end of the novel when it becomes less grotesque and depressing.

MILD SPOILER AHEAD! I would give this book 4.5 stars if I could.

On face value, I thought *Challenger Deep*™ was about a psychological analogy between exploring the deep and discovering inner strength. And it is that, but you don't get any real life adventure of the underwater world – it's all in the protagonist's head. And from a marine biologist aficionado, I felt a little duped. From part way in, I found *Challenger Deep*™ tedious to read, switching from realms and dreams - I wanted to be entertained, but didn't get that. The narrative went all over the place and I found myself getting bored. In hindsight I understand there is a purpose to this style or narrative. The frequent tangents bulging with symbolism are meant to reflect Caden, (our protagonist) mental state, but for me it bogged down the pace and plot. It almost gave me a headache. Neal Shusterman has done a marvellous job in describing the working mind of a person suffering mental illness, and can see where *Challenger Deep*™ had received all of its accolades; but this just wasn't the read for me. I just have to mention there is a short paragraph on the topic of suicide (in the last quarter) that Caden inwardly muses upon, which I thought was excellent and poignant. This is by no means a horrible book, though, I would have liked to have seen it at least half as long; or have another aspect of the story introduced that isn't touched by Caden's illness. The only way I can describe my feelings over this book is that it was like peering through those glass bricks, where the view on the other side is warped and blurred to the point of bare recognition. Yes, that is the whole point of this novel, but I completed it with a sense of wanting more.

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