



# Katya's World

*Jonathan L. Howard*

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## **Katya's World** Jonathan L. Howard

The distant and unloved colony world of Russalka has no land, only the raging sea. No clear skies, only the endless storm clouds. Beneath the waves, the people live in pressurised environments and take what they need from the boundless ocean. It is a hard life, but it is theirs and they fought a war against Earth to protect it. But wars leave wounds that never quite heal, and secrets that never quite lie silent.

Katya Kuriakova doesn't care much about ancient history like that, though. She is making her first submarine voyage as crew; the first nice, simple journey of what she expects to be a nice, simple career.

There is nothing nice and simple about the deep black waters of Russalka, however; soon she will encounter pirates and war criminals, see death and tragedy at first hand, and realise that her world's future lies on the narrowest of knife edges. For in the crushing depths lies a sleeping monster, an abomination of unknown origin, and when it wakes, it will seek out and kill every single person on the planet.

## **Katya's World Details**

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Author : Jonathan L. Howard

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# From Reader Review Katya's World for online ebook

## Tiffany says

Hallelujah. A heroine without a romance! It was so refreshing to have a strong female lead, without some side romance or instalove to deal with. I absolutely love that part about this book and it may have skewed my overall opinion of it a tad. Hopefully, other authors take note and we can stop with romance stories being shoehorned into everything.

I really liked this book, even with it's flaws, and think it should have a higher average rating. There were some choppy and cumbersome moments in the narrative and there was a tendency for random, sporadic, sudden POV changes. I know that the POV switches filled a need to get into other characters' heads, but they were so abrupt and uncomfortable.

However, I found the premise to be something new and pretty awesome. The plot twists were exciting. I'm really hoping that there really is a sequel to this book because I was left with many hanging threads and unanswered questions. I do have to admit the ending was less than satisfactory. But overall, I really liked it.

I was worried when I first started because I read some previous comments, but I found that ultimately, once I got past some of the construction problems and forgave the author for the ending and not answering all my questions, that I was completely taken by the originality of the story and setting. I know some commenters think that there should have been more flora and fauna to flush out the setting, but I think it would have been an unnecessary distraction, and a disservice to the narrative. This book wasn't an adventure story, but a war story and I would have been more irritated had I been distracted from the undersea submarine fights with the pilots dodging giant squids and seas of fish. Jules Verne had his world and his story, but this was not it, and I think that's okay too.

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## Katya says

For this review and more, come over to [The Book Lantern](#).

Sci-fi isn't my favourite genre, for no other reason than perhaps the fact that I haven't read much of it. Oh, I tried some Hamilton once, and I have some vague recollections of picking up Dune, but in terms of hard-core science fiction I have read very little.

This book was recommended to me by a friend who thought the name similarities were awesome, and now that I've read it... yeah, I think that this is the closest of a Philip Reeve substitute that I will ever find.

For those of you not aware of my (passionate, powerful, groundbreaking) fangirl-dom of Philip Reeve's books, I will just send you to read "The Mortal Engines" (not to be confused with Cassandra Clare's series, please), and come back to the review once you're done.

Finished?

Well, "Katya's World" is just like "The Mortal Engines", except it won't rip your guts out quite in the same way that Reeve's book does.

So what is this about? Well, in the distant, distant future, after nearly a century of anarchy and destruction, Earth enters in contact with its colony Russalka, demanding that the status quo is maintained. Unfortunately, the Russalkin don't feel the same way, and an independence war is waged. Ten years after a shaky stalemate, Katya Kuriakova, a prodigy in navigation, goes on her very first journey, and... well, things don't really go exactly according to plan.

Attentive readers might already notice that "Katya's World" is Russian-themed, if not Russian-inspired, much like Leigh Bardugo's "Shadow and Bone". This homage is not unintentional - the Russalkin were originally selected from the same region as to avoid interracial and intercultural conflicts as much as possible, and this is just one of the few interesting pieces of worldbuilding that Jonathan L. Howard peppers throughout the story. Culture is a running motif - old culture vs new culture, cultured vs un-cultured, and what identity really means. The novel plays with those concepts to create a clever rhetoric against racial and nationalistic hatred, which I found to be particularly pleasing.

As for our heroine, Katya, if I had to place her somewhere on the badass scale, I'd say she's a younger, more idealistic version of Hester Shaw. Or, rather, she's what Hester might have been, if certain event had not occurred - she's intelligent and initiative, a natural-born tactician and survivor, but she has a certain innocence about her which more hardened YA heroines lack. And while Hester is easily my favourite (because Hester is awesome), I think I prefer Katya Kuriakova to broken birds like Katniss Everdeen. Perhaps it's because we see Katya as she slowly sheds that childhood innocence and discovers the harsher realities of the world, so her progression as a character feels more organic and therefore - more interesting.

Ultimately, in addition to being a pretty cool sci-fi, "Katya's World" is also a novel about growing up and responsibilities, one that isn't afraid to take chances with its characters, or to raise the stakes until they're sky high. Definitely recommended.

Note: A copy of this book was provided by the publisher via Netgalley.

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## **sj says**

Man, when I was growing up, I would have KILLED for a book like Jonathan L. Howard's *Katya's World*. I read a lot of adult sf because the stuff that was out there for younger readers was mostly just crap (or non-existent). There were a few exceptions, yes, but I found most of them either a. boring or b. condescending.

*Katya's World* is neither of those things. I was hooked from the prologue on. In a nutshell, Earth set up numerous colonies on various worlds, populating them with people of the same racial/ethnic background to minimize tensions. Russalka is a water planet (as in, zero land masses) that has been colonized by people of Russian descent...which was then left to its own devices for a number of years while all communications from Earth just stopped. One day, the Grubbers (non-colonists) came back and said "Hey, thanks for keeping things going for us, we'll just step back into our position of authority now," but the Russalkin said "No way, man."

War were declared.

Many people were killed on both sides, until one day the Earth contingent just pulled up and left.

This isn't the story of that war, though (all of the above happens in the prologue) - it's the story of Katya

Kuriakova, a 15 (almost 16) year old girl that just received her navigation card and is about to take her first voyage actually working on her uncle's submarine.

Look, there wouldn't be a story if everything went according to plan, right? Right.

Kids on Russalka don't have much of a chance to be kids. They have to grow up fast because their world is incredibly harsh and unforgiving. Katya may not yet be 16, but she's what we would call incredibly mature for her age. Is she mature for the average Russalkin kid? Probably not. She's smart, but I think most of the kids there had to grow up just as quickly as she did.

You want to know the best part about this book? It doesn't talk down to its readers. It doesn't say "Hey, my audience is young, so let me just explain everything in one giant infodump because I know you're too stupid to understand it."

No, it assumes that if you're reading, you know enough to be getting on with, or can glean it from context (which is what I always thought was part of the fun of reading). There are a few times where things are explained (like the *Siege Perilous* reference, which I don't even know that many adults would get), but it's not done in a heavy-handed way - it's an organic part of the story. I can not even begin to tell you how refreshing this was.

Second best part? NO ROMANCE! Yay! I'm so tired of every single YA book thinking that there has to be some sort of romantic entanglement to appeal to readers. Some of us don't think it's necessary. Some of us are exceedingly grateful when romance isn't even part of the equation. Some of us finish reading a book like this and say "Yes. More of that, please."

And really, that last sentence pretty much describes my feelings on this book. Yes. More of that, please.

I know there are more books planned for this world. Part of me really hopes that Howard will eventually write an adult series set in this same world, or perhaps even allow this series to age with its readers like Rowling did with Harry Potter.

(But seriously, I want an adult series about the early colonization efforts. Mr Howard, can you make that happen for me, please?)

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## **Ben Babcock says**

When I was a child, I remember tuning into re-runs of *seaQuest DSV* on the Space channel in Canada. (I was alive when it first broadcast, but it was in re-runs by the time I started paying attention.) I never watched the series regularly, but I'd happily sit in front of an episode if it happened to be on. I was captivated by the idea of a tricked-out submarine exploring the depths of the ocean on our own planet Earth. I seem to remember the first season, especially, focused on the scientific parts of such exploration. (Eventually Michael Ironside showed up, which is fantastic for him, but the show wasn't the same.) And say what you will about the show itself, the concept is brilliant. Even now, fifteen years on, we are still groping in the dark when it comes to investigating our oceans. Samples from James Cameron's record-breaking descent into the Challenger Deep might yield new forms of life that could help treat illnesses or break down plastics. There is a "final frontier" here on our own planet, and while I'm all in favour of space exploration, I don't think we should neglect what is right in front of our eyes.

So that's where I'm coming from as I read *Katya's World*. It isn't similar to *seaQuest DSV* at all, except that both feature people in submarines. Yet Jonathan L. Howard strives towards that same sense of wonder when it comes to oceans and their relationship with humanity. As Kane stresses to Katya repeatedly, the Russalkin might have formed a distinct culture after three generations, but they are still human, and the way they interact with the ocean is rooted in this fact. From their technology to their mythology, their life on Russalka is not just a product of the immediate planetary environment but the culmination of thousands of years of seafaring, exploration, and naval warfare.

With a name like *Katya's World*, and coming from an imprint like Strange Chemistry, you'd be expecting a book about a colony on another world. And it is. But Russalka happens to be a world without any dry land, and so its settlers have constructed underwater habitats. So Howard has written a science fiction book that is also a submarine thriller, with thematic echoes of Cold War spy games and piratical hijinks. There are a few technological innovations—sidearm masers are standard issue, since they are much safer in an enclosed environment; and mention of interstellar starships and the like, of course—but for the most part, the science and technology are very familiar. Howard confidently wields a vocabulary that immerses the reader in the story and slickly defines the unfamiliar terms while still advancing the plot.

So aside from the fact that it's set on an alien world with slightly advanced technology, *Katya's World* could very well take place in the oceans of Earth. The pirates and the FMA are two competing factions, or countries. Katya and her uncle are the innocent civilians caught in the middle of a wider power struggle. Meanwhile, a sea monster stalks both parties, intent on eliminating those who have awakened it from its slumber in the deep. And every time Katya or anyone else has a brilliant idea to solve their current problem, the stakes change, and the situation somehow worsens. There's never a dull moment.

Thanks to these changing circumstances and tightly-written scenes, Howard maintains interest through what is otherwise a somewhat long, flat book. In other words, he kept me hooked, but I confess to wondering throughout what the bigger picture was. I was sure he was building to something more than just, "Escape the evil pirates" as the endgame. And to be fair, there is such a picture, but it's dangled as a carrot beyond the end of the book. If you go into this looking for vast political machinations, you will be disappointed. The only resolution we get is on the level of family and personal relationships.

Fortunately, the protagonist is up to the task of connecting with the reader at that level. Katya is smart and competent, but not to a Mary Sue extent: she very often is the one who comes up with ideas, or makes a key cognitive leap at a critical moment. However, her solutions are never panaceas, and rather than have everyone stand around dumbstruck while Katya has to explain her leaps, Howard usually demonstrates that the people around her can arrive at the same conclusion, albeit after a few more seconds. In this way, he creates a heroine who is independent and self-assured but not unrealistically capable. On an ocean world, anyone who isn't intelligent is probably going to die pretty quickly.

Katya isn't the chosen one. She's not particularly special. Vampires could read her thoughts, and she isn't the last scion of a diminished faerie house. She just happens to be in the wrong (or right) place at the wrong (or right) time, and she makes the best of her situation. This is what makes for interesting fiction. All that other stuff is merely decoration, and sometimes I feel like the rabid and hyperactive buyers—by which I mean the publishers and agents who trade in it, not the readers—of young adult fiction lose sight of this fact.

I have nothing against young adult novels, or novels of any stripe, in which the protagonist is special, chosen, or destined for greatness. If she happens to have some special quality that brings all the boys to her yard, all the more power to her. These narratives are important, particularly for youth, because the real world is harsh and often anonymizing, and these special qualities of heroes help us feel more distinct in our

individuality.

**Still, it is so refreshing to have a young adult novel in which a young woman succeeds because of her knowledge of science and quick thinking.** Even more shocking, there are no love interests in sight! There are no cocky rival navigators just her age, ready to step in and infantilize her for a trivial navigation error. There are no slightly-older-just-to-the-point-of-creepy mentors who take her under their wing with only the slightest of leers. Katya spends the majority of the book in predominantly male company, it seems; at times she schools them, and at times they school her. It's almost like Howard is claiming that everyone can learn something from everyone else.

In short, *Katya's World* is an original novel with a fantastic setting, compelling plot, and likable characters. Howard knows how to create a balance between too little and too much exposition, which allows him to impart a fairly detailed sense of Russalka's origins and its relationship with Earth. Principally through dialogue, Howard educates us about submarine travel and what life might be like beneath an ocean. And while he does this, pirates and an insane submarine warship threaten our protagonist from all sides.

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## Penny says

I had a difficult time rating this book. It's good. I like it.

...BUT it's lacking.

What is it lacking? More. It's lacking more. This story could be the beginning of an epic sci-fi series--for all I know it actually is--but from what I can gather it is a standalone. A frakking standalone! I find this frustrating because there is so much here, so much meaty goodness. There's enough here for a series and a couple different spinoff series, at least.

I want to know more! I want more!

One thing. I'm a little disappointed in some of the characterization and—okay make that a couple things—some of the convenient events that took place in order for the author to wrap things up sooner rather than later. I was fully expecting for this book to end with some sort of cliffhanger, something to indicate this story would definitely be continuing. But, no, that did not happen.

Also, not that I mind it, this book has no romance of any sort. Again, this doesn't bother me because I'm not a fan of romantic plot lines, especially when a romance overshadows everything else. But I know the lack of romance will cause many a reader to pass up on this little piece of awesomeness.

It's unfortunate because there is an amazing universe laying within the pages of this book. It has a lot going for it. 3 stars.

A e-galley of this book was provided by Netgalley. My views are my own.

**Update:** since writing this review I have learned from Goodreader, Amanda, that this is the first book in a trilogy. I am so excited to read the next book, Katya's War.

A copy of this review is posted at my blog.

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### **Samantha Jewiss says**

As you may have seen from my very first Letterbox Love, this book was my very first printed advance review book. It was sent to me by Strange Chemistry who have made a trailer for Katya's World [HERE](#)

I loved this book. I even loved the book cover. I even loved the paper it was printed on. The main character is Katya, a 15 year old girl who has just started working as a co-pilot on her Uncles mini-submarine. She is a great character, super intelligent, resilient, resourceful and she has heart. You root for her. She is a brave young woman. The only thing I found is that she doesn't seem 15. If not told her age then I would assume she was 18-20. There are also plenty of other great characters. Kane especially is a character I am intrigued by. He actually seem like a saner version of Myrin from Rachel Caines Morganville Vampire series. Even characters like Suhkalev, who I immediately disliked, had substance and growth.

The story sets off at a fast pace and maintains that pretty well through out the book. I think due to the decision to have a prologue as the platform to tell back story and history of Russalka. I liked the flow of the writing and Mr Howard made it feel as if a movie was going on in my head. The whole world that Mr Howard has created is incredibly detailed. When I first started reading I was worried that I would get easily confused as some of the wording seemed complicated and technical. This worry was gone after a page as Jonathan L Howards writing works so that you quickly get used to any unusual terms.

The creature that features prominently in this book is eerie and had me tensed on the sofa, as did some of the action scenes. There are quite a few twist and turns which were AWESOME. I could so see this book become a movie. It is action packed and suspenseful. I read this book in a couple of days as I really did not want to put it down. I would liken it to Star Trek crossed with 24.

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### **Kate Sherrod says**

I had to keep reminding myself, as I read Katya's World, that without Wesley Crusher, who annoyed millions with his over-the-top precocity and tendency to save the occasionally weirdly bumbling asses of the crew of the Enterprise-D, we would not have the 24k slab of awesome that is Wil Wheaton today. Which is to say that sometimes, it's worth putting up with an improbably gifted young protagonist being the one to think of all the solutions to all the problems in order to enjoy the rest of a show's or novel's offerings.\*

And what offerings there are! Like a stormy human-colonized water world, in which everybody lives in underwater cities, travels by submarine, and struggles to exploit the amazing mineral resources on the ocean floor and in the ocean water. Like a colony of entirely Russian descent (the powers-that-were in the waves of human colonization having concluded that removing the possibility of ethnic tensions was a very good idea) who eschew intoxicants and other Russian folkways because the environment is too hostile and drunkenness can easily lead to death.



Like a war fought under the waves, not among said Russian-descended colonists, but against invaders -- from Earth! A war that warped the culture of Katya's world forever, ten years before the events of this novel unfold, and is still warping it.

And, most importantly and excitingly, like a giant mysterious something haunting the deep, destroying subs and interfering with transport and commerce, which Big Benthic Baddie starts having a direct and frightening effect on Katya's own fifteen-year-old life as she starts her career as a submarine navigator! Said BBB and its secrets providing a marvelously creepy and menacing undertone to the whole novel. Yowza.

All this and a fascinatingly enigmatic hero-villain amalgam who totally steals the book even before we find out what he's really up to. Except that might not be what he's really really up to. Except that it might be after all. See?

So on the whole, I agree with my dear EssJay, who loved the Snape out of this book and hopes to see more works, maybe even for grown-ups, set in this fascinating world. Howard handles the science and the sociology very well, as well as the tension of sub-oceanic combat, sub-hunting, seek-and-destroy missions, discussions on the nature of synthetic vs. artificial intelligence\*\*, so I know that, for instance, some prequel work on the war that preceded this story, or how Earth went from a colonizing powerhouse to something mysteriously crippled and desperate, would make for good reading for any age group.

And really? Katya's Wesley Crusher-ism isn't that annoying. If you could tolerate Sheriff Carter's always being the one to come up with the brilliant off-beat solution that all the scientists in Eureka couldn't, Katya won't bother you at all. But if you caught yourself rolling your eyes at Carter sometimes, well, they'll roll a bit more for this. But don't let that stop you. This is a neat book!

\*And really, I want to forgive said annoying precocity and ass-saving as maybe one of the necessary trappings of young adult fiction, which I have but rarely read, even back when I was a young adult, but is that the case? At any rate, I probably wouldn't have noticed/been bothered by it so much had this been a first person narrative, in which case I could take it as a slightly unreliable narrator maybe inflating her importance to the course of events a bit, instead of the third person omniscient that I got. A pity.

\*\*And, as Essjay so gleefully pointed out, even this heady stuff is made lucid for young readers but is never presented in a condescending info-dump, in narration or dialogue, which is always appreciated!

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## **Simon says**

I have been fortunate enough to have the opportunity to read an advance copy of Jonathan L. Howard's Katya's World from new publishing imprint Strange Chemistry from Angry Robot Books.

Like their elder brother, Strange Chemistry titles will principally be SF and Fantasy works, with plenty of cross-over and genre-bending novels too from the looks of their forthcoming publications. However SC will be focusing on young adult works.

Katya's World is a really great book. I know we should never judge a book by its cover, but this is a beautiful cover! It also immediately establishes, before a word has been read, some of the background setting to the novel. Now, I hate spoilers in reviews so I will try my hardest not to give too much away here. But as all of the following can be gleaned from the back cover I reckon I'm fairly safe in revealing it!

The novel is set on the colony world of Russalka, a planet with no land masses. As such the action takes place almost entirely in sub-marine settings. This allows for the author to imperil the characters in several interesting and unusual ways. Mr Howard's attention to detail is evident in his descriptions of setting, action, and behaviour and it is clear that he has invested a great deal of time in ensuring believability for his technology and the world in which it functions.

His writing style is flowing and very easy to follow, with dialogue that rarely feels stilted and helps add to the realism of the overall setting. Mr Howard manages to avoid the pitfalls of the 'info dump' in a number of very clever and subtle ways, giving the reader enough information to understand the plot while not overburdening the text with too much unnecessary detail.

One of the biggest problems that faces YA writers is how to construct, and then tell, a story that is engaging for the target audience and does not patronise them. Mr Howard is very successful in these regards and has created a story which is engaging for the reader (I found it very absorbing).

Central to the plot, of course, are the characters and it will probably come as no surprise that the main protagonist for Katya's World is the titular heroine, Katya Kuriakova. Katya is drawn very much in the mould of the current crop of female teenage leads but bears far more in common with, say, Katniss Everdeen, than Bella Swan - this is a very good thing! Katya is exactly the kind of heroine who takes the plot and helps guide the reader through it. She is brave but is still a teenager and Mr Howard has pitched her perfectly. Following her progress and development throughout the novel is as rewarding as the plot itself.

And what a plot it is. Twisting and turning just as you think you've figured out what it's going to be. This reads like a very fast-paced action film and this is to the credit of the story. Developments keep you turning the pages and I honestly found the book very hard to put down.

Overall then, I highly recommend this title. If you liked The Hunger Games I suspect this will be just the cup of tea. I'd also happily give it as a gift to a teenage reader. Mr Howard does not shy away from dealing with difficult and challenging concepts and I believe that this will broaden its appeal to a wide audience.

Strange Chemistry are to be commended for publishing this title and I, for one, will be eagerly scouting out future titles from this new imprint.

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## **Katy says**

3.5 stars - I'm not sure whether this book didn't do a very good job of describing everything or whether I'm just too dumb or unimaginative, but I had a VERY HARD time picturing the ships, submarines and aircrafts and a lot of the action when everything was SO CRUCIAL to this novel. I couldn't tell if they were steampunkish or futuristic or just your normal machines we have today. And the Leviathan? I know part of it was the mystery of not knowing what it is, but I was maybe picturing the alien in the 2012 movie "Battleship." So I spent a good deal of the book reading what was happening but not being able to SEE what was going on in my head.

But I liked that the book was unpredictable. Well, this is coming from someone who can't claim that she's read many sci-fi books, and even then, I'm not sure if they're really considered sci-fi. But back to the point, although it was a bit frustrating to not be able to picture the Leviathan, I was intrigued that there was some mystery to it and that it was hard to tell which side it was on. And not only the Leviathan but also everyone

involved and whose side they are on, FMA's effectiveness (or lack thereof), the Yagizban's involvement in the whole situation and all the twists and turns leading up to the end. I will say I didn't care for the theory behind the corruption of the Leviathan's intelligence though. I know the book briefed us on it earlier, but it seem to come out of nowhere, even though I guess it was logical in a quick, glossed-over explanation.

I really like Kane. He reminded me of a less crazy - well maybe only slightly - Captain Jack Sparrow without the eccentric outfit. He was such a complex character with all his riddles and his complicated past. And you never knew what was going to come out of his mouth or what he was going to do next. And Katya was a great heroine, strong, smart, assertive and not at all annoying. The two characters surprised me? (view spoiler)

And the end was so great because it was so powerful. So yeah, it took me a bit to get into it, and it didn't really get good until about halfway through. But it was interesting and action packed, so I did end up liking it quite a bit. I just wish I was able to see the story more clearly.

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## **Sarah says**

Katya's World is the first novel in Jonathan L. Howard's new science-fiction series Russalka Chronicles, featuring heroine and protagonist Katya Kuriakova. Howard has also written the Johannes Cabal series, which begins with The Necromancer.

Before I go too far into writing the review for this book, I would like to mention that I did NOT finish this book. Not because it was bad, or terrible! But because as hard as I try, it's almost impossible for me to get into and enjoy science-fiction novels. I'm constantly on the search for that one science-fiction novel that will just hook me on the genre indefinitely, but it seems like an infinite, never-ending search.

I normally don't write reviews for books I haven't finished reading, but because I contacted Angry Robot Books specifically for a review copy of Katya's World, I am following through on my promise for writing a review, which is, in fact, rather positive.

The synopsis for Katya's World is very intriguing and original, and reminded me a lot of the movie Waterworld featuring Kevin Kostner.

The prologue of Katya's World pretty much tells you everything you need to know about the book's setting, and the world of Russalka. When Earth became overpopulated and damaged by the human race, our robots sought out a new planet to call "home." However, the planet was comprised of all water and no land, so to see if there were any possibility of humans being able to live and thrive on Russalka, Earth dropped off a team of scientists to study the planet. Unfortunately, the scientists were "forgotten about" and left behind for good, so humans found a way to survive on the planet.

Years into the future, 18-year-old Katya Kuriakova is training to become an underwater submarine navigator. On her maiden voyage at the helm of the ship's controls, Katya and her uncle pick up a dangerous criminal-pirate accompanied by a law officer. When their submarine becomes directed off-course, Katya is forced to escape death, with the criminal by her side. From there, she (allegedly) encounters a series of events that open her eyes to the truth behind the planet and future of Russalka.

I made it through the first three chapters of this book before my eyes began to glaze over and my mind started wandering. My song and dance in regards to sci-fi novels is always the same - the sci-fi terminology and technology bits are way over my head, and my brain just fails to grasp anything that goes on. The premise of *Katya's World* is very exciting, but the day-dreamy side of me just couldn't stick with the intensity of and details behind the plot.

Adults and teenaged fans of science-fiction will most likely enjoy *Katya's World*. The suspense and intrigue elements are definitely present throughout the first few chapters, and set up great expectations for the rest of the novel.

For more book reviews, please visit <http://dreamworldbooks.com>.

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## **Mitch says**

I'm not quite sure what to think of *Katya's World* to be honest, and looking at the user generated genres a lot of people don't seem to have a clue either. It's certainly not dystopian or post-apocalyptic, more like hard science fiction with a young adult spin to it. Definitely light and fun, I liked this one and would wholeheartedly recommend it to readers who maybe don't have a lot of experience with serious sci-fi and want to dip their toes in the water, so to speak, but there are a couple of issues for me personally that keeps me from giving this a higher rating.

But first off, the good. Howard's pacing, excellent, once I got past the prologue, basically setting up the background and stuff, the story just got going and going and going. Whether it was the mysterious sea monster, the pirates, or the mysterious sea monster again, there's not a dull moment for first time submariner Katya Kuriakova. I know a lot of science fiction can be bogged down by technobabble (and its evil big brother, hard science), but Howard makes *Katya's World* fun. Yes, scientific facts do get dropped here and there, but never at the expense of the plot - this is absolutely a great submarine adventure full of guns blazing, sea monster attacking, danger around every corner action. I cracked up in a couple of places too, Howard has a way of writing that makes even the firefights and shoot-ups hilariously entertaining - everything just comes together to make this the kind of book that's a breeze to read because so much is going on with plot twist after plot twist after plot twist that I absolutely just had to finish.

It helps too that Katya's surrounded by some very awesome, very hilarious supporting characters. Tasya, fierce head lady pirate, is at the top of the pile as the villain who just refuses to die (and not just because of one crazy over the top missile launcher scene), but other characters including Suhkalev, Uncle Lukyan, Kane, kept surprising me too. Unfortunately, with so many great supporting characters, Katya herself wasn't as impressive - not only did she not strike me as a very believable fifteen year old, but she didn't stand out for me nearly as much as the main supporting characters - maybe less than even Sergei, who's only in the first chapter or two - even though she had a lot to do. I guess she was a little too uptight for me the whole time, but, after her last scene, I'm gonna urge patience with her, just enjoy the ride.

My problem though, comes when I think back to the best submarine books I've read, say *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* or *Hunt for Red October*. I probably shouldn't, I mean, those are the classics, just being comparable to them means *Katya's World's* really good in its own right, but I guess this book was just so good I expected a little more. For one, the underwater setting feels underused, yeah, there are currents and some brief mentions of sea life, but the ocean's full of mysteries, I guess I'm a little disappointed Russalka doesn't have coral reefs, kelp forests, schools of fish, or anything besides underwater mountains to add a little

more spice to the scenery because, sometimes, I almost feel like the action's happening on asteroids and stations in space. And also, the suspense, while good, sort of gets dropped halfway through, as the sea monster plot segues into the bigger effect on the entire world story. Howard did a pretty good job maintaining the suspense before revealing the true nature of the Leviathan halfway through, but after that even though he tries, it just doesn't feel the same.

I guess I'm a little disappointed, but *Katya's World* still does a lot right. It's great, tightly plotted fun, a can't go wrong pick that gives a taste of what serious sci-fi novels or submarine adventures are about.

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## Mieneke says

*Katya's World* by Jonathan L. Howard ticked of several boxes on my to-do-list book-wise. First of all, it is a YA science fiction novel, thereby not only expanding my YA reading, but my SF reading as well – which were two of the reading goals I'd set myself this year – but it also allowed me to acquaint myself with a writer I'd heard a lot of good things about. Several of the bloggers whose opinion I respect a lot love Howard's *Johannes Cabal* series. So I was excited to start reading it. Barring some problems with the writing, my excitement was very much justified: *Katya's World* was an engaging read.

To begin with, the world building is excellent. Russalka is an amazing environment and I loved the way Howard has shaped it. He has made the ocean world of Russalka more than just a globe with a water-logged surface and bad weather. He's created an entire ecosystem underwater with layers of a different composition and consequently different properties and reactions to the Russalkan submarines. It's also a bit of a nightmare vision as the idea of being in a submarine scares the bejeezus out of me. The idea of being surrounded by an element that's likely to kill you if your vessel breaks just gives me hives. It's similar to space travel in a sense. However, as it is less likely that I'll ever find myself on a star ship than on a submarine, reading about space faring doesn't unnerve me as much. I'll hand it to Howard though, I didn't feel that unease for long, as you forget you're underwater until they actually have a problem or have to get out of their ship. I also liked the way Russalkan society is drawn; it's a place where youngsters need to grow up fast and one where the original settlers of Russalka have divided into two: the regular Russalkin and the Yagizban, the ones who settled up top on floating settlements and who functioned as the go-between between Russalka and off-planet traders and diplomats.

The characters are well-drawn as well, especially Katya, Kane and Katya's Uncle Lukyan. Katya is a fantastic heroine, though she strays frighteningly close to a case of 'speshul snowflake-ism', as the reader keeps getting reminded how intelligent she is and how cool she stays under pressure. However, Katya's down-to-earth nature keeps her from getting annoying and over the top. In addition, she isn't always able to save the day and that helps keeping her grounded as well. There are also hints at Katya's past that suggest she isn't such a good girl as she seems, so hopefully we'll see more of that in the rest of the series, as this is the first book in the *Russalka Chronicles*. Kane reminded me of a cleaned-up Captain Jack Sparrow, with the same nonchalance and wilful evasiveness when it comes to the truth. But he had a bit of added tragedy in his history, which I hope we'll find out more about as well. What I found very refreshing is that there is no romance in the novel, not a bit, not even a hint. I don't mind romance sub-plots in the books I read, but it is good to see a book featuring a female lead that doesn't include one. Instead the plot is made interesting by the mystery of the Leviathan and by the threat of war. Howard skilfully moves the conflict from off-world to on-world, yet manages to keep the Terran threat looming.

One area where I did have some problems was with some of the writing. The narrative is written in third

person omniscient, so it's able to jump heads in the middle of a scene. There were a few times however where the landing wasn't completely smooth and felt a bit clunky and I had to go back to double check whose head I was in. Still, this might just be a case of personal taste in stylistics; while I don't mind third person omniscient at all, I don't like the narrator to intrude too much into the story, unless she consistently does so. At one point it seems as if the narrator is breaking the fourth wall to comment on Katya's upbringing, which seemed very out of place in the scene.

The Russalkin were bred to shoulder responsibilities from an early age, but the urgency and importance of this one weighed upon Katya almost more than she could bear. It spoke much of her character and upbringing that she did not think of denying that responsibility for more than the briefest moment. (p. 229)

If the narrative at that point is a reflection of Katya's inner monologue, it doesn't make sense to talk of her upbringing that way, unless there is an intrusive narrator, which there hadn't been up to that point. There were a few other stylistic niggles that I hadn't expected from an experienced author like Howard. For example, at several points in the book we get exposition through Katya reminding herself of something. This and oft-repeated reminders of certain facts, such as Russalkin having to shoulder responsibility at a really young age and the fact that Katya is an exceedingly talented navigator and very intelligent, let the writing down for me.

Despite those reservations, however, I loved reading this book. I loved Katya and I even loved Kane. Katya's development from the start to the finish of the novel – shown beautifully through how she explains her decision to stay and fight at the end of the book – is what make this story shine. I can't wait to return to Russalka and to Katya and see where she goes from here. *Katya's World* wasn't a flawless book for me, but one I'll gladly return to in the future. With an inventive setting featuring a strong female lead, Howard delivers an interesting SF story that is sure to draw in readers of all genders and ages.

This book was provided for review by the publisher.

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## **Experiment BL626 says**

CAUTION: Long Review

*Katya's World* is a candy of hard science-fiction. It has themes, ironies, and allegories. I could easily imagine reading this in high school and discussing the book's literary value in English class. I would have definitely preferred reading this over *Ender's Game*, which I liked but not as much as KW. Yes, KW was better than *Ender's Game*. That's my opinion so believe it.

Now, I love romance, but I was delighted by its absolute absence in KW. Very atypical for a YA, KW had no dreaded love triangle and no distracting eye candies. It was all about "holy fuck, I'm thrust into a situation beyond belief and now I gotta help save my planet from an apocalyptic war!!!" Yes, the triple exclamation points are necessary.

What few interludes the story has are short. Disaster after disaster occurred; I literally bounced my legs out of excitement as I read KW on my bed.

## **An Eyebrows-raising Beginning**

The prologue was complete world building. The info-dumping was a lazy way to begin the story but I honestly liked it. I didn't have to gather slivers of information and complete the world building puzzle as the plot happened. The prologue laid it all out for me: how far is this in the future, why begin colonizing planets, where is this story taking place, etc. KW allowed me to sit back, relax, and enjoy the cinematic-like action.

Rare is the hard sci-fi I read that isn't stuffed with dizzying expositions. I wouldn't have wanted KW's beginning to change in any way.

However, there was one thing...

A colonisation project was mounted. In common with all such projects, the colonists were all taken from a single ethnicity. Previous experience had shown that, in the stressful environment of a new world where disasters may occur at any time, people look for others to blame and ethnic differences were frequently where fracture lines formed.

All my brain cells commented and overloaded my capacity to form a coherent opinion. However for the sake of enjoying KW, I went along with it...hesitantly. Pretty quickly, I saw a literary message building itself. One that said to me, "Yeah, I know. It's full of crap. And here's why. I'm going to tell you the 'why' using the story's plot." (YMMV.)

## **The Characters**

+++ the heroine

Katya Kuriakoya was awesome! Her self-aware detached personality may alienate readers but I loved it. I loved everything about her. I found her courageous, resilient, and pragmatic. She got dangerous and morally ambivalent things done. No matter what the odds were — and the odds were invariably high, she strived to survive. This was a tough girl through and through.

+++ the others

I liked every characters, including the cowardice, power-abusing Officer Suhkalev. I didn't expect much from this very minor character other than as a villainous cannon fodder.

Every characters on were on different sides, and it was hard for me to choose a side. They were all strong and determined. One moment I'm on that character's side, and the next I'm on the previously-a-bad-guy-now-maybe-a-good-guy's side. Everyone was right to an extent and wrong to another. KW is not a black and white novel. You will feel a lot inner turmoil as you determine which side is the right side.

Or maybe there is no right side because in the end I settled for being on Kayta's side and hoped everyone survive despite being enemies. As I said before, the characters were likable. Not everyone survives; every death saddened me. This book didn't hesitate to pull the spectrum of human emotions from me.

Also worth mentioning is the handling of female characters. There were no damsels in distress or sexualized kickass heroines. KW was dystopian, but gender was not part of its scope (not that I personally discerned).

+++ the Leviathan

It was mysterious. It was frightening. It was *indomitable*. It was also a very well named villain. Speaking of names, I loved how a few of the names in KW derived from mythology.

She spoke the names softly like a prayer. “Kraken. Scylla. *Leviathan*.”

Once the story was revealed Leviathan, it became scarier. I thought, “Oh Mother of All Tentacle Aliens, how the hell are they going to defeat this?!”

### **The Plot**

KW was flooded with action and doused with twists. The plot was unpredictable, fast-paced, and utterly *epic*. Honestly, near the end I wanted the novel to ease off the action with a long interlude because it was too much of a headrush to handle in one sitting of a read.

### **The PoV**

KW was told in Katya’s 1st person PoV, but towards the end it was occasionally interjected with others’ PoV. Usually this would annoy me but it felt natural to the story and kept my interest. It also helped greatly that the times it switched to a supporting character’s PoV it was to introduce a twist. And woah were there many twists. Nonetheless, I hope Katya remains the star throughout the series.

### **The Ending**

The ending was one of those things-are-just-beginning-cue-dooming-theme-music kind. I didn’t mind that, but what I did mind was the flat resolution. Talk about a big disappointment. It strongly felt like the story’s engine of adrenaline sputtered out. And no, KW being the first part of a series did not mollify me.

### **In Conclusion**

I rate KW 3-stars for I liked it. I loved everything about the KW except for open ending. I recommend the book for those who like YA science fiction to be actual science fiction instead of a facade for romance.

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### **Mark says**

Strange Chemistry is the new YA imprint of Angry Robot, and once the announcement of it's creation was made I kept my eye on their releases, hoping to see a sci-fi YA novel that I could pick up and read. Katya's World by Jonathan L Howard is the first sci-fi release from the imprint - and the first in book in the Russalka Chronicles - and I wanted to see just what it could offer. While not quite the space opera story I was looking for, Katya's World delivered, and made Strange Chemistry an imprint I'll be keeping my eye on in the future.

Katya's World is a story that follows our main character, Katya Kuriakova, and starts shortly after she's passed her academy exams and is qualified as a submarine navigator. She joins her Uncle Lukyan on his vessel, the Pushkin's Baby, on what should be a straightforward freight run, but just before departure the vessel is commandeered by the Federal Maritime Authority to transport one of their officers and a prisoner, Kane, to one of their bases. But not all goes as planned, and after a strange signal shows up on their equipment the Pushkin's Baby is attacked and sunk, only for the crew to be rescued by Kane's associates - pirates. From here we're taken along by events that reveal a secret from Russalka's past war with Earth, and the threat the planet now faces.

The prologue to Katya's World is essentially a history of what happened to humanity prior to the events that take place within the novel, and it's an excellent set-up. After reading it I was thoroughly intrigued to see



what the novel holds, but despite the space opera feel of the introduction, I was left a little disappointed when starting the story. Russalka is a planet of water, with no land mass, and all of its inhabitants live in underwater facilities. Submarine travel is the biggest aspect of life on Russalka, and while these initially didn't appeal to me as much as I'd hoped, the writing and characters soon brought the story to life and kept me hooked, turning the pages and wanting to find out what happens next.

What make Katya's World so enjoyable - so readable - are the characters. Katya, as our protagonist, is an interesting lead and as the novel progresses I found that she developed nicely, but very recognisable to the first-time navigator that we met at the start. Kane, the anti-hero, is just a blast to read, pure and simple. I loved pretty much every scene he was in, and I found myself questioning a lot when it came to him, from what his history is, and just what his motivations are now. The supporting cast are all interesting and more than just filler, and brought together they all make the novel well worth reading.

I did have a couple of minor issues with Katya's World, but in truth they didn't affect overall thoughts on the novel. I felt that a couple of things fell into place a little too easily for our characters, with some things just that touch too convenient. It didn't detract from my enjoyment at all, and it kept the pace of the story flying along, which in turn made me blast through it whenever I could.

Katya's World may not be the interstellar space opera I hoped it would be, but boy was it a blast to read. With a story that barely stops for breath, a cast of characters that drag you back for more, and a setting that holds so much promise, Jonathan Howard has delivered an excellent start to the Russalka Chronicles. I'll be keeping my eye out for the next one...

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## **Ranting Dragon says**

<http://www.rantingdragon.com/review-o...>

Jonathan L. Howard, author of the humorous Faustian series Johannes Cabal, ventures into new waters with Katya's World, the opening to a new science fiction series aimed at young adults. As the title implies, this book follows fifteen-year-old Katya of the planet Russalka, a world with no landmasses aside from its polar ice caps. Ever since the original Terran settlers arrived from Earth, humans have lived underwater in pressurized environments and traveled by submarine—a difficult life, but one they take pride in. As the book opens, Katya has just become an adult according to Russalkin law, and she's embarking on her first submarine voyage as a member of her uncle's crew rather than as a passenger. Their journey unexpectedly takes them into unfamiliar waters, where Katya encounters pirates and war criminals and witnesses the awakening of an unstoppable monstrosity.

### **Science fiction worldbuilding**

Even from the first pages, the worldbuilding was one of my favorite aspects of Katya's World. The prologue, though essentially a big history infodump to start the story off, reads like a grizzled grandfather narrating the past century of Russalkin history, relating their origins from Earth, the colonization of their planet, and then finally their war with Earth. The information dumped on the reader is all interesting and feels fairly relevant to the backstory, with the old storyteller's voice keeping the pace with its simple, unassuming narration. And then, throughout the rest of the novel, further details about this strange planet and different culture are revealed. All in all, Russalka feels like a believable planet with a rich, if brief, history, and I feel like there's more left to learn in the future volumes—not just about Russalka, but about Earth and about the science of

the universe.

#### Viewpoint flaws

The book starts with Katya's viewpoint and stays exclusively with her for much of the novel. But even when we're in Katya's head, Howard keeps many of her thoughts secret from us. The moment when Katya has a sudden epiphany and goes to talk to another character about it only to be distracted by his circumstances and apparently forget all about the questions she had for him was maddening! For chapters after that, I paid close attention, waiting to hear what Katya thought she'd figured out.

The last portion of the novel adopts a more global viewpoint and follows several different characters. This is abrupt and really quite disorienting at first; I think the book would have been stronger for either sticking to Katya throughout or starting with multiple viewpoints from the beginning. It is possible that my disorientation was worsened by the rough formatting on my e-ARC, though; I do look forward to rereading this as a physical book.

#### Young adult

This is a young adult novel with a teenaged female protagonist. Of course there's going to be romance, probably even a love triangle, right? Refreshingly, no! There wasn't a hint of romance throughout the book. In this story of Katya's coming-of-age, she faces many challenges and life-changing events, but there is no time or place for romance. I do enjoy romance in stories, when it belongs; but in this case I was thoroughly glad with its absence. If Howard had tried to include it, it would have devalued the rest of the story.

#### Why should you read this book?

This is a quick, engaging read—so engaging that I stayed up too late to finish it. Every twist caught me off-guard and drew me further into the story. If there were any major issues with the writing, aside from my complaint about viewpoint, I was too engrossed in reading it to notice—which is praise in and of itself. This book is certainly suited to young adults, but adults will also find enjoyment in it. The characters aren't forced into roles for the sake of fulfilling tropes, and the worldbuilding is tops. I certainly recommend Katya's World to anyone who enjoys reading about life on imaginary planets, especially those who are sick of the abundance of love triangle stories in young adult fiction today.

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