

Arabella of Mars (Review)

Written by Administrator

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kay, so the Napoleonic Wars are still taking place. There's that.

And there is colonialism. Again, a constant of the British Empire.

But then there is the *fact* that space isn't, well, space. It's full of air.

And with sailing ships that can lift on massive hot air balloons to low earth orbit, where they can set their sails and move about on interplanetary jet-streams and then, when they get to a planet, deploy heated chutes to come in for landing, yeah, so it's rather a different 1813 than you could imagine.

So young Arabella is a daughter of a rich landowner on Mars, interested in the ways and affairs of the natives (an English colony, of course. Why stop with India?), a pants-wearing tomboy. This latter fact causes her mother to decide that the frontier has made her too wild and packs her (and her sisters) back home. Now a societal prisoner of cold uninteresting England, poor Arabella pines for her native planet. Yet, while visiting relatives, she overhears her cousin Simon hatching a plot to travel to Mars and kill her brother and assume the family fortune. Locked away, it is up to Arabella to utilize her pluck, travel to Mars and stay Simon's assassinating hand.

So she'll be a busy girl.

Arabella of Mars calls on a number of period tropes for its telling, and that's fine. I recognize the bits of a girl shipping as a boy aboard a merchantman, of overhearing mutinous plans, of French space privateers and likely lads and mysterious Indian captains (a.k.a Nemo). And of

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course, we have the Indian Mutiny (cast with Martians) for the heroine to deal with.

So here's the deal on this book (first of a series, implied): just go with it. Yeah, it's silly and fantastic and difficult to explain to your literary chums, but it's fun. It's pretty much *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped* cast in space, with a dash of steampunk and a gallon of daring-do. I have to admit that I enjoyed it. I think you will too. So go out and get this one. Just get over the air-in-space deal and you'll be fine.

(and this is coming from a guy writing a story about people travelling about the moon on ice-runner boats!)

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