



Arkfall

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Humans live deep within an apparently lifeless planet covered by massive ice sheets. Having to survive in confined spaces has bred a unique culture where deference and non-confrontation make co-existence possible. **** Osaji's opportunities are limited by the need to care for her aging grandmother. But all that is about to change as circumstances push her toward a journey like no other.

Arkfall Details

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Author : Carolyn Ives Gilman

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From Reader Review Arkfall for online ebook

Kevin says

Arkfall is a surprisingly brilliant 5-star novella. The story centers on a group of three people who are set adrift in an underwater alien world. The peculiarity of the underwater world is fun, and interesting concepts are introduced to explain how humans can adapt to living in the environment. The driving force of Arkfall though is the great character development from beginning to end.

Lindsay says

An interesting read with a fantastic main character and some unique ideas.

Eric Hart says

I enjoyed "Dark Orbit" so much, I started looking for Gilman's previous work. In Nebula-nominated "Arkfall", she tackles personal issues dealing with deciding what path to take in life, and how much say you have in how you live, from the point of view of a character trapped in a ship which can only follow currents, with little ability to change direction. The ending is a little bit too much on the nose, but not enough to spoil the overall effect.

R. August says

About one fifth the length it should have been. Perhaps if I were Japanese I would have balked at the characterization of Osaji, but as I am not I didn't see her as the same flat stereotype that her wild west partner was. A little more subtlety on his part would have been welcome. It was a little hard to believe that a space-faring civilization would not have known that there was life on the planet before they touched down, but it was a forgivable contrivance for the story. Despite it all, I enjoyed this brief adventure and wished that it were longer.

Cary Grey says

I liked the story, which is about the explorer's spirit and the shackles of familial obligation. I wish that more of the story would have revolved around the locations that Osaji and Jack (and Mota) discover, but then again I'd have preferred this be a full novel. I feel like it could've been, but it's not bad as-is. Definitely recommended if you've enjoyed the rest of Gilman's Twenty Planets series.

Jenni says

Such an interesting novella. A very unique setting, with great worldbuilding that perfectly suited the introspective focus of the story. Osaji was a very, very relatable protagonist: caught between her desires for a different life, and the crushing societal pressures that they conflict with them. Definitely recommend.

Cameluta says

This story was amazing. It had only 57 pages (at least this is what my ereader showed) but it felt complete. The underwater world was so fascinating ... so many times I was wondering how it will be to have a world self-sustained. Osaji and Jack characters are antagonist, but they complete each other so well. The writing was beautiful, definitely a recommended reading.

Outis says

The setting is interesting but the highlight of this story set in a society with odd mores is a bit of situational comedy driven by culture clash.

Much of the word count is devoted to something else however... I won't spoil it except to say it's imaginative but highly implausible and has very little payoff. The story ends with a preachy moral instead.

Also of note: caring for a parent with dementia (or was that something else?) is an important but secondary topic.

Meran says

I must have read this in 2008, since it was in the Magazine of F&SF, but I don't really remember it. It's been EIGHT YEARS since then, and I'm getting a different experience; I'm identifying with the grandmother, Mota, not her daughter Osaji!

Very interesting science: people living on large planets, with heavy pressure under the seas.. which is the only place people believe they can live on those worlds.

A woman and her grandmother are forced to escape a quake in a purloined vehicle, a space "ark" (like on the show LEXX!) with a third guy, a man, a spacer no less, and go thru the phases of grief; denial, anger, etc. and all from the young woman's POV.

They discover amazing things, including other forms of life and unknown lands, mountains even that no one has seen or even guessed were there.

Short, quick story __ I hope it becomes part of a novel someday.

Zen Cho says

Recommended by Ann Leckie. I loved it -- loved Osaji and her conflicted relationship with Mota, loved the strangeness of their underwater world. I wondered a bit about the implications of having the very circuitous culture of Ben represented via characters of (apparently) Japanese heritage ... also I thought the American Wild Wild West guy was incongruous. Americans always gotta have Americans in their stories! Not that there's necessarily anything wrong with that, of course, but it's a bit odd when they're all in outer space, that space cowboys should be similar to actual (or at least one's idea of actual) cowboys.

Jakob Hessius says

This is a very short book by Carolyn Ives Gilman that I bought because I was going to Swecon in Stockholm, which Carolyn would attend as a 'Guest of honor'. I was very excited to get to meet her and, obviously, had to have a book for her to sign!

My intention was to buy her better known book 'Halfway Human', but couldn't get it in time for the convention, so this is what I got instead.

It is a cute coming of age story, about a girl rebelling against her confined life and all the expectations surrounding her maturity. The world building, or rather "under water world building" is rather interesting, but the story and the characters are pretty flat and not that interesting. I guess it's hard to build an entire world, several characters and a gripping story in only forty pages. I did enjoy it though, but wish it had been forty pages longer.

My main goal was to get the book signed, and that I did achieve!
Caroline was an interesting guest at the con, and a very nice and friendly person.

I really look forward to reading more of her work!

Don says

I read this without having any pre-conceived ideas of what the story was about, and was pleasantly surprised. The story was low-key but engaging. The world was mysterious and baffling but also, for the most part non-hostile. Osaji, the main character, was very well drawn. She is a woman caught in the confines of her society and family obligation, with frustration and dreams that seemed very real to me.

The world is fascinating, although at times the science seems a bit baffling. How they can go up and down in depth in such a deep ocean without suffering from decompression issues is ignored... having some knowledge of how nitrogen bubbles out of your blood in decompression I could not understand how this could be waved away... except perhaps that the world they are on has extremely low gravity so consequently the weight of the ocean is proportionally less... but still not satisfying.

And living in organic submarines that have NO MEANS OF PROPULSION? Oh, that is just insane. How do they dock the bloody things when they come back from "floatabout"?

(view spoiler)

Although I found the interaction between Osaji and Mota annoying (view spoiler) I guess Osaji got off easy in the end. Although it is part of life, its not particularly entertaining reading.

For me, as much as I had some issues with the story, and the character of Scrappin' Jack was a bit two dimensional, and its not the kind of story I would normally read... still I found the story one I had a difficult time putting down.

Aaron says

Very short (I read it over two days during lunch at work) but very good. I could read scientifically grounded books about the exploration of other planets all day. Especially those with a good plot and believable characters, like this one.

Mike Zyskowski says

A novella that I'd be happy to read a full blown novel about

Karen A. Wyle says

This is a very enjoyable novella (if it's even that long -- the download is deceptive, as it includes a substantial preview). The worldbuilding is clever and original, and the characters are reasonably three-dimensional. The story also avoids taking the relationship of the two main characters to the cliched destination it could have reached.

The book reads like a prequel or an accompaniment to some additional stories, which I gather it is not. (While it shares a universe with some other books, I gather they do not take place on the same world.) I was a bit restless about one unanswered question: the discoveries the protagonists make pose a challenge to the world view of the society from which one of them comes, and we see very little to forecast how that society may cope. There is also a sympathetic, indeed pivotal, minor character whose probable fate I would have liked to see acknowledged.

Some members of my book group posited that the female protagonist's personal journey symbolically reflected the situation of women in certain cultures. It may.
