



Way Down Dark

J.P. Smythe, James Smythe

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The first in an extraordinary new YA trilogy by James Smythe, perfect for fans of The Hunger Games and Divergent.

There's one truth on Australia: You fight or you die. Usually both.

Seventeen-year-old Chan's ancestors left a dying Earth hundreds of years ago, in search of a new home. They never found one.

The only life that Chan's ever known is one of violence, of fighting. Of trying to survive.

But there might be a way to escape. In order to find it, Chan must head way down into the darkness - a place of buried secrets, long-forgotten lies, and the abandoned bodies of the dead.

Seventeen-year-old Chan, fiercely independent and self-sufficient, keeps her head down and lives quietly, careful not to draw attention to herself amidst the violence and disorder. Until the day she makes an extraordinary discovery - a way to return the Australia to Earth. But doing so would bring her to the attention of the fanatics and the murderers who control life aboard the ship, putting her and everyone she loves in terrible danger.

And a safe return to Earth is by no means certain.

Way Down Dark Details

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Author : J.P. Smythe , James Smythe

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Genre : Young Adult, Science Fiction, Dystopia

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From Reader Review Way Down Dark for online ebook

Mogsy (MMOGC) says

3.5 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum [https://bibliosanctum.com/2017/06/10/...](https://bibliosanctum.com/2017/06/10/)

Not knowing anything about Way Down Dark before I started, boy was I in for a surprise. Somehow, I'd gotten it into my head based on the series title that this would be a post-apocalyptic dystopian set Down Under—but no, the novel is actually a generation ship story taking place on an interstellar space vessel called the Australia. In fact, the name of the ship itself is significant and made one of the plot twists later on in the book very obvious, and therein lies one of my main problems with this novel: too many predictable developments and conflicts. That said, I really enjoyed myself. There were still plenty of unique and interesting dynamics emerging within the main storyline—laudable, especially for a Young Adult novel—and if I had expected a little too much from it, well, that is entirely my own fault.

Way Down Dark begins the way many generation ship stories start—with descriptions of a mass exodus from Earth, whose living conditions are no longer suitable for large populations of humans for whatever reason. It is a tale seventeen-year-old Chan knows well, having been passed on for generations onboard the starship Australia where she lives. One day they will find a new home, but until then, our protagonist and thousands of others remain packed within the crowded berths and decks, trapped in a hellish existence filled with danger and violence. Long ago, the ship's occupants divided themselves, and now a savage group called the "Lows" have become a persistent threat, venturing out of their own territory near the Pit to invade and take over other areas of Australia. One thing holding them back from attacking Chan's home in the Arboretum had been her mother Riadne, a well-respected woman rumored to have fearsome, mystical powers. But now Riadne is dead, and Chan is left alone with the truth of how she died, along with a deathbed promise to her mother to keep her head down, be selfish, and stay alive.

However, ignoring the suffering of others is something Chan simply cannot do. Before long, our protagonist is fighting back against the roving groups of Lows and rescuing the helpless victims of their cruelty, much to the chagrin of Agatha, a family friend who has sworn to Riadne to watch over her daughter. Chan saves those she can, scrambling up and down the ship to retrieve the vulnerable, bringing them to a safe haven where they can be hidden and protected. Then one day, she makes a remarkable discovery, learning about a possible way to return to Earth. Unfortunately though, this just increases the tensions on the ship, elevating the brutality and violence in the gangs of murderous fanatics. As the situation reaches its boiling point, Chan and her allies desperately attempt to uncover the secrets of Australia for a possible solution to their problem, for resources are fast running out and when that happens their refuge will succumb to the enemy.

Crossover YA is a pretty hot category these days, with its lucrative appeal to both adult and young adult audiences, and at first, I actually thought this was what J.P. Smythe had intended for Way Down Dark. Almost immediately upon starting the book, however, I had to alter those initial expectations and place it firmly on the younger end of the spectrum. Namely, the narrative lacks a certain level of complexity, glossing over details and simplifying character motives and personalities. While this is no more and no less than a lot of YA on the market, I thought the book could have taken its ideas much farther with its potential. Instead, I got pretty much what was to be expected—which isn't a bad thing, just slightly disappointing.

Take Chan, for instance—she's strong, willful, and independent. When Riadne dies, she makes her daughter promise that she will stay of trouble and not draw any attention to herself, because making waves and trying to be a hero is a good way to get yourself killed on Australia. What would have been really surprising is if

Chan had actually listened to her mother, but of course underneath that sharp and cynical exterior is a heart of gold, and Chan can no more help running around rescuing children than she can help being a badass (though for all her bravado, she's still a naïve teenager, making a mistake later in the story that I saw coming a mile away).

There's little exploration into how our protagonist became this way though, just as there's little in the way of explanation for how things got to be the way they were aboard the ship. What actually happened on Earth to warrant the need for ships like the Australia? And once my suspicions about the ship's history proved true, I couldn't help but wonder: What was the point? And how is it that situation deteriorated so badly? As wild, inhuman, and destructive as the Lows are, they were nonetheless able to set up a rudimentary form of social hierarchy, so why couldn't the regular folk have done the same and set up leaders, fighters, protectors, etc.? In fact, how did the Lows even get to the point of losing all semblance of their humanity and decency?

Granted, I probably would have had a better time with the story if I hadn't been poking around its weak spots so much, and I'm sure there will be explanations coming down the road given the big reveal in the last chapter and the epilogue. Still, just be forewarned, there will be many questions and not enough satisfactory answers, at least not in this first installment. Ultimately, Way Down Dark could have done a lot more, but for a first of a trilogy, it is not a bad start. I think part of the problem is that I went in hoping for too much, and so for the next book I will know to adjust my expectations accordingly. After all, things did end on one hell of a cliffhanger, and I absolutely want to find out what happens next.

Justine says

This book is dark and gritty and went places I didn't expect. I completely see why it was shortlisted in 2016 for the Arthur C. Clarke Award.

Emma says

Despite a slow start to this book it explodes into action when violence arises from the differing groups; the Lows, Bells, and the Pale Women who live on Australia- a spaceship floating in amongst the stars.

The Lows becoming ever more violent are slowly taking over the ship from its deepest depths, that's when our heroic seventeen year old Chan comes in. Orphaned and living with family friend Agatha, it's only so long before she decides to take action and fight back.

What I liked most about Chan is that she's very grown up for her age, she's not blind to the fact of life. The guilt of killing someone doesn't phase, survival is her continual battle and she seems to be the protagonist I've been waiting for from a dystopian novel and I think her background is what makes her so thick-skinned. We're not really given a description of what Chan looks like other than because of lice she shaved her head, conveying again a matter of fact attitude, a thinker and someone who does what is necessary to solve a problem.

There's a lot of world building in this book, and we're kept in the dark to the end as to why they're on this ship called Australia. We're not certain as to how Earth was apparently destroyed, so I'm hoping this will be cleared up in the next book in the trilogy!

The spaceship Australia seemed like a place where people had come to die, not as somewhere to live. Poverty and degradation reeked all over, no authoritative figures to restrain the various groups from fighting. Nothing seemed to give the people living there a reason to life.

With a hell of a cliffhanger, Way Down Dark is a reasonably short book, but nonetheless packed full of mystery that brings up the harsh reality of what a hard life can entail. Smythe's writing really got to me in this novel, he made me really think about the consequences of a corrupt world. It's the beginning of a fierce, on-the-edge battle for survival. A brilliant start to what I think will be an extraordinary trilogy, bring on the second book!

Rinn says

I received a copy of this book for free from Netgalley, in exchange for an honest review. Also posted on my blog, Rinn Reads.

In a sea of Young Adult dystopian novels, Way Down Dark felt like a breath of fresh air. Ironically, considering it is set entirely on a claustrophobic spaceship. I really don't like it when books are branded as 'The next Hunger Games' or whatever the current trend is, as this has been called, and it really isn't that similar.

Australia, the ship where Chan lives, has several different factions: the Lows, the Bells and the Pale Women. Not everyone is in a faction, the former two being particularly violent and the latter a religious sect. But as the story begins, the Lows are becoming more violent and slowly taking over more and more of the ship. And then Chan begins to fight back against them.

I actually liked the violence of this book. There are a lot of YA dystopian novels out there that talk about how violent society is, but it is never shown. In Way Down Dark, life is tough. The Lows are brutal and what they do is horrific, but through this Smythe demonstrates just how much of a dystopia Chan is living in. It was also good to finally have a YA protagonist who doesn't feel guilt for killing and doing what she has to survive – Chan is tough, she is a product of the Australia, and what she does is, for the inhabitants of the ship, just a fact of life. Smythe does not skim over that, and the book is all the more shocking and effective for it. Additionally, Chan's appearance was not mentioned once, apart from when she says she shaved her hair to avoid lice, as most people on the ship do. A YA protagonist who does not talk about her looks, how 'plain' she is? What a relief!

I had several questions about the world-building. Why is everyone on this ship? We don't get much more detail than 'the Earth was dying', but I want to know more. What was actually happening? Global warming, nuclear war? Is everyone on the ship all that is left of humanity? Why are there no authority figures or any form of government? And most importantly, why was Chan's mother so well-known amongst the ship's inhabitants?

However, I really really enjoyed this book. It's short, at only 288 pages, and there's a lot crammed in. I'm just hoping that my questions will be answered in book two (although some were sort of answered towards the end, which then opened up more questions that I can't discuss without spoilers!), which I will definitely be reading. How can I not, after that cliffhanger of an ending?

Kelly (Diva Booknerd) says

ABSOLUTELY. PHENOMENAL.

<http://www.divabooknerd.com/2015/07/r...>

Way Down Dark is *the* young adult dystopian of the year. Gritty storyline and a strong willed, determined, kick ass heroine that will have you on the edge of your seat. It's dirty, it's gritty and exactly what the dystopian genre needs. A tough, balls to the wall storyline that holds the reader hostage. And you'll love every. Freaking. Moment. It's action from cover to cover, leaving little time for you to catch your breath.

Australia is stationed in space, hovering above the earth in search of a new home. Previous generations have passed down the stories of the Earth being over populated, dying and a new home was needed to save mankind. It's inhabitants scrambled to build ships to send skyward, but one was never found. Chan was born upon Australia, a ship of murderers, hardened criminals and misfits of society. The next generation on board are split into groups, the Pale Women who live by their Testaments, the Bell's who are experimental genetically modified soldiers, dangerous as they are dim witted. Shopkeepers who recycle clothing and shoes from the dead and the Lows. Deadly gangs that roam the ship looking for their next victim. But now they've decided to expand. Families are being terrorised, children stolen, parents gutted like animals and thrown into the depths of the ship and Chan may only be one seventeen year old girl, but she's determined to fight back.

Chan is absolutely fierce. I adored her! She knows when to keep her head down and when to fight back. The families who live within the berths, she considers her people and when the Low's begin to sweep through with their own form of caste cleansing, Chan takes it upon herself to take them on. The Low's aren't your average young adult villains, they're brutal, terrifying and have no qualms about slashing you to ribbons just because they can. Their leader Rex is nothing short of a ferocious, homicidal and now out for blood.

It's fight or flight on board Australia, but eventually they will find you. There's no where to hide, even for Jonah. Jonah with his shock of red hair lives under the instruction the Pale Women, until he finds his world ripped apart by Rex. Together he and Chan form a tentative bond, wanting to rescue others from the clutches of the Low's and themselves. But Australia isn't what it seems. Years of fables told throughout the generations could never have prepared them for what those on board are about to discover. It's explosive.

James Smythe is an incredible author that has crafted an engaging, enthralling and brutal dystopian young adult novel that will leave you breathless. It's intelligent, dark and incredibly gritty. I loved it for it's brutality, it's honesty and it's determination to fight for the underdog.

Yzabel Ginsberg says

[I received a copy through NetGalley, in exchange for an honest review.]

Life on the *Australia* spaceship is hard: the Earth is gone, only handfuls of survivors were sent on such ships through space, in the hopes that someday they'd find a new place to live... but aren't these travellers way too entrenched in destructive ways to even reach that someday? This is what I found deeply intriguing and nagging in this novel: a strong dichotomy between the goal, the Promised Earth, and how the ship's people were getting to it. Telling myths and stories about their origins... yet living almost day to day only, as if not

hoping in anything else anymore. Some of them taking care of their arboretum and their few other sources of goods... yet others bent on destroying, conquering, killing, razing down whatever they could, just because they could. Trying to survive by scrapping out metal and other bits of the ship. And all the while, those colonists remained trapped in their own microcosm, unable—or unwilling—to do more than that, their world torn between various gangs.

This is when you know that the society Chan's living in is completely upside down, and that something has gone terribly wrong. And the twist, although there are several hints and it's not so difficult to guess, pretty much fits.

Chan was a likeable enough protagonist: headstrong, wanting to help others, but not immune to bits of selfishness and cowardice, as she was trying to keep her promise to her mother ("don't die"). Not a perfect girl, not a special girl, but one who knew from the beginning she wasn't a special snowflake and that her only way of ensuring her survival was to bank on her mother's reputation and make it her own, using tricks and carefulness. The choices she made could've been made by many, many people: can you decide who to save when you do have some power (fighting...), only it's obvious you'll just never have enough? However naive some of her choices seemed to be, Chan tried to do what she felt was right by her fellow dwellers on the ship. She had a nice balance of good and bad sides, bringing humanity into chaos and madness. She could easily have let herself become a Rex, but she really tried not to. And she didn't spend most of the story swooning over some guy(s), which is always a nice change.

I liked the violent, brutal society depicted here, even though as far as world building goes, it was stretched rather thin. However, this was partly justified by how many decades, centuries had passed since the ship had left Earth: history decayed into gritty myth, and without much guidance, the minds of the people themselves started "decaying" as well. Though it may be seen as simplistic, it was also logical, all things considered, and was a good way of illustrating how narrow the world of the survivors had become.

On the other hand, the pacing of the story was a really problematic element for me. While it was necessary to illustrate how harsh life was on the *Australia*, the various events in Chan's life became redundant: be careful, try to work, barter, climb the gantries, escape the Lows, hide, climb up and down, hide some more, fight, get wounded, hide again, fight and get wounded again... After a while, it felt like filling between the strong starting point (Riadne's death) and the "big reveal"—and in a book that isn't so long, it's kind of annoying. This is why I'm not giving it a full 4 stars.

The end, too, brings closure to this first part of the trilogy (yay), but its cliffhanger was annoying nonetheless.

A pleasant read, one that kept me coming back to it, and that I liked overall. In the long run, I don't know if it's going to be that much more original than a lot of other dystopian YA stories out there. The ending seems to open towards something very different... or maybe not so? We'll see, we'll see.

3.5 stars.

Lily says

Hundreds of years ago, or so it is believed, humanity escaped a dying earth, searching for a new place to call home.

They never found one.

Now, there is only survival.

Way Down Dark by James Smythe is an altogether darkly disturbing and gritty dystopia set on the broken and decaying remnants of The Australia, a ship lost for generations in the vast emptiness of space. The Australia is a brutal landscape, adrift in the void and built upon violence and disorder, crumbling infrastructure and dwindling resources. It is overrun by fanatics, scavengers and murderers, loosely governed by a brutal gang mentality; you fight or you die. The story follows 17 year old Chan, determined to persevere against the bleak and horrendous darkness that is her existence and who accidentally stumbles upon an extraordinary discovery that will change everything that she believes.

I wouldn't outright say that I enjoyed this book, the author is a master at creating tension in the plot and the atmosphere is so darkly disturbing and unsettling that I was on edge the entire time I was reading it, equal parts horrified and intrigued. This is a world that is brutal and dangerous and broken, but also shockingly compelling and well actualised. The main character is tough as nails, incredibly strong willed, capable and determined, with a moral compass that flies in the face of her violent world. The story telling is fast-paced and filled with plenty of action, carnage and bloodshed. It is probably not suited for the faint hearted. This is a bloody fight for survival and it pulls absolutely no punches, never letting up the action or tension for a second. There is no beauty here, just fresh horrors and jagged wounds, decomposing bodies and the worst that humanity has to offer.

And yet... even in darkness there is hope.

The only downfall was that the plot felt familiar to me. If you have read much dystopia I think you will recognise where this story is going early on in the piece. This felt like an arguably darker and more horrifying version plot wise of several young adult dystopias that came before (view spoiler). This didn't really lessen my overall enjoyment of the book, but I was a little disappointed that it did not break new ground, so to speak.

I'm definitely interested to see where this series can go. That is, if I can stomach it.

Actual rating 3.5 stars.

Aentee says

Full Review crossposted to Read at Midnight.

Not everybody could be saved, that's how the story goes. The people sent up in the ships – they were the lucky ones.

First, an intro: Way Down Dark is follow the spaceship Australia. It carries the descendants of humans from generations past who fled the Earth when life as we knew it collapsed. They've been drifting endlessly in space, the ship – once a mode of transport to salvation – is now the only world the humans know.

1. You Like Strong Female Characters

'I'm not special,' I say, 'that's right. I'm really not. Anybody could have done what I'm doing, but they didn't. So I am going to. Maybe that's enough.'

You know how a lot of books just have one standout female characters while the rest of the cast just kinda... there? I'm looking at you: Graceling, The Hunger Games, and co. It's not like that in Way Down Dark. In fact, the book is heavily focused on the females of the ship and their interactions.

We have Chan, our narrator: strong, cynical, but kind. When her mother passes away, she made Chan promise: Stay out of trouble. Be selfish. Don't die. Australia is a harsh environment, a world where the strong eats the weak (at times, literally). To survive, Chan has been taught to look out for #1. She's well equipped for it, too: having been trained to fight & conjure parlour tricks that passes off as magic to the uneducated masses of the ship. Chan struggles with the internal code her mother and Agatha (a second mother figure) have taught her, she can't help but want to reach out to protect those who are too weak to fend for themselves. I liked that she didn't come off as mightier-than-thou, but a real girl with struggles and insecurities about all her decisions: even the morally right ones.

There's also a host of other female characters with backgrounds of their own. Riadne, Chan's mother, though dead at the beginning of the novel – is a constant force in the book. She was kind and well-respected on the ship, but also had a rebellious streak that ran even wider than Chan's. There's Agatha: an older woman's who tough as nails and a surrogate mother to both Riadne and Chan. Sweet little Mae, saved by Chan from certain death, continuing the strong maternal theme that runs throughout the story. Our main villain is Rex, the fearsome leader of the Lows – who's terrifying, yet still written to have glimpses of humanity. There are also others such as the Pale Ladies and Bess, who I'm sure will have even more of a role to play in later books.

2. You Like Strong Settings

The Lows? They're savages. Vicious, nasty, the basest parts of us run wild. The Bells? They're idiots. Lunks. Driven by impulse rather than anything resembling logic. But the Pale Women are something else. They have faith, which makes them tricky.

As in many YA scifi novels, we have people broken down into groups. The ones that inhabit Australia are vivid and colourful. There are the free people, who try their best to make a living on the ship despite order having fallen wayside a long time ago. There are the creepy religious zealots: the Pale Sisters, at first vicious dealer of 'justice' – now reclusive women that act on the words of their Bible. Finally, there are the Lows, creatures who have shunned the human code of conducts. All of these groups are drawn with such distinct characteristic, I could almost smell their breath and see their scarred bodies as I was reading.

The Ship itself is a character of its own. Both the characters' homes and something they grew to despise. It had beautiful places like the arborateum: an orchard of sorts. It also had terrifying corners such as the Pit: basically a landfill of corpses collected from all over the ship. There are the colorful free markets, the dark corners where the Pale Sisters hang out – each of these places were illustrated clearly on the pages through James Smythe's words.

3. You Like Books That Surprises You

I don't want to spoil too much so I'll keep this section brief. At 56% mark (according to my Kindle), the book does a 180 and all of my expectations were crumbled. I was very certain the book was headed a certain direction, but one sentence changed it all! Looking back, the twist might have been predictable if I wasn't tearing through the story at breakneck speed – but I liked that surprise. The direction James Smythe takes the story is very bold: leaving a lot of ground to be uncovered in the subsequent novels. It also promises that the world in the book is a lot larger, and a heck of a lot scarier than we initially thought.

4. You Like Believable Romances

The romance in this book was subtle. As it should be, with anarchy happening on the ship and death always just one mistake away. I also liked that in some way, it is a gender reversed romance: Chan is the heroic figure, whereas Jonah supports and follows her lead. Though there was not a lot of romance, I enjoyed their connection. I liked that though they cared a lot for one another, it was not an instant omg-can't-live-without-you vibe that you often see. They helped one another stay grounded and human in a tough situation, something I can always root for in a relationship. Plus, there's two more books for this ship to sail in a more swoony direction!

5. You Appreciate Books About the Power of Stories

Everything on Australia revolves around stories. They're all we have to entertain us; and all we've got to keep the little bits of who we were before we left Earth alive. We're told them from the moment that we're born, and we keep them alive until the day that we die. We create them, and we destroy them. The stories keep us safe, and they keep us scared. Sometimes, it seems like you need one to feed the other.

There are many important stories essential to these characters. For Chan: it's the stories Agatha tells her of her mother, helping us understand the connection between these three women. For Jonah and the Pale Sisters: it's the stories in their Three Books that serve as their code of conduct – but also as a promise of a better world waiting for them out there. Even our villain, Rex, has a story: the one she literally carved on herself to claim leadership and reign amongst the Low. Finally, the whole of Australia's existence is sustained by a story that allows them to hope – though it was cruelly shattered by the conclusion of this book.

And OMG you guys, the conclusion of this book!

Is it 2016 yet?

Why It's Missing One Star

- I felt that while the book was very engaging, it never quite hit its climax. That's quite possibly because of the crazy ass cliff hanger ending we've been left on *pouts*
- The ship was an amazing setting, but I wanted to know more about Chan's world – yes, yes I am an impatient grasshopper and it will come in the next book. So much information is being held back and I want it, now!
- I found the action sequences (and there were A LOT of them) a bit hard to follow – then again, I am very poor at visualising these things.

Overall, a tense, moody read with a cast of female characters that have meaningful interactions. What are you waiting for? Buy it!

Laura says

Wow! Way Down Dark is an exciting, fast-paced, action-filled dystopian with a very well-built world that ends up being an incredible beginning to a new trilogy. Seriously, I would be shocked if The Australia Trilogy does not become a huge thing. The story-telling is absolutely phenomenal.

Chan, a seventeen year old girl, is our main protagonist. She lives on a ship called the Australia and has her whole life, as well as the generations before her. Australia is searching for a new planet to live on because it left earth destroyed. It has a whole sustainable ecosystem (reminding me of *Snowpiercer* - only more in depth being that this is a book) and was meant to last until finding a new home. Only, Australia is not quite the same as it was at the beginning. Over years of drifting and never finding a new home, dangerous gangs have formed and have only gotten worse over the years. When Chan is forced to help her mother in a way she never wanted to, she gets on the most dangerous gang of all's radar, the Lows. One thing is true in Australia..everyone knows this. *You fight or you die. Usually both.* This is something we are constantly reminded of throughout the story. It is impossible to forget how dangerous Australia truly is. There is plenty of action and fight sequences with violence and gore. Plus, there is absolutely no romance in these pages (big bonus for readers similar to me).

The build up of the story is just fantastic. It is filled with twists and intrigue. The book is 288 pages divided into three parts with relatively long chapters. There are 12 chapters with 4 additional chapters told from Chan's mother's best friend Agatha's perspective, but set in the past to enlighten us on earlier occurrences aboard the Australia. We're also given a prologue explaining why the people left earth to live on ships in space and an epilogue.

With that ending, I need the second book asap. I cannot wait to see where James Smythe takes this series next. He created such a fantastic world within these pages. It truly is a refreshingly unique dystopian story.

I absolutely recommend this book to anyone that loves a great dystopian - including fans of The Hunger Games, Divergent, The 100, and *Snowpiercer* (all for different self-explanatory reasons). **I cannot recommend this book enough!!** Give it the read it deserves!

fromcouchtomoon says

YA Dystopia in Spaaace... the world seems ill-considered, but then it makes sense toward the end after the big reveal when it becomes IT WAS A ____ THE WHOLE TIME. Too unambiguous about the evil guys, fails to humanize all sides, but for a spacious, quick and easy YA novel, it's a good read, with strong, imperfect female characters that dominate the narrative in ways that feel perfectly natural and uncontrived.

Liz Barnsley says

Way Down Dark was simply fantastic – a rip roaring kind of old school adventure set in Space, a perfect piece of storytelling aimed at the young adult audience that anyone of any age will absolutely adore. Forget The Hunger Games – you ain't seen nothing yet...

So anyway we meet Chan, who is fending for herself after her Mother dies, living aboard Australia – where violence abounds, day to day living is tense and insecure and also where things are about to get a lot worse as one of the factions aboard begins a huge power play...

I sunk into this one without looking back – from the very first page James Smythe captures the imagination, sets the reading adrenalin pumping and things simply get better from there. I devoured it, completely immersed in this world as Chan fights for survival and tries to maintain at least a semblance of moral code. Discovering the ship's secrets she is about to face even bigger challenges.

This is so terrifically multi layered – imaginatively speaking it is a corker, the world building is superb, the characters are all vivid, alive and gorgeously drawn and the crafting of the story is top notch. Really really great writing and a true touch of storytelling genius.

Best thing is this is a trilogy, and as a part one it sets the scene with pitch perfect rhythm, making your teeth ache in anticipation of book two. The end packs such a punch, the final line is so inordinately fist pumpingly good that I practically jumped in the air before coming back down and thinking “Oh darn. Now I have to wait”.

I feel pretty much the same about this one as I did reading Red Rising – the guys over at Hodderscape will understand that one and may read this line then find somewhere to hide...but this is me you are talking to – I'll find them.

Overall a truly wonderful read – the kind of book that writing was meant for, ingenious, artistic and most of all a hell of a story. And as always for me, the story is the thing...

Brilliant.

Figgy says

Actual Rating 3.5

Hundreds of years ago, people fled a dying Earth in search of a new home. They never found one.

Everything the people on the spaceship Australia remember now is from the stories that were handed down, generation to generation; there is no permanent record of any of it. All the books have long since crumbled, and any scraps of use – be they fabric, metal scavenged from the ship itself, or items collected from the decomposing bodies in the pit at the bottom of the ship – have been recycled, many times over.

The only place they can get anything new or fresh is the arboretum, a greenhouse that hangs in the middle of their ship, where they can work to pick fruit and vegetables. Everything else is recycled and turned into food, water, or clothing.

Everything we wear is recycled, like the air, like the water, but how they get their materials is different. They scavenge. We've come to accept it: that they go to the Pit at the bottom of the ship, take what they need from the bodies and then clean it, dye it, re-cut it. They turn the scraps into something new and you'd never know where they originally came from. Rumour has it, even the dyes they use come from down there. Rumour has it that they harvest skin with

tattoos and recycle the colour from them, draining it out of the dead skin, soaking it out and breaking it down. I don't know if that's true, but it feels like it could be.

The rest of this review can be found [here!](#)

Brett Orr says

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Gritty. Dark. Brutal. These are buzzwords that are routinely used in reviews of Young Adult novels, but never have these words been more fitting than for James Smythe's *WAY DOWN DARK*, the first novel in the *AUSTRALIA* trilogy. The 'Australia' itself is a colossal spaceship sent adrift through space, searching for a new home after the destruction of Earth - but the ship has been floating for hundreds of years without communication or governmental control. Instead the ship and its inhabitants are left to rule themselves, forming classes and factions that vie for control of Australia. I said this was dark and gritty, and to be honest, the level of gruesome detail borders on the nauseous at time. Most of the book involves discussions of the 'Pit', the lowest level of the 80-floor vertical ship, a place where everything rotting and dead has fallen and accumulated. Bodies and waste have piled up here, serving as the mass grave for hundreds, perhaps thousands of people over the years. Be warned - you might need a strong stomach to get through some of the chapters. The book follows Chan, a teenage girl who attempts to make a small difference against the mounting war between the 'free people' of Australia and the Lows - vicious bandits who border on the psychopathic. The Lows - originally called that because they lived on the lowest levels of the ship - have been amassing power, conquering the ship section by section, and they will kill and destroy everything in their quest for control. Added to the mix are the mysterious Pale Woman - holy priestesses who live in the topmost floor of the ship and worship a modified form of the Bible that has *three* Testaments rather than *two*. This 'new' bible contains additions that tell about the destruction of Earth, the story that everyone on the ship believes. I can't say anything without revealing a massive spoiler, but suffice to say, if you know about the history of the country - my own country, as it happens - Australia, then you might have your own suspicions about the big plot-twist. I was hoping for it, but it still floored me, and spurred on the the second half of the novel in a big way. *WAY DOWN DARK* appeals to its own Biblical themes too - the Pale Women talk of 'ascension' and allude to *Revelations* and the Apocalypse. The Four Horsemen are there - *War*, as the Lows and Free people engage in a bloody struggle; *Famine* as the ship's primary source of food, a sustainable arboretum, is contested; *Conquest* as the Lows sweep across the entire ship, led by a power-crazed king; and *Death* itself that hangs over the ship, slowly whittling down the population of Australia. Chan might even be Christ of the second coming, redeeming and saving those whom she believes are pure and deserve hope, and condemning those who have wronged her. Out of all this comes a gripping novel, short and thrilling. The action never lets up, only broken for the occasional plot reveal. The world of Australia is impeccably described, and has clearly been thought through in detail; right from the first page, the reader is transported to this desolate ship in the middle of space, where trust is rare and power is the new currency. *WAY DOWN DARK* will stay with you long after the final page has closed, and it ends on a cliffhanger that will certainly kickstart the sequel with a bang. *WAY DOWN DARK* is already available in all good bookstores, and I recommend it to anybody who loves YA Sci-Fi or Dystopians.

The Good

A dark, bloody YA that doesn't pull any punches. A perfectly described world of chaos and power, with two massive plot-twists that make this one of the best novels of the year.

The Bad

The gruesome details can be a little nauseous, but aside from that, I can't specifically name anything 'bad'.

The Verdict

Brutally dark and intense, WAY DOWN DARK delivers a thrilling entry to the AUSTRALIA series with a twisting plot that makes it one of the best new releases this year.

Lindsay says

On a generation ship called Australia a young woman has just lost her mother and struggles with her last directives. Be selfish. Look out for yourself first. Survive.

It just happens that Chan's mother dying is the catalyst for a new leader of the Lows to come to power. The Lows are animalistic savages that live in the lower parts of the ship and have been slowly expanding their control for years. The society on-board has been stable for a long time, but no longer.

This is good dystopian SF, although brutal in parts. It's a little hard to see how this sort of place had been stable for years, let alone decades, but I think it's plausible enough. It also makes for a really interesting extended prologue for whatever happens next.

One thing (very spoilery): (view spoiler)

Bilbo Baggins says

Did not like this at aaaaaall.
