



Beyond the Starline (Dark Sea Trilogy #1)

Austin Hackney

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An orphaned child. A mysterious device. Cut-throat pirates who'd kill to get it.

When her mother is murdered by pirates, Harriet Howland is thrust into a dangerous quest to find her missing father. A fast-paced steampunk adventure for everyone from 9 years old and up.

Harriet Howland is happy to day-dream, listening to the tales of adventure a roguish sky monkey tells her at their secret meetings. But when her home is attacked she is thrown headlong into a dangerous struggle for survival. What is the mysterious device the dying woman gave her? Who is the strange Professor Poliakoff? Will she find out before the pirates close in?

Beyond the Starline (Dark Sea Trilogy #1) Details

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Author : Austin Hackney

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From Reader Review Beyond the Starline (Dark Sea Trilogy #1) for online ebook

Dave Higgins says

Hackney combines the broad sweeps and high peril of the action mystery with the fine detail of character-driven narratives. Both rollicking tale of a plucky youth and sweeping portrayal of a complex society, this novel has much to appeal to readers of all ages and preferences.

Harriet Howland spends her days working in her mother's laundry and her nights sneaking out to listen to the tales of derring-do told by Sibelius the sky monkey. But when pirates attack her home in search of both her and a mysterious brass device, she is thrust into an adventure more dramatic than the most unfeasible of Sibelius' tales. Chased by both criminal factions and the police, each step closer to the truth of her past puts her two steps closer to disaster.

Hackney crafts a grimy, yet not depressing, world, filled with cheeky dodgers, melodramatic villains, and steam-gauge-clad machinery. Skilfully balancing description of technology and science with the casual perspective of a narrator used to the sights of their own society, he shows the reader a vast steampunk dystopia without descending into tedious exposition or specification.

Where this balancing act between the dark and light, familiarity and wonder, might fail is in the names of places and things: Harriet's home town is called Lundoon; and several other names are almost those of the real world. With no explanation for why the names are this way, this neither one nor the other labelling can feel like cleverness for the sake of it.

However, this is the only bump in an otherwise engaging alternate reality, filled with the darkly comical, lightly threatening, and space squid.

Shifting between grimy back streets, labyrinthine swamps, and the voids between worlds, the plot races from danger to danger, casting doubt on ever more of Harriet's comfortable assumptions.

Harriet is a well-written protagonist. Head filled with Sibelius' tall tales and lacking life experience, her reaction to the sudden collapse of her life is a plausible mix of confidence and naïvety. It would be easy to characterise her as a 'strong female lead', but that would miss the fact that – while her sex creates obstacles – she is not defined by it.

The supporting cast are a similar mix of familiar stock figure and nuanced personality, both providing the sense that they have complete lives outside Harriet's story, and making them immediately accessible without sacrificing the possibility that they are not what they seem.

Overall, I enjoyed this book greatly. I recommend it to readers looking for fast-paced steampunk adventure that is light without lacking depth.

I received a free copy from the author in exchange for a fair review.

Dee Chainey says

Excellent book reminiscent of Philip Pullman's Dark Materials with a steam punk twist! Engaging characters, with a lot of plot twists and suspense, this will keep readers on the edge of their seats until the final page!

Meg Merriet says

I loved this book! Within the first page, I was hooked. A young girl in terrible danger travels to the dark sea in pursuit of her father 'the adventurer.' Golden Compass meets Treasure Island meets The First Men in the Moon in this thrilling adventure to the stars. The heroine Harriet is the most adorable little guttersnipe I've ever encountered in a novel, and her traveling companion Sibelius stole my heart with his sky monkey charm. I couldn't get enough of their dynamic and I am looking forward to the next book.

This coming of age story utilizes humor, action and beautifully written prose to whisk the reader away to another world in a fresh and original narrative. A great read for folks of any age. This universe has been meticulously crafted and full immersion takes place effortlessly. You can feel the machinery vibrating in the walls, taste the morning fog hanging over Lundoon. This visceral journey was one well worth taking and I highly recommend it to anyone who craves adventure and mystery or has ever looked up at the stars and imagined sailing the cosmos to distant worlds.

Dominique White says

Having noticed the strong positive reviews for Beyond the Starline on this site prior to picking up my copy, I must admit I found the reading experience deeply disappointing. The undeniably strong plot and superb rollercoaster ride action were marred by narrative flaws, sexist undertones ("Harriet" conveniently becomes "Harry" and is, by the way, the only female character in the novel, except her deceased progenitor and stepmother), a drab and mundane steampunk other world, as well as reinforced class stereotypes that I feel will only serve to nonplus middle grade readers.

"Beyond the Starline" has original features that would make it stand out among the crowded MG literature market, but in its current edition I would be reluctant to recommend to peers or their children. I am nevertheless delighted that the novel is receiving accolades from other readers who have taken much pleasure from reading the debut novel of The Dark Sea trilogy and whose opinions I respect.

Wendy says

This is the story of Harriet, a young girl whose life is turned upside down in a single night when pirates attack, killing the woman she thought was her mother in their search for a device Harriet never knew she had. Her foster mother's dying command sends Harriet and her friend Sibellius, the charming French-speaking monkey, on a non-stop adventure to find the father Harriet thought was dead, and the mythical land

he was searching for.

Did I say non-stop? Because I mean it. Harriet's adventures literally take her high and low like a rollercoaster as she races from the pirates and to her destiny in the skies above, as well as the streets below which she has never been to before. Indeed, this is a high-flying adventure, taking Harriet from Sibellius' balloon to sky ships sailing among the stars as the friends journey to the moon with pirates and giant space squid ever on their tails. It moves along very quickly, but also sets up quite a bit, introducing the main character and the coveted treasure that will likely play a big role in the rest of the series.

This is intended for a younger audience but is just as enjoyable for adults looking for a fun read. Despite this, the story isn't always light-hearted, as Harriet struggles with the secrets she unravels and finds that the truths are not at all pleasant. There are some hard lessons taught and learned by Harriet.

One of the elements that really captured my attention at the start was Harriet's inner monologue. The story is told from her point of view, but it goes one step further into her perspective because she actually does talk to herself in a charming, but still easily understandable, brogue.

The steampunk elements are worked in seamlessly, making them seem as natural and accessible to the reader as regular cars and boats.

But really, what really got me was Sibellius. That's right. You had me at French-speaking sky monkey.

J.L. Weaver says

It's not often I stumble upon a story that truly draws me into another world. Beyond the Starline is such a book. In fact, while I had my nose buried between the pages, I forgot I was reading. The smoggy Victorian-esque city of Lundoon comes to life in all its grimy, clanking, pick-pocketing glory. Before I knew it, I found myself transported to an exciting steampunk world filled with airships, pirates, charming characters, and daring escapes. This is one fast-paced adventure, written by an inspired mind, the wonderful stuff of daydreams. There were a few twists I didn't expect. And best of all, I cared about the characters. I was right beside Harriet, Sibelius, Davy and co every step of the way. Teens and the young at heart should be intrigued by the mystery elements, and warmed by the positive messages of friendship and determination. Also, who doesn't love a French-speaking monkey? I'm certainly looking forward to more adventures in the Dark Sea Trilogy!

M.H.Johnsen says

Beyond the Starline is a roller coaster from start to finish. We follow the protagonist, Harriet, as she gets thrown into adventure, running from murderous pirates to protect a mysterious device linked to the puzzle of her own parentage. This is Treasure Island and the classical quest story rolled into an exciting steampunk package and set in space. Think airships, talking monkeys, magicians and outpost colonies on the Moon. Suitable for younger readers and entertaining for older ones, it has a strong message of friendship and equality. I'd recommend it wholeheartedly, in particular for the younger audience, and I'll be sure to pick up the second book in the series when it is released in the summer of 2016.

The novel is strong and compelling, and its flaws few and minor. The story moves at breakneck speed, and could benefit from a slower pace in places. Hackney writes well and it would be a treat to see him slow the story down for increased emotional impact. Nevertheless, the drive of the story will almost certainly be a winner with younger readers. Throughout the story there's a strong emphasis on equality, with Harriet earning the respect of her initially prejudiced male compatriots as the plot unfolds. This part of the story is important, and while I found this aspect perhaps a bit too blunt for my taste, I expect it will be well received by a younger audience. Also, the slight bluntness is contrasted nicely by the subtler, deft handling of Harriet's relationship with her parents. This is central to the emotional conflict in the story and surprisingly dark for an otherwise cheerful read. In my opinion, this is a solid positive, as it balances the light with the dark in a delightful way. One senses that there is a rich history lurking under the surface of the story, its details hinted at with a promise of answers to come. This history and the flawed adult characters add believability and dimension to Harriet's quest. It is, in my opinion, one of the strongest elements of the novel.

In short, *Beyond the Starline* is packed with exhilarating action sequences, engaging mysteries and I am looking forward to seeing how the story unfolds in the second book of the trilogy. I'll be sure to pick it up.
