

Orphan Station

John Kent

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John Kent's *Orphan Station* is an emotional, heroic coming-of-age tale that sees the universe through the eyes of a young girl in space as she searches for the truth about her family.

Selene Sotana is a bright, creative preteen who lives on a space station that orbits a radioactive planet. Her parents helped build Orphan Station, but their tragic death has left Selene an orphan herself. She lives with her "uncles"—the other crew members of the space facility. The crew teach and nurture her, but also must hide her existence. Selene's secretive world is shattered after an encounter with another ship, sending her on a journey of healing and discovery during which she learns new information about her family. As the adult crew members argue about what's best for Selene, she takes her destiny into her own hands, proving she's more than just a child.

Selene's transition from child to teenager is perfectly rendered: she balances between insecurity and ego, and she's prone to emotional outbursts. Her imaginative mind and inventive actions make her a likable hero, while her mistakes and reflections are relatable. The trauma of a major incident affects the tone of her inner monologue and the rationale of her decision-making, while her physical and psychological evolution is reflected in her language and motivations.

Selene's "uncles" are described physically, with personal details and dialogue to establish character traits and voices. Parts of their personal histories are woven into the story, often revealing surprising information about Selene's family. Selene's relationship with her Orphan Station family explores the line between personal and professional behavior, while the dangers of space encourage themes of lost childhood. Selene brings the human experience to the ship and the characters on it, introducing warmth and life into an otherwise cold and sterile environment.

Selene's inner monologue moves the novel forward. In some ways she is an unreliable narrator, frequently daydreaming and dramatizing her encounters. The pace is rushed toward the end, adding several underdeveloped characters and hard-to-visualize action scenes. While it's sometimes difficult to discern the plot's direction, unpredictable twists are successfully added throughout the narrative, capturing Selene's character growth and bringing cohesion to her experiences.

Various locations on Orphan Station are described, though it's difficult to imagine the facility as a complete unit. There is a lot of technology aboard Orphan Station; some is well-explained, while other aspects are confusing. Information about the station, its relationship to other space facilities, and the general status of mankind are briefly examined through Selene's lessons on the ship, but not fully explored. As the novel is the first book in a series, some questions about the crew of Orphan Station and Selene's life are left unanswered.

Orphan Station is a fun, creative, female-driven science fiction novel with a heart of gold.

DELIA STANLEY (August 7, 2018)

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