



A Problematic Paradox

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Guardians of the Galaxy meets *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* in this wild, warm-hearted, and hilarious sci-fi debut about a brainy young girl who is recruited for a very special boarding school.

Nikola Kross has given up on living in harmony with classmates and exasperated teachers: she prefers dabbling in experimental chemistry to fitting in. But when her life is axially inverted by a gang of extraterrestrials who kidnap her dad and attempt to recruit her into their service, she discovers he's been keeping a world of secrets from her--including the school for geniuses where she's sent for refuge, a place where classes like Practical Quantum Mechanics are the norm and where students use wormholes to commute to class. For Nikola, the hard part isn't school, it's making friends, especially when the student body isn't (entirely) human. But the most puzzling paradox of all is Nikola herself, who has certain abilities that no one understands--abilities that put her whole school in greater danger than she could have imagined.

A Problematic Paradox Details

Date : Published January 23rd 2018 by G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers

ISBN : 9781524738457

Author : Eliot Sappingfield

Format : Hardcover 352 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Childrens, Middle Grade, Humor, Fiction, Young Adult



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From Reader Review A Problematic Paradox for online ebook

Sean says

Holy cow, this book was AMAZING!! So much wit and fun and crazy gadgets... and the enemies... oh just wait. I can't spoil it. Nikola is one of my favorite protagonists ever. Super-smart and knows it, totally cool and confident...

I promise, even the adults will find TONS to love about this book. It's like when you watch a really well-written animated film and half the jokes are written for the adults, but written in such a way that the kids think they got it. I can't wait to see where it goes.

I read an advance copy of this book.

Anja says

This was a good, solid, juvenile fantasy book. It was well-written with lots of intriguing detail. The dialogue was funny. I liked it. However, as a juvenile fantasy book aside from the alien aspect, it wasn't anything special or earth-shattering. Despite being intriguing 50% of the time, the plot was pretty basic and nothing stood out to me: the protagonist stands out of the crowd because of something 'unusual' about her and is eventually accepted by a different society. Something bad happens and the adults don't believe the protagonist until the end of the book.

I'll give kudos to the author for creating an unusual setting and somewhat interesting but also flat characters. I do want to learn more about the parahumans and Hypatia and Werner and Nikola, especially her powers. I felt like the villain wasn't layered. I thought that Nikola would find her father at the end. I felt like the stuff with Tabbabitha happened---whenever she tried to contact Nikola during school---so that it would distract the readers from why Nikola was at the School in the first place, but I wasn't distracted. I want to see Nikola reunite with her dad. I hope that it'll be covered in the sequel (I'm assuming that there is a sequel because you can't just end the book the way it ended; there has to be more). For once, I'm more interested in the plot of the sequel (s) than the characters themselves. I felt like Nikola is a one-dimensional character but I like her intelligence so I do want to read another book in her POV. I'd recommend this book for juvenile fantasy readers. I'm bias to rate this book a 3/5 rather than a 5/5 because I'm no longer a juvenile reader.

Sean Randall says

"Warner started tapping out some rude commentary, and before long, the three of us were having a rather hilarious argument that sounded a lot like sitting inside a car during a hailstorm."

From the synopsis of this, I asked if it could be the next Randoms, the fantastic first kids book by David Liss. Whilst falling into a different bracket, and perhaps having more strangeness and less of the contemporary tropes, this still really rocked. A bit younger, mentally, than some others in the class, but highly enjoyable all the way through. More, please!

Samantha Clark says

What a fun book. I loved all the inventions and fun ideas for the genius school. Think Hogwarts with science instead of magic.

Jackie says

Nikola Kross lives with her quirky, near-genius father in a trailer outfitted with all the requisite creature comforts. He made his millions inventing odd things. He is almost always absent (in mind and body) and Nikola doesn't have many friends at school either. But, when she is approached by Tabbabitha, a creepy alien, things take a turn for the insanely odd. She means to whisk her away.

Tabbabitha doesn't get her way with Nikola, so, of course, she goes after Nikola's dad. He is kidnapped and now Nikola is on her own...sort of. She is taken to The School where genius humans and parahumans learn and study highly complex subjects. Here she has friends but worries about her dad. As the days go on, she learns there are secrets her dad has been keeping from her. And, she finds she has special attributes, too. How will all this help to get her dad back and what exactly does Tabbabitha have to do with it all?

A Problematic Paradox is full of quirky characters, scientific-thinking, and complex situations. As a reader, I didn't really connect with the characters or the plot. At times, there was too much information and at others, not enough. For me, it was a tedious read.

Megan says

I'm not exaggerating when I say that Nikola Kross is a genius. She's 13, but she's already an accomplished scientist. The only problem? Being extremely smart makes it very difficult to make friends. She's shunned at school for being the "weird girl," and even her guidance counselor suggests that Nikola try to blend in with the rest of her peers rather than being herself.

After an unsettling encounter in a park with some very strange-looking bullies, Nikola comes home to find out that her dad has been abducted, and the kidnappers are coming for her next.

The truth? The abductors are aliens with advanced technology and abilities.

She is sent to an advanced school for geniuses as a refuge. This is no ordinary school, but as it turns out, Nikola is no ordinary girl. She has abilities that no one can explain, but these gifts may help her save her father and the school.

I utterly loved this book. It was hilarious, articulate, and well-written. There were moments where I just had to sit back and flail at the cleverness of the language and worldbuilding.

I got to about 75% of the way through and was convinced I knew how it would end. Nope, that wasn't the case at all. My predictions were way off base.

I guess this book is going to be part of a series, because there are a lot of plot points that haven't been

resolved at the end. Bad news is, this book came out earlier this year, and I'm not sure how long it will take for the author to write the next installment.

I loved this book, hence the 5 stars, but to be honest I think it may be better categorized as YA rather than middle grade. The vocabulary alone is enough to make my eyes glaze over, and I actually understood most of the words they used. I could only guess at what a 6th grade would think of all the science jargon. Though, much of it is hand-wavey sci-fi science jargon, so you don't actually need to know quantum mechanics to love this book. Think Rodney McKay in Stargate or Scotty in Star Trek. Does the science actually hold? No, but it sounds plausible to the untrained eye. That being said, those words can get loooong.

I loved how Sappingfield discusses the cultures of the aliens. To be honest, the worldbuilding was off the charts. I'm so impressed by the imagination and inventiveness.

I guess one thing I had an issue with is how easy everything came to Nikola, though I suspect there is a plotty reason for this that will be explained in the next book. I have a few guesses about who her mom might be (or rather, what species her mom is) that might explain her abilities.

I would recommend this book to students probably 7th-9th grade (if not older), especially if they are getting into science fiction and enjoy snarky female protagonists. I do think older teens and adults would also enjoy this book as well.

Rawan says

I liked this book for several reasons: One, it's the type of sci-fi that makes you literally space out of reality (which I truly needed these days). Two, it's a children's book, so if it's a good one (which it was), then it's fun. Although I'm almost 18, I like reading children's books because they're so different from adult books, they don't contain the cliche and drama, and they're made for a child's mind, a mind that has simple to no worries, and that's mostly innocent. The novel was seriously very fun and the idea was one that I've never heard before. The only comment I have was that everything was rushed at the end, and it felt like the story needed a completion. Other than that, I loved the book and I'll definitely make my younger siblings read it (when they decide they could read a word from a book without sleeping).

Sallyavena says

The storyline is a perfect story of overcoming rough things, using your smarts and talents and learning new things, but it is bogged down with all of this higher level "Thinking, ideas, science" that was hard to follow and made the story drag. Nikola is an exceptionally intelligent human that has always found it hard to fit in. She ends up at a "town" for highly intelligent beings that are doing things like quantum physics and nano technology to the umpteenth degree and they like to talk about all of this. Being just an average person with an average knowledge of physics, I found it hard to follow and don't even know if any of it is real...and it is a big part of the story. Seeing as the target audience is much younger than I am and really have no knowledge of physics, I can't see how this book would be a big hit with them. Or they'll just skim over 3/4 of the book to get to the fighting aliens scenes.

I can see this book being a big hit with those with a geek mindset that loves physics.

Lisa Lewis says

I'm not usually a fan of aliens and sci-fi, but this story hooked me from the first page! I love Nikola Kross and her spunky snarky attitude. She doesn't quite fit in at her middle school, being a genius and all. Then her dad is kidnapped and she is next. Nikola escapes and ends up at The School (for humans and not). It has hi-tech, wormholes, and a crazy intelligent student body. She works hard at school, at finally making friends, at trying to find her father, and trying to stay alive.

A Problematic Paradox is so good; I am praying for a sequel!

Lily G. | Sci-Fi & Scary says

Disclaimer: I received a copy of this book from Netgalley free for review consideration. It does not affect my review.

A Problematic Paradox was a fantastic read, when it wasn't making me irritated. So mostly, yeah, it was awesome. However, there were a few key points where what I thought was funny and what the author thought was funny diverged so much that it left an unpleasant taste in my mouth. And, unfortunately, it only takes a couple of those occurring before your whole experience of the book was tainted.

For example, I found it a little difficult to stomach – given the current plethora of school shootings happening in the United States – a teacher suggesting a child take an AR-15 for self-defense. Even if it was bubble-gum pink and came with non-lethal ammunition. Obviously there's a huge divide in America right now on how we should handle the situation, and a book review is not the place to go into it. So, I'll simply state that in my opinion this was in extremely poor taste.

(I would add a trigger warning here if you are getting this for a child who has been affected by school shootings. The gun never makes another appearance, but the one is enough to possibly upset them.)

Another thing that bothered me (though not nearly as bad as the above) is that this was a little bit too Harry Potter influenced in key areas. I would have preferred to see Nikola with another ability that wasn't super similar to Harry's. Maybe you can put it down to just being an ear-mark of an extremely stubborn, strong-minded person, but... And the headmaster is an obvious nod and/or dig at Dumbledore, except not nearly as likable. So, yeah, a bit much going on there.

One other thing I'd like to address - not a criticism, merely an observation - is that there are many times in the novel when the humor feels a bit advanced for the intended age range. Like the gambling debt reference. It made me snicker, but how many kids in the appropriate age range would get that?

Moving on, though, in most other aspects, A Problematic Paradox was a great read. There were lots of lines I snickered at. I liked Nikola and Hypatia. (I thought I was going to dislike Hypatia in the beginning. Was happy she grew on me.) Some of the other characters were entertaining as well. The set-up of fighting against the "Old Ones" was nice. The school itself was awesome. I loved how everything was spread out, the locations, the scheduling, etc. It sounds like a great geek school that most of us would love to attend if it actually existed.

The pacing of A Problematic Paradox was perfect! This was a book that hit the ground running and didn't stop until it had reached the finish line. There's also just the right amount of action, and at least a few scenes that were surprisingly creepy!

Even with my problems with A Problematic Paradox, I can acknowledge that Eliot Sappingfield's debut novel will delight many readers. I will not be reading any further into the series, but I can see it becoming a huge hit. I would suggest, however, pre-reading it to decide if its appropriate for your kiddo.

Tory says

An insanely fun, snarky, zany, scienced-out Harry Potter!

"...when you stop looking for the worst in people, *that's when you see the good stuff.*" -p44

Maryann says

Great fun! I would love to see a sequel.....! Full review coming soon in Library Media Connection.

Beth says

When your dad's secrets catch up to him and he ends up kidnapped, and you find yourself at a boarding school with other geniuses (courtesy of his back-up plan, which he also kept a secret), what do you do? In this case, make the best of things -- find friends for the first time, discover the joys of learning, miss and worry about the lost father, and oh yeah, confront the evil alien at the root of your problems. The protagonist has a snarky, fun voice and combines wit and luck with great energy.

Ms. Yingling says

ARC provided by the publisher and reviewed at Young Adult Books Central

Nikola Kross is a bit of a social outcast, and her guidance conselour (whom she calls "Ms. Hiccup") advises her to try to make herself less of a target. That's hard for Nikola to do, considering that her mother went missing when she was very young, and her father is an eccentric scientific inventor who has set up two mobile homes inside an abandoned SuperMart in North Dakota for the two to live in. When she is accosted on the way home from school by a very weird girl named Tabbabitha, Nikola is very worried when she gets home and her father is nowhere to be found in their compound. When she is later attacked and manages to run off, Ms. Hiccup appears, saying that she was given a pager by Nikola's father, with the instructions that she was to pick up Nikola and drive her to a specific location if the pager ever went off. The two head to Iowa ("On purpose?"), follow circuitous directions, are attacked by a swarm of enormous bees, and finally

end up at The School. Nikola's father is a friend of the founder of this institution, Dr. Plaskington, who doesn't seem surprised that Nikola's father was abducted. The Old Ones are on the move, and everyone in the school is preparing for them to attack. Nikola manages to settle in as much as possible, and actually make a friend in her roommate, Hypatia. For once, the scientific curriculum and geeky classmates make her feel right at home. Tabbabitha is still a threat, and The School is preparing its students to fight the Old Ones. Will it be enough preparation for Nikola to survive and locate her father?

Readers who enjoy stories set in schools for children with special powers such as Black and Clare's Magisterium series, Bell's Uncommoners, or Nimmo's Charlie Bone will be enthralled with the details of life in The School. The whole town seems to be part of the campus, and the different magical shops and restaurants as well as the great classes and quirky teachers will appeal to those who want to imagine schools where all of the students are magically minded. While Nikola didn't get along perfectly with all of the students, I especially appreciated that there weren't any real enemies for her there, either. Fighting Tabbabitha and the Old Ones was problematic enough!

I almost wish that we had seen more of Nikola's daily life in the SuperMart before her father was kidnapped. What an imaginative setting. I especially liked her description later in the book of how her father cleaned--when things got bad enough, he just replaced the mobile homes! Don't we all dream of that when contemplating the area behind the refrigerator?

Having Nikola be the heroine of a science infused story line is quite a nice idea, since girls are often underrepresented in science fiction tales. This reminded me quite a bit of Jennifer Strange in Jasper Fforde's The Chronicles of Kazam, or Lucy Carlisle in Stroud's Lockwood and Company. Of course, the missing father makes definite parallels to the newly REpopular A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L'Engle. It's good to be reminded that girls can vaporize aliens just as well, if not better, than the boys.

Mark Buxton says

My name is Nikola Kross, and circumstances have dumped me straight into a war pitting humans and parahumans against the Old Ones. My father has been taken prisoner by the ancient creatures, and I now find myself in an advanced, secret school for geniuses. The school is in the middle of nowhere and is guarded inside a dimensional dome by thousands of robotic bees. Teachers and other students don't understand my natural ability to manipulate quantum agar, but many people would have been killed without it. Tabbabitha, the Old One who captured my dad, has been trying to figure where I am, but I have no idea why. My roommate and I have now discovered a startling and impossible truth. Somehow, Tabbabitha has gotten past the school's defenses, and it's only a matter of time until she finds me!

I was unsure about this book when I started, because it's a bit odd and wacky. Nikola had an abrasive personality, and her home in an old department store building was eccentric. The paranormals were strange and diverse characters with abilities and habits that take getting used to. However, the plot became more "normal" when Nikola was first attacked by the Old Ones. I appreciated that the author didn't attempt to explain Nikola's ability with the agar, but it became the main weapon and defense. All of the characters were highly intelligent, so you need to be prepared for descriptions of science concepts, computer talk, and far out

ideas; Nikola's roommate took an afternoon to whip up a wormhole allowing her to quickly travel across the town. I appreciated the author's creativity in developing a unique and inventive setting and conflict. Overall, the book may not be for everyone, but I found it engaging and interesting. I recommend you give it a shot.
