



## Flotsam (Peridot Shift #1)

*R.J. Theodore*

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**A fantastical steampunk first contact novel that ties together high magic, high technology, and bold characters to create a story you won't soon forget.**

Captain Talis just wants to keep her airship crew from starving, and maybe scrape up enough cash for some badly needed repairs. When an anonymous client offers a small fortune to root through a pile of atmospheric wreckage, it seems like an easy payday. The job yields an ancient ring, a forbidden secret, and a host of deadly enemies.

Now on the run from cultists with powerful allies, Talis needs to unload the ring as quickly as possible. Her desperate search for a buyer and the fallout from her discovery leads to a planetary battle between a secret society, alien forces, and even the gods themselves.

Talis and her crew have just one desperate chance to make things right before their potential big score destroys them all.

## **Flotsam (Peridot Shift #1) Details**

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Author : R.J. Theodore

Format : ebook 535 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Steampunk, Fantasy, Aliens

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## From Reader Review Flotsam (Peridot Shift #1) for online ebook

### Devann says

*I received an ARC copy of this book from NetGalley*

Space pirates! Or maybe Steampunk pirates? But still, what's not to love? This was such a fun book. It's set in a world that basically used to be a 'normal' planet but something happened that they call the Cataclysm and it got 'blown up' I guess for lack of a better word, but now their 'planet' is made up a lot of little islands [that somehow still have gravity and air? But I'll suspend my disbelief because I really love it] and the 'flotsam' is basically the outer atmosphere that is littered with all these crashed ships and other stuff. There's also a lot of stuff with the different races of people that live there [and some aliens as well] and their gods, but I don't want to rehash the entire plot here. It's some really cool world building and made even more impressive by the fact that this is the author's first book.

All the characters were really fun too. The main crew of the pirate ship consists of four people but there's another character that is fairly prominent as well as one of the aliens. It's a very interesting group of people and they all have their own things that they bring to the team. This book reminds me a lot of the Sunken City Capers series (first book: The Solid-State Shuffle), which I love, mostly just in terms of mood but both series are about thieves/pirates although hilariously enough the pirate one takes place in space and the other one takes place mostly under water because it's set in a world where the coastlines have moved up drastically. Anyway, this was just a really fun book that went from being your average heist story to a very involved political plot. I can't wait for the next one!

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### Yuna says

2.5\* but I'll bump to 3 because I think it had potential.

This book reminded me a lot of The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet, which I was also so-so on. I liked that this book had a more linear plot (but more on plot later because it was...messy) and didn't feel episodic the way Long Way did for me. But, what I loved about Long Way was the tight-knit crew and the character interactions. That was missing for me in Flotsam. It tried, but pretty much from the get go that we meet the crew, they're defying or questioning everything the captain, Talis, does. So, it made Talis's musing about how Dug is her BFF and the crew is family and she's got to do right by them etc feel a bit less than genuine. This wasn't Mal and Jayne posturing a la Firefly, it was as if Zoe got in Mal's face every time he made a decision, and had no camaraderie. Or if Kaylee constantly held the threat of leaving her Captain Tightpants over his head, and confronted him all the time over how to run his ship and btw she'd do a better job. So, no crew chemistry for me, and when it tried to build a backstory for them it felt forced.

I liked the plot at first, but by the end there were too many Big Bads all maneuvering for power and I'd long since gotten action fatigue. As much as alchemy was brought up, I never got a sense that it factored into the story. Re: messy plot-- Gods v. Aliens v. Secret Society v. Angry Planet.

The ending is abrupt. I know this is the start of a trilogy or series, but there was zero closure for me. It just ends with everything kinda shitty.

For all that there was always stuff happening (perhaps a bit too much), and this isn't an overly long book (not sure why GR has it listed as 500+ because my paperback was <400), it felt like it could've used a bit more judicious editing. In particular, some of the descriptions of settings/people get really long.

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### **Featherfire says**

I was expecting to like this book. I wasn't expecting to love this book. I certainly never thought it would end up on my "wow" shelf, but I feel it's earned its place there. I actually found myself avoiding reading because I didn't want it to end. At the outset, I admit I was concerned by the very prevalent Firefly-like feel (there were times when I could easily read Talis's dialogue in Nathan Fillion's voice), but as I read on that faded away and the story took on a life (and a charm) all its own. Because of its genre, it still maintains an air of Firefly-with-a-dash-of-Bioshock-Infinite for me (this could be because I just don't have a lot of experience with steampunk in general)... but that's okay because I love both of those things. The worldbuilding was excellent; I never felt lost or confused even though Peridot is a very unique setting, but there wasn't so much exposition that it felt like an infodump at any time. The pacing of the story was also very nice... it never dragged, I never felt bored by the narrative but neither did I feel there was too much action with no downtime. And all of the characters were likable in their own way... even Hankirk. And now I sit back and wait for the sequel with as much patience as I can muster.

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### **Jennifer (bunnyreads) says**

This book is a cool blend of steampunk, fantasy, and sci-fi. I am not even quite sure which category to tuck this one in and I loved that about it.

You can tell there was a lot thought put into this world, it's gorgeous. The setting, the alien cultures, the outfits, everything was so visually stunning and I liked that it was a nice balance of detailed world building and trusting you to be able to keep up. And that there was a very handy glossary for the times when you think you know what something is but aren't totally sure, or in my case, just terrible with names. For me, the glossary was a definite must-have.

The characters were appealing and the tidbits of back story and their complicated pasts together and apart, were interesting and kept me wanting to know more about them.

Although, there were things that were hinted at that I would have loved more than just allusions to—especially Tallis and the High Priestess Illiya's, time serving together. And I wished for more about Tallis and Hankirk's rocky past. I think it would have made some of Tallis's decisions concerning him less frustrating to have had a better understanding of their relationship. I am hoping there will be more of that sort of thing in the next book.

The Yu-Nyun had an Earth Final Conflict feel to them in the way you are left questioning if they really are as benign as they seem, or do they have ulterior motives? I was really hoping with the not leading you by the nose style to the writing, for there not to be an obvious answer to that question and others that were hinted at within the plot. Some events in their attempts to get us from one thing to the next felt a bit easy and for me, those moments were some of the weaker parts of the story.

On the whole, it was an enjoyable story with lots of room to grow and my issues were so minor compared to

what I thought were its strengths. It made for a really fun and creative read and is the kind of debut I love finding. I am looking forward to seeing where the author takes things in the next book.

Thank you to Netgalley, Parvus press, and the author, for the opportunity to read this ARC!

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### **Laura says**

Flotsam drew me into a type of world I've never seen before. An exciting mash up of space opera and steampunk, the adventures of Talis and her airship crew kept me riveted. I'm definitely looking forward to the next installment of this series!

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### **Riley says**

**Flotsam** has one of the strangest non-dream settings I've experienced in books. The planet Peridot underwent a catastrophic event, known as the Cataclysm, that resulted in the world being split into pieces that are loosely held together by the power of the Nexus. Each piece is an island, floating in space. One assumes that the Nexus maintains the loose configuration, atmosphere and gravity that allows the islands to support thriving populations. Oh, and the gods live within the Nexus and seem to have some responsibility for creating life, maintaining the balance of the Nexus and controlling all magic (alchemy).

Most of the action takes place in the skies on board the *Wind Sabre*, an airship, lending the steampunkish feeling. Though the presence of gods and magic/alchemy also give it a fantasy feeling. The non-earth space-like setting gives it a scifi feel. Plus there are aliens. So it is hard to define the genre of **Flotsam**. But, since I enjoy steampunk, fantasy and scifi, I really savored the combination.

There are many vividly described locations throughout Peridot that are part of the story. I appreciated the author's descriptions of all these fascinating places.

I loved that the adventure never, NEVER slowed down. Will Captain Talis next decision be a good one, or will she get her crew into even more trouble? Spoiler – there was a lot of leaping from the frying pan into the fire. Followed by more leaping.....

There are plenty of colorful characters in this book. The least well known major character is the lead, Talis, as only parts of her story come out. But this is a series. There will be opportunities for Talis' secrets to come out in a future story. Throughout **Flotsam**, you get to know about the crew of *Wind Saber* as you learn how Dug, Sophie, and Tisker came to be part of the crew. And there Talis' ex-boyfriend, Hankirk, who is stupid and dangerous. And, I suspect, he will not go away easily.

There was a cliffhanger ending, which I am not fond of. I really liked this book, so Flotsam gets 4 stars – minus one star for the cliffhanger.

Through NetGalley, I received a copy of this book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

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### Alexa says

Read on my blog.

LGBTQAI+: I think Tisker (a side character) is gay, but there is only really one reference to it and the word isn't used. There are also aliens who use neopronouns. (So, not much.)

Sex on page: No (also no romance at all, only references to a past fling)

*I received an ARC through NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.*

I'm not even sure how to rate this book. 3 stars? 3.5?

Peridot is a fractured planet made up of many islands, home to five distinct humanoid races that were created by the Divine Alchemists, who are now worshipped as gods: Cutter, Breaker, Bone, Vein and Rakkar. The main character, Talis, and two other members of her crew are all Cutters, and the fourth one, Dug is a Bone.

I would like to start by saying that I loved the worldbuilding in theory – the fractured planet and the five races that were created by gods who still live among the people – but I had problems with the execution. To me, the Cutters sort of seemed like “regular” humans with no real special characteristics. We only see one Breaker in the entire book, and basically no named Rakkars. The Vein are four-limbed people who are physically blind, but oh, they have a magical sight – like every other blind race in anything ever. And finally, the Bone are dark-skinned people who live in desert tribes. While not outright barbaric, the Bone are often portrayed as violent, and the one Bone crew member, Dug, is described as large and intimidating immediately when he appears. I hope I don't have to explain why I was conflicted about that. In short, I liked the idea but I felt like the races could have been written much better, and I'm hoping they'll be more detailed in the sequel.

As for the characters, in the first half I was intrigued by all four crew members of the Wind Sabre – but towards the second half, Sophie and Tisker faded into the background and barely felt like individual people. Also, as I mentioned above, there is one throwaway sentence about Tisker not preferring Talis's “parts”, which is not only a pretty cissexist way to say he's gay, but it's also never brought up again. (To be fair, there aren't really heterosexual romances in the book either, other than mentions of the fling Talis used to have with one of the male antagonists.)

One thing I really enjoyed was the alien race (the Yu'Nyun) and the very different way they use gender and pronouns. They don't seem to have genders at all, or at least at this point we don't know anything about those – they use pronouns based on situation and class, and they have very strict rules on what class is allowed to wear what type of clothes. If I remember well, there are 9 pronoun groups, but like 50 different versions of the same pronoun? While this is only explored in a couple of scenes so far, I was genuinely intrigued by an alien race that is truly different from what we expect, and doesn't just have the same binary genders. The characters we see use the xe/xin/xist pronoun set, and one of them becomes a major side character. (Although an actual “human” (Cutter, Bone, etc.) nonbinary character would have been nice.)

As for the plot... I sadly have to admit that I almost completely lost interest in the book about 70% in. I found myself enjoying it until then, but the main battle fell flat for me and I was begging for it to be over. Still, there were some plot twists and solutions by the crew before the 70% mark that I appreciated.

In short, I would say that Flotsam had many ideas that I liked, but the execution very often could have been better. I might pick up the sequel to see if these things improve, but at this point I am undecided. Honestly, I have no idea where the plot is going after this, but I hope we learn more about the Rakkars and the Breakers, as well as the Yu'Nyun. Especially regarding the Yu'Nyun, I have some suspicions based on hints and I would love to see more.

My rating: ???/5.

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### **Mike says**

This is the second steampunkish novel I've read recently featuring airships plying between the floating remnants of a planet long after a catastrophe has torn it apart, and I have to say, if this is a new genre, I like it. For one thing, both of them have been better, from a copy editing viewpoint, than the vast majority of steampunk books, but they've also shown a good grasp of story structure and characterisation. (The other was Curtis Craddock's *An Alchemy of Masques and Mirrors*.)

I have to say that I never did quite figure out the physical layout of Peridot. There's gravity, but there doesn't seem to be anything causing it; things just fall into the flotsam layer and stay there. It was never clear whether the aerial islands formed a disc or a sphere, either; it seemed like a disc, but I could be wrong. A lot of the early worldbuilding consisted of unexplained references that I had to set aside in the hope of understanding them later, and some things, as I say, never did get clarified. Near the end of the book, an island boasts a volcano, which seems at odds with the way everything is laid out; where's its magma coming from? And the river and fountains of sand, while cool, didn't seem particularly likely.

All this is background, though, really, and the focus is on the plot. It starts with a well-worn premise - plucky captain, who's rebelled against the injustices of society and become a smuggler, has to take risky jobs to keep her battered old ship maintained and flying. Despite its familiarity, the trope is played well, and the escalation of stakes is smoothly handled. Before we know it, the captain and her crew are in the middle of an alien invasion, and making choices that affect the fate of gods.

Yes, it's a genre mashup: steampunk, aliens, post-apocalyptic, adventure. Fans of Lindsay Buroker will probably enjoy it; it has a competent female lead who keeps questioning her competence to herself; a diverse crew who have their own issues and bicker among themselves, but pull together when the chips are down; and the aforementioned steampunkish setting, aliens, and adventure plot. If the author can be as consistent as Buroker in producing entertaining stories on this model, she's likely to do well, and this one is certainly a promising start.

I received a review copy via Netgalley.

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### **Jillian says**

Normally, I am not a scifi reader at all, but this combination of scifi, steampunk, and space opera was very engaging for me and I was pleasantly surprised at how readable it is. It is funny, the character development felt natural, the pacing felt just right, and the world is unusual enough that it is intriguing but not so unusual that it leaves you feeling confused and left behind. Once you get into the rhythm of the writing, the author's style is refreshing and it felt very "clean" in terms of efficiency; meaning, there are descriptions of characters, scenery, fighting scenes, etc., but I felt like every word counted and nothing was too flowery or ornate. Oh, and I love the glossary at the end. I am excited to see where things go with this series!

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### **Connie says**

Tails and crew are down on their luck so accept a contract that will tide them over, trouble is this simple job to salvage an old antique ring is not so simple and they're not the only ones with an interest. A fabulous SteamPunk adventure with Airships, Aliens and God's.

I really enjoyed this and I loved Scrimshaw the Yu'Ny whole Alien who ended up on the Wind Sabre and I hope we see more of his character in the next book, which I'm really looking forward to.

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### **Tracey says**

Historically for me stories of space travel reminded me of Star Trek which I had been ambivalent about at best as a child. So to say I was uninspired by the long running galactic TV series to ever read books set in space was probably an understatement. However, after reading Meagan Spooner and Amie Kaufman's acclaimed Starbound series a whole new genre of books was opened up to me. This led me to Flotsam and how very glad I am.

Talis is captain of her own ship, Wind Sabre and along with her small crew survives by taking contracts of a somewhat dubious nature. When she accepts a deal to retrieve a ring from the flotsam layer of dead junk that surrounds the space islands of Peridot, it seems too good to be true. Probably because it was. The contract takes Talis and her crew on an uncomfortable journey for survival. An old flame turned adversary, Hankirk, now an Imperial Captain is hot on her tail with the might of the Cutter Government behind him. Add to that the strange Yu-Nyun alien spaceship trailing her and she's in a race for funds, new parts for the space ship and her survival.

Occasionally in a book, I read a line that I enjoy so much I go back to read it again. And again. Then I savour it like a really good Merlot. This book didn't have one such line. It had many that I loved, so wonderfully crafted, like "she'd start the questions on the outside. Find a chink, wedge it open, and ease in" This author can paint a picture as vividly as if she had acrylics and a brush in hand and she isn't afraid to use a cutting sense of humour. When referring to the reluctantly accepted resident alien she tells us that Talis thought 'it' was "always agreeing while simultaneously correcting. Not her favourite conversationalist this one"

Talis is a complex character, beautifully written. She is fiercely protective of her crew, especially the (figuratively and literally) tortured Dug. She is a tough, resilient woman on the outside whilst constantly self-doubting her thoughts and decisions on the inside. Her musings again give free rein to the author's ability to write a dry sense of humour. When in trouble Talis thinks "what an incredible honour to have such a target painted on her back"

The plot jogs along at a very respectable pace and the world building was excellent. One of my favourite quotes comes at the end of the book, so I can't include it without adding a huge 'spoiler alert' warning. Rest assured, the book's end has left me waiting with bated breath for book number two. I genuinely can't wait to read it to find out where the story goes next.

An ARC was greatly appreciated from NetGalley, the author and publisher and this review has been in no way affected by that.

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### **Mandy says**

Full disclosure: I received an advanced ARC copy of this book.

Maybe it's because I'm more of a hard sword-and-sorcery fantasy reader than a sci-fi or steampunk reader, but I really enjoyed this novel and found it to be very original. The world building is extensive without getting bogged down in the details, which I appreciated. Many authors most known for their "world building" tend to get so hung up in description that they forget to develop their characters, and that didn't happen here. I found myself intrigued with the crew, especially Captain Talis.

I read for a good story and escapism, and this is quite the yarn. What begins as a salvage operation on a steampunk-style airship quickly turns to sci-fi with fantastical races and genuine aliens (that actually fit the moniker), and then turns again into a bit of a mystery, and the line between the good guys and the bad guys gets blurry. There are a lot of elements from various genres that I think the author has tied together, but I have to say my strongest impression was that the Wind Sabre and her crew have a very Firefly/Serenity vibe going on.

Overall, story is what's important to me, and I really enjoyed this one. I look forward to more entries in the series.

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### **Koeur says**

Publisher: Parvus

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Genre: Mixed but mostly Steampunk

Rating: 4.4/5

**Publishers Description:** Captain Talis just wants to keep her airship crew from starving, and maybe scrape up enough cash for some badly needed repairs. When an anonymous client offers a small fortune to root through a pile of atmospheric wreckage, it seems like an easy payday. The job yields an ancient ring, a forbidden secret, and a host of deadly enemies.

**Review:** A crazy blending of Steampunk, Fantasy and SciFi that takes you on a genre bending wild ride through the skies of Peridot.

The world building is incredibly epic for a newly minted author and hints at uncovering even more as this series evolves. The characters were not only well developed with the movement but continued to draw interest as their personal histories unfolded. At one point I thought this novel was going to take a nose-dive into many buckles being swashed and overly elaborate descriptors on how they were dressed for battle (if hot looking sky pirates are your thing). Thankfully the instance was short lived and the novel gained in grittiness what it lost in glamour.

Although mixing genres has been done before, this author elegantly combines the visceral and fantastical into a salable whole. Well done noob.

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### **Abi (The Knights Who Say Book) says**

\*I received an advance reader copy in exchange for an honest review\*

**Review:** 2.5 stars. Okay, so Flotsam is... interesting. (Aka the start of every "conflicted feelings" review)

I have to say, I started off pretty impressed. The world of Peridot is really cool, from a planet made up of thousands of floating islands that's currently in the midst of an alien encounter to there being five different types of humans with various strange additions (extra arms or feathers, for example) to the airships that are used for travel because there's no real ocean in this world. And the worldbuilding only got more interesting as the book went on, exploring the concept of mortal gods and what interstellar travel would mean to a place like Peridot.

The plot also included several interesting plot twists, so there are definitely parts of the plot I look back on favorably. Others, not so much. There were a few scenes that seemed like they were supposed to be action-packed and dramatic but because they basically amounted to longwinded accounts of maneuvering air ships around they just... weren't. I remember thinking at one point that the chase scene I just read felt like an account of two snails racing each other — both slow and irrelevant. Not to mention, in the biggest battle of the story the main character does very little, and everyone basically watches this one other character does all the important things. At that point you sort of want the author to just make that character the main one and be done with it.

The other place I feel Flotsam fell flat was with the characters. The main crew and such were reasonably developed, but I think you can tell that I don't feel a whole lot of excitement about them; they were pretty average. Mostly I think the problem is that while I can see each character's individual personality, I can't really see their bond as a crew. While we see how they each interact individually with Talis, their captain and the main character, the group dynamic just isn't there.

I was also disappointed with a few aspects where I feel Peridot's awesome, original worldbuilding reverted to predictable scifi tropes. The little we see of the Bone people and their islands (the Bone are Black (and the Cutters are also PoC, at least if I'm remembering correctly)) are just very... "barbaric punishments and also a desert?", aka pretty much like every barbaric country that just happens to be the country full of Black people in every fantasy/scifi book ever. Again, it might just be because we don't see enough of their floating islands to see a nuanced view of their culture, but it feels tired. I hope the Bone get a more in depth treatment in the

sequel.

There's also another one of the human races (the Vein) that are blind, and appear to have the ~magical ability to sense everything around them even though they can't see~ that every single blind character in fantasy/scifi does. The author could have done something way cooler and original by not using that old trope and instead focusing more on what kind of accommodations would develop for blind people in a strange world like Peridot, in my opinion.

And yet, for all these criticisms, I still would like to know where the story is going in the sequel (mostly because after that ending, I honestly can't predict where).

#### **Previous update:**

I'm almost going to cry <3 I had some real complaints about this book's handling of a nonbinary character's pronouns that made me rate this lower originally, but I've just been informed that the publisher is taking this seriously into consideration and making some kind of change! I'm so glad they're willing to really listen and adjust, and I'm glad that I can now add this to my nonbinary characters shelf without the embarrassment of that character being misgendered the whole time. While I don't know what pronouns the author will eventually go with, I have faith that the adjustments made are going to be much more sensible.

Full review on the actual book content/plot/characters to come, but I wanted to adjust my official rating to 3 stars and make a note that I have a lot more faith in Parvus publishing now, and I'm so happy they reconsidered.

**Another update (latest edit):** I wanted to add a quick note here after getting another email from the publisher! It seems the author is going with xi/xin/xist pronouns for Scrimshaw for the final version of the book, without the misgendering that occurred in the draft arc. To clarify for anyone who is wondering whether they should read this for nonbinary representation: Scrimshaw is an alien, and a secondary character, so xi is not the focus of the book; I'm just glad to know that anyone who picks up this book in the future will get a nonbinary character treated with respect.

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#### **Bob Milne says**

Flotsam is a book that intrigued me from the first line of its cover blurb.

*A fantastical steampunk first contact novel that ties together high magic, high technology, and bold characters to craft a story you won't soon forget.*

Seriously, that one line promises a lot. The further I read, the more excited I became, until I started to worry my expectations were becoming too high. No matter how good a read it might be, R.J. Theodore had her work cut out for her - through no fault of her own - in delivering on those expectations.

Having had a few days to digest the book, to separate the emotions from the thoughts, I am pleasantly surprised to say it was everything I wanted - and perhaps even a bit more.

This is a book that starts out with a crazy treasure hunt that is of neither the deep-sea nor the outer-space variety, but somewhere in between. We're introduced to Captain Talis as she's dangling in the air, waiting to

explore a shipwreck within the detritus strewn layer of the atmosphere. It has all the elements of a pulp adventure to it, complete with betrayal, attack, and pursuit, and kicks things up a notch with the appearance of a freakin' spaceship. Yeah, you heard me, a beautifully odd ship of silver, floating alongside sail-driven steampunk airships.

There is a lot to like here, beyond the rather cool concept. The characters are a lot of fun, some more developed than others, but all of them more than just stock figures. The world building is impressive, and even if it feels like there is a lot that's been held back at this point, what we do get is satisfying enough to turn questions into anticipation. The action is fantastic, something of a cross between space opera and nautical warfare, and the hand-to-hand combat is refreshingly unorthodox. Theodore does a great job of playing to the genre conventions, but never settles for being predictable, even if it means forcing the reader outside their comfort zone sometimes. As an added bonus, the aliens are truly that - alien - humanoid in appearance, but visibly crossed with other species, and having a class-based system that surpasses any question of gender.

While Flotsam does explore some themes of gender, class, and authority that are interesting, it is most successful as fantasy escapism. This is fun, fast-paced, and, and clever enough to keep you guessing. As a standalone novel it does, perhaps, leave too much unknown or open-ended - especially with its cliffhanger ending - but as the opening to a series it is everything it needs to be to keep us reading.

<http://beauty-in-ruins.blogspot.ca/20...>

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