

## Kiya and the Morian Treasure

**R. S. Mellette**

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*In Kiya and the Morian Treasure, the first entry in a science fiction series, friends team up as the galaxy teeters on the brink of war.*

In R. S. Mellette's space opera *Kiya and the Morian Treasure*, a girl is swept into a galaxy-spanning adventure to prevent a war by finding a lost treasure.

Nadir is the daughter of a planetary diplomat who has mastered the art of protocol and proper behavior. But then her mother dies and her father, Janus, hires Kiya, a cocksure guide, to take them to their home planet, Caseri. Their ship is attacked and boarded by a bounty hunter who's eager to cash in by turning Janus over to a vile warlord.

To Nadir's surprise, Janus turns himself over to be executed; the warlord who kills him hopes that the act will unite the galaxy under his rule. Kiya continues with her contract, taking Nadir to Victalus. There, secrets come to light about Kiya's history and connection to the legendary Admiral Moria, whose death left his massive treasure hoard a mystery.

Both about the connection between Kiya and the Morian treasure, and about Nadir's father's sacrifice, this intimate, playful story is narrated via Nadir's journal and heartfelt thoughts; there are a few interjections from people who witnessed events that she didn't, too, that result in new immediacy. As Nadir travels across space at Kiya's side, her voice matures, but without losing its sense of humor. And Kiya is a snarky companion; still, every word she utters serves a purpose. Nadir comes to adopt some of his unsavory verbal traits as she grows, becoming less of an upright diplomat's daughter.

The book's worldbuilding is light, left to quick bursts of undercontextualized information; planets' names, alien races, and technologies are shared, but without enough context to prevent them from becoming a blur. The dynamics between people hold interest better because of their tenderhearted turns. Nadir and Kiya's friendship stems from a shared sense of trauma, but it evolves into one of deep mutual respect.

Though much of its action is recounted after the fact, the story is fast moving and urgent. And while the treasure triggers its movements, Nadir's growth is more central to the novel as a whole, and her transformation is joyous. It vivifies the drama around the central task—to stop the warlord who killed her father—and results in a powerful conclusion that's made more involving because of her quick wit, despite the danger she faces.

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JOHN M. MURRAY (January 16, 2022)

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