

The High Ground

Melinda Snodgrass

(Jul 5, 2016)

Softcover \$14.95 (356pp)

978-1-78329-582-1

In Melinda Snodgrass's *The High Ground*, book 1 of the The Imperials Saga, the riddle of interstellar travel has been solved, and humans are but one of several intelligent species sharing the planet. Where there is intelligent life—in this case the Cara'ot, an alien race bent on subjugating the universe—there is danger afoot. Crucial to defense of the Solar League is the High Ground, the Solar League's elite military academy. Mercedes, oldest daughter of the League's emperor, is sent to the academy by her father to popularize women in the military, while Tracy accepts a scholarship to escape the tedium of his father's tailoring business. *The High Ground* covers their freshman year, and despite a story arc that would benefit from more action, the characters and world building are strong enough to pull the story. Quality writing that alternates between the characters' points of view makes Mercedes and Tracy relatable and accessible.

Furthermore, the aliens who've joined Earth's culture are unfailingly interesting—some dominate the restaurant trade, using their prehensile tails and six-fingered hands to negotiate tricky rope walks while balancing trays of food; others find that their two front eyes and two side eyes give them a leg-up in surveillance-related jobs. Spanish and Anglo-Saxon cultures have merged, and society echoes a feudal era, with duels, emperors, nobles, and a rigid class system. Though this is at heart a YA romance, skilled writing, a world that arouses curiosity, and gathering clouds of political intrigue will draw crossover readers as well.

SUSAN WAGGONER (Fall 2016)

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