



The High Ground

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Emperor's daughter Mercedes is the first woman ever admitted to the High Ground, the elite training academy of the Solar League's Star Command, and she must graduate if she is to have any hope of taking the throne. Her classmate Tracy has more modest goals — to rise to the rank of captain, and win fame and honor. But a civil war is coming and the political machinations of those who yearn for power threaten the young cadets. In a time of intrigue and alien invasion, they will be tested as they never thought possible.

The High Ground Details

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From Reader Review The High Ground for online ebook

David Harris says

I'm grateful to the publisher for an advance copy of this book.

Six hundred years in the future, enabled by the discovery of how to fold space, humanity has spread out across the Galaxy. Old Earth is abandoned, a violent, inhospitable place, its climate ruined, and of interest only to eccentrics and romantics.

Progress.

In other ways things have gone backwards - the Galaxy is ruled by the Emperor of the Solar League under whom an extensive aristocracy flourishes.

Like aristocracies everywhere, they are arrogant, entitled and more ornamental than useful (for certain values of "ornamental"). But they do have power.

Women are treated as breeding units, forbidden any autonomy and tyrannised by the Church. Aliens whose planets have been conquered by the human race are mistrusted and kept down (in a sly vignette Snodgrass shows us how under this hierarchical model even the lowest class humans have somebody to look down on: a perfect illustration of colonialism and racism).

If that makes the book sound rather worthy, it's not. I mean, it is (what's wrong with being worthy?) but it is first and foremost a story, and a well-told one. In a blend of SF, YA, school story and even fairytale ("the Princess and the Tailor's son") Snodgrass drives the plot through two enthralling - if often very annoying - protagonists, Tracy (the tailor's son - and a pretty mean stitcher himself) and Mercedes (the daughter of the Emperor). Of course, they fall in love, despite their different status and of course, this causes problems (a princess and a dirty intitulo?) But there's more going on here. There is the whole dynamic of an able, but poor, man who has an opportunity to make his mark when he wins a scholarship to the elite Academy, the High ground of the title but who is forced to defer to a bunch of often incompetent toffs. Even when he saves the day he risks being blamed for whatever has gone wrong, and can't take any credit.

Similarly for Mercedes - ostensibly a pampered, privileged daughter of power, she has no autonomy, no say over her life - she never wanted to join the High Ground, but is forced to, the first woman ever, yes, but not of her choice: it's all for reasons of politics. yet she wants to make a success of it, not to be a token woman, to graduate: but that seems to mean having to be twice as good as the boys (while hobbled by impractical clothing). The same as the men but backwards and in high heels, as it were. There is a hilarious scene where Mercedes beats the male cadets hands down in a space fighter simulator. They're furious. It must be rigged, mustn't it? One can't help thinking of the recent tedious sulking by male gamers (so, OK, perhaps this future isn't so far from our present as you'd think...)

It's an enjoyable read. Through all their trials and setbacks, Tracy and Mercedes remain vivid, real characters, teenagers learning about life in a world they don't control and can't (much) influence (not even the all mighty Princess). This is the first volume of a series and rightly it concentrates on establishing the world and drawing the characters. There are some hints of wider things going on (in the prologue, in the mentions of Hidden Worlds and missing ships, and in the closing part of the book, where feudal politics suddenly and violently intrudes into the lives of the pair) but this is largely a character study: think Romeo and Juliet in space, with a dash of Hogwarts mixed in.

Finally, for a book that takes a swords-and-honour culture (unless you're one of the peasants, who can't afford honour) the culture was (for me) refreshingly different as the chivalric titles and general ambience are Spanish rather than Anglo. Not only did that add a dash of the exotic (again, there's humour when it's explained what the titles are derived from!), but it also avoids the impression, whenever a new character appears with a resounding title, that he (it's generally he) is clothed in furs and has just come in from a snowstorm.

The only slight drawback for me was the sheer numbers of aristocratic characters with florid titles: it's hard at times to keep up with who everyone is and whether or not they are Tracy's allies or enemies (actually that's not so hard, he has few friends). Aristocrats - what use are they?

Jasmine says

This is so YA. Characters are teenagers forced into military service, there's a love triangle, the entire political system is palpably corrupt, a looming evil is on the horizon -- despite the cover art, it's YA.

Note that I don't mean this as a criticism, just an observation.

Another observation-- we know from the conceit of the book that our main characters are gonna end up being very good at military and political stuff. But right now they're just learning, and it was fun to have characters who didn't really WANT to be there. Mercedes wanted to make an advantageous marriage and be a mom and not have to worry about the empire, and Tracy wanted to be an accountant. SORRY KIDS, YOU GONNA BE GENERALS. LEARN TO FIST FIGHT.

Julie (Manga Maniac Cafe) says

3.75 stars

I found the world-building a bit confusing, and wish it had been more detailed. The writing could be pretty flat, and only the two main characters had any depth. There were pacing issues, but the action at the end made up for the sluggishness throughout. This spent a lot of time setting up the relationships and challenges that both Tracy and Mercedes will have to face in future installments, but if you enough space operas, this should entertain. I will read at least the next book, which won't be out until July of '17.

Justine says

A nicely engaging military academy story, which Snodgrass calls "merely the first act in my five-act drama." So, lots still to come as the characters leave the academy, *The High Ground*, and proceed to the next stage of their lives.

Although the story itself is pretty basic, ultimately I liked both the mix of characters and the Colonial Spanish influenced world (although I admit to referring to the character list a few times.) The whole class based social structure was infuriating, and really had me squarely on the side of the main character, Tracy. I also am onside with all those conquered races now serving the Solar League, so hopefully there will be more pushback from them in later books.

Definitely in for act 2, In Evil Times.

John says

Gratuitous foul language and way too much tedious romance for my juvenile taste, bleh, but decent premise and cast, very good military college and space action (the author is not hesitant about killing or traumatizing major characters). The supposedly enslaved aliens are a particularly nice touch, as they obviously have something up their multilimbed sleeves. The "blindly arrogant aristocracy vs. rising middle/lower class" bit is overdone but the author cleverly plays it for laughs by having all the snotty titled nobility basing their claims on descent from today's Fortune Five Hundred corporations, e.g., "Duque de Argentio y Pepco." Will definitely try the sequels, in the hope that the author doesn't get bogged down in the snogging, etc.

Text Addict says

It was quite disorienting to encounter a space opera that doubles down on the nineteenth-century-style empire trope by actually including nineteenth century religion, cultural attitudes about (human) gender, and obsession with the threat of the Other. The dash of the more modern fear of genetic engineering really read like more of the same.

It was an interesting and absorbing story, once I got over the shock, but ultimately not convincing enough in plot or politics for me to give it more than 3 stars.

Jeffe Kennedy says

I loved this book! It wrapped me up in the exquisitely built world and the fascinating characters. The story raced along and kept me guessing. As the first book of five (guaranteed, as the publisher contracted all five!), the romance will still take time to build and overcome the substantial obstacles. AND I AM SO ON BOARD WITH THIS, PEOPLE.

Damn!

My greatest regret is I have to wait until next July to get the next book. My only solution is to make you all read it, too, so we can commiserate.

Seriously one of the best SFR/Space Opera series I've read.

Jo (Mixed Book Bag) says

There is a lot that is familiar in The High Ground. The setting is a military academy named The High Ground.. Trace, one main character is there on a charity scholarship. Mercedes, the other main character, is the daughter of the Emperor. The first meeting between the two is accidental and neither knows who the other is. That changes as the two arrive on the first day. The Emperor has no sons and has made his daughter his heir. She is the first woman to go to the High Ground. Trace dislikes the upper class and did not want to

take the scholarship. Both are a little off balance and find that they have more in common than you would suppose.

The action is predictable but very well done. Everything in the story helps set the stage for the next book in the series. In *Evil Time*, book 2 in *The Imperials Saga* will come out in July of 2017. I look forward to seeing both Trace and Mercedes again. After how the book ended it will be interesting to see how the two interact after they leave *The High Ground*.

Veronique says

3.5

Not entirely sure how I feel about this book. On one hand, this is a good scifi adventure, engaging, fast-paced, combining the military school story with elements of a YA romance. We witness the development of two characters at polar extremes of the social scale, one the daughter of the Emperor, the other the son of a poor taylor. The Bildungsroman aspect works very well, both protagonists having to re-evaluate themselves and the world around them. Yes, they do make mistakes and come across sometimes in an unflattering light, but then they are the product of their education and society, so far, and it is always hard to break the mold. Mercedes and Tracy are well portrayed, as are some of the other protagonists, and I couldn't help but liking and rooting for them.

No, the problem was with the setting. Snodgrass gives us a universe where humanity has colonised the stars but also regressed to an archaic social model, one with a small ruling aristocracy that oppresses majority of the population. Not only have women's rights been curtailed, but they have been reduced to being seen as pretty objects only valued for their reproductive capabilities. What annoyed me is that this civilisation has not always been like this, since based on what seems to be our 20-21st century, so what happened? How come there aren't any traces of this cataclysmic change?

What I did find interesting were the aliens. We are introduced to a few races that have been defeated and now used as servants/slaves, but there are allusions to much more. Tracy becomes progressively aware of their hidden potential, and although he is learning to see them differently, his journey is still far from achieved. The Cara'ot are especially intriguing with their views on adaptation/evolution, and what exactly are they up to? The beginning of the book gives us a glimpse of a possible alien threat, or is it, and how are the Cara'ot involved?

John Christensen says

Not bad, but not different

This is a very well written book. The problem is that it's a well-written book that hits every expected beat dead-on and never veers away. From the generic future setting with nobles, where humanity went out into the stars, found all sorts of aliens that just happened to be their tech level and decided "fuck it, let's conquer them", to the fact women have basically few rights because apparently conquering aliens requires non-stop

baby making, to a princess entering a military academy and falling in love with the commoner scholarship student, to assassination attempt, to political marriage - you've read this story before, and will read it again.

Lindsay says

An old-school military SF book set around the space service military academy, the High Ground, and dealing with issues of gender, race, class and empire/colonialism.

The Empire is a human creation where several conquered alien races are second class citizens. Probably actually third class, as there is a human aristocracy as well (with an amusing/terrifying origin). There's an interesting element to the Empire in that the problem isn't resource scarcity, it's a scarcity of humans. The means by which humans are responding to the massive demands for procreation and what that does to the role of women in this society permeate the book and make depressing reading for any feminist. But there's a change coming: the Emperor has only been able to produce daughters and rather than have the Imperial line pass to his hated cousins, he has rammed through a law that allows his eldest daughter to inherit. Which means she has to go to the High Ground and not alone either. The small group of women that then enter the prestigious and aristocratic academy shake things up considerably.

The story follows the Princess Mercedes and a scholarship attendee at the academy, Thracius (Tracy), the son of a tailor. They're both brilliant at what they do and have similar stakes in being very different from the typical academy cadets. In a lot of ways this is your typical military academy book, with hostile and supportive instructors, enemies and allies among the cadets and the always entertaining path towards military competence (and distinction) from otherwise feckless characters.

I have many thoughts about this book. Firstly, and importantly, it's a really entertaining story that I would recommend to anyone looking for a simple SF romp and as the clear first element in a whole series of these.

Also, the world-building is interesting. Even the good guy characters have some pretty repulsively imperial and classist attitudes, particularly towards the alien underclass. The culture is relatively believable in that it's basically a Spanish aristocracy with an American constitution and a lot of hints of Brazilian ancestry. There are people of all races present (although I don't think there's enough Indian or Asian people in terms of percentage) and there's no human-to-human racism. Racism in this book is dealt with in terms of aliens and the conquered peoples. The role of women in this society is clear back to the 19th century though with chaperones, the outlawing of contraception and the attitude that women belong in the home making babies as cannon fodder for the Empire's conquests.

This is a feminist book though, but it's a depressing one. It's feminism at the point of the suffragette movement or the feminism of Rosie the Riveter. It's centuries in the future and women are back to being only as valuable as the products of their uterus, unless for politically expeditious reasons. And it's the same old tired fights. So when a bunch of cadets experience their first time in a space fighter simulator and a woman cadet turns out to be a natural and everyone is amazed, I don't find that as uplifting as I think I'm supposed to. *Because this happened 500 years before the events of this book and we moved past it.* And this book never does.

In fact, the marketing material in the back of the book implies that the Princess is going to be struggling with her marriage in the next book. Yawn.

Robyn says

I thought this was a very fun book. YA-ish in content if not in tone, which makes sense since it is very much a coming of age tale for our two heroes, Mercedes and Tracy. It's a fully realised world (if sometimes odd; a juxtaposition of 20th century culture with 16th century Spanish mores and hierarchies - there's an explanation for this but I'm not sure it worked all that well for me - and yet, I didn't care all that much, as I loved the characters and the writing). Lots of commentary on class and social differences, and pointed analysis of the other when it came to discussing the alien populations. I will eagerly read the next book, mostly because Snodgras is a skilled writer who moves the story forward brilliantly.

Courtney says

I thought The High Ground was an amazing book that mixed hierarchy within society along with some science fiction themes involving space travel and aliens. Based around two characters Tracy (bottom of society) and Mercedes (Princess and high part of society), they form a bond together at The High Ground Academy where they don't necessarily want to be.

For a larger review regarding spoilers, you can find it here. Don't want to spoil it for you possible readers without telling you!

<http://gamerssphere.com/2016/07/13/hi...>

D.F. Haley says

Does not break any new ground recycling the military school/coming-of-age sci-fi genre. Another case of a lower-class brilliant youngster trying to find a place in a caste-ridden monarchical system overcoming prejudice and economic/social constraints. At least the various tropes are assembled well and the main characters are well-drawn and engaging. Most of the plot elements could be seen coming from a mile away, but despite lack of surprise, remains a tale well-told.

Most interesting elements are the alien races, subjugated and taken-for-granted. We have plenty of intimations that the next books in the series will explore these. I'm looking forward to the next book in the series.

S.J. Higbee says

This book is written from two viewpoints – and is one of the reasons why it works so well. We get an insight into Mercedes' life and the strains of being the first young woman ever admitted to a male bastion – Solar League's Star Command – to prepare her for the task of ruling in her father's stead. And no – this isn't your classic female heroine panting to knock down the barriers to women having more freedom in society, as Mercedes was perfectly happy with her court life and spending time with her highborn female companions. She is appalled when her father informs her that she will be attending The High Ground.

Her desperate reaction is also mirrored by another reluctant candidate from the other end of the social scale.

Her father's skilled but poor tailor is thrilled when his only son, Tracy, is selected as a scholarship student to attend The High Ground. Tracy isn't so impressed – he hates the whole rotten system and has no intention of being part of it on any level, until he realises the problems it will cause his father if he walks away.

Snodgrass has been very canny in selecting both these characters as it means we see two lives at both extremes of this rigid, very hierarchical society, both with their own constraints and pressures that oddly, end up being similar even though the causes are quite different.

I'm aware that I've given the impression that this is one of those stories all about the social structure with lots of chat, meaningful looks and not much else – it isn't. In amongst the classes and the difficulties of fitting in, there is plenty of action – and when it all properly kicks off with a life or death event pulling in both main characters and most of their friends and foes, I simply couldn't put this one down.

I really enjoyed this one and am delighted to find yet another talented female author writing my favourite kind of fiction – I'm definitely going to be tracking down the next book in this series.

9/10
