

Schism: The Battle for Darracia (Book 1)

Michael Phillip Cash

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This dynamic fantasy world is sure to entertain, as political intrigue, family turmoil, and vivid characters drive the plot forward.

Schism: The Battle for Darracia is a fast-paced novel that will appeal to lovers of science fiction and fantasy. Set on an alien planet, this is a story about social equality and the struggles faced by those seeking great change. It is also the tale of one young man's journey from childhood to adulthood.

V'sair is the heir to the throne of the planet Darracia, but he is only half Darracian. His father married a woman from an enemy planet, Planta, and V'sair is the only half-breed in existence. He fears that he is too different to be accepted by the people of Darracia and that no one will follow him. The fact that his father will not allow him to be initiated into the secrets of the Sradda—an important rite of passage for all adult men—frustrates him greatly. When his father's rule is unexpectedly and violently challenged, V'sair must prove himself worthy to carry the Fireblade, a weapon that defines a man in this warrior's world, and learn the truth of the Sradda in order to protect himself and his family.

Michael Phillip Cash tells his story in a clear, precise manner. The writing is easy to follow, and the narrative moves from scene to scene and character to character smoothly. The plot is interesting, with political intrigue, family infighting, and philosophical ideology woven into a seamless whole.

The world of Darracia is dynamic and described beautifully. In one particularly moving passage, Cash writes: "The stars littered the heavens like the sparkling bubbles that aerated the water. The four moons hung low on the horizon but lit the ground with their lambent glow. Red treetops beckoned, and Tulani gasped with delight as they floated above the land, which was now a speck in the night sky."

Little distracts from the main plot of the tight narrative. This does, however, leave scant room for character development. Though the emotional bonds that tie characters to one another take center stage, more detail is needed. The struggle between the ruling class of Darracia and its servant class is largely fueled by beliefs that V'sair's mother introduced to his father, which the king then brings into his rule. This makes their connection important to the story, but little is offered about how that relationship developed. Additionally, romance blooms between V'sair and a servant girl, Tulani, but their interactions are brief, making the commitment they feel for one another seem implausible. Without more of such details, it is difficult to care intensely for the characters and the fate of their world.

The author has crafted a complex society with a well-defined class system facing a political struggle for social equality. This is the first installment of a planned series, and Cash does a fine job laying the groundwork for future books. *Schism* is a quick, pleasurable read that is sure to entertain.

CATHERINE THURESON (January 6, 2014)

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