

The City Among the Stars

Francis Carsac

Judith Sullivan, Translator

Margaret Schiff, Translator

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In Francis Carsac's newly translated science fiction classic *The City Among the Stars*, Earth's Empire is falling, and Tanker, a lieutenant within the Stellar Guard, is tasked with delivering a message that could turn the tide.

When Tanker's ship is sabotaged, he is left drifting in space. A passing ship rescues him, and he finds himself among the People of the Stars, descendants of oppressed scientists, artists, and religious followers who fled Earth generations ago. Their ships function as city-states; the People of the Stars rarely interact with planets, and they refer to Tanker and his terrestrial ilk as "planetaries."

Met with prejudice and suspicion, Tanker questions why people who despise him would bother to save his life. But the People of the Stars have their own enemy: the Mpifis, a violent alien race under whom they have suffered terrible losses. Their only chance lies with tracer technology that the Empire developed that would give them the ability to track through hyperspace and cut off avenues for surprise attacks. Tanker is uncertain about whom he can trust, but works to decide where his loyalty lies.

Because Tanker is a refugee within a foreign society, he is able to view the People of the Stars objectively. He asks thoughtful questions of his few friends and is ravenous in his reading in the ship's library. Still, he trips over unfamiliar customs, though his bravery and adaptability earn him begrudging respect. However, most of the book's women are developed most in terms of their interest in Tanker and their jealousy toward romantic rivals; Tanker's attitudes toward them are grating.

A dramatic exploration of belonging and the weight of unintended consequences set within twin wars, *The City Among the Stars* revives the golden age of science fiction for a new audience.

DANIELLE BALLANTYNE (May / June 2020)

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