

The Silvers

J.A. Rock

Riptide Publishing (Mar 17, 2016)

Softcover \$18.99 (312pp)

978-1-62649-432-9

Respect, trust, and, ultimately, love between two men of different species is rendered compelling and utterly believable in J. A. Rock's *The Silvers*. B., captain of a small mission to investigate intelligent life on a far-flung planet, looks the other way when the Silver Planet's pale gray aliens are treated like lab animals by some members of his crew. "They're not us," B. repeatedly tells himself, for the Silvers seem incapable of resistance, anger, and even pain. To B., their passivity and lack of individuality reflect the Silver Planet itself—monochromatic and sparse, with a single species of flower, a single food source, and very little life. There is no war because there is literally nothing to fight over; sex for pleasure is unknown, and the only real achievement of the Silvers as a species is their ability to count everything from the hairs in an Earthling's eyebrow to their own population with computer-like speed.

When B. rescues Imms, a Silver wounded by one of the crew, the relationship they form challenges everything B. thinks he knows about the Silvers, and much of what he thinks he knows about himself. The writing is skilled throughout, with realistic, well-rounded characters. Imms, who learned English from a dime novel set in the Old West, leaving him prone to expressions like, "Hold it right there, pardner," is especially appealing, one whose innocence brings out the otherwise-cynical B.'s better nature. Their return to Earth together marks the end of an idyll, and their relationship is subjected to the strains of cultural adjustment, infidelity, and outside forces who seek to return Imms to lab-rat status. By turns funny, bittersweet, and poignant, this well-paced read is, above all, human.

SUSAN WAGGONER (Fall 2016)

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