

READING GROUP
GUIDE



SKY'S END

Book One: Above the Black

by Marc J Gregson

Instant *New York Times* Bestseller!

★ “A **thrilling** and **brilliantly realized** series opener; readers will clamor for the next installment.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred Review

★ “**Highly recommended** to readers who love fantasy and dystopia.”

—*Booklist*, Starred Review

★ “**Action-packed, mysterious** and **satisfying**.”

—*BookPage*, Starred Review

ABOUT THE BOOK

Plummet into a kill-or-be-killed competition where a scrappy underdog hell-bent on revenge must claw his way to the top in this thrilling YA fantasy debut.

Exiled to live as a Low, sixteen-year-old Conrad refuses to become heir to his murderous uncle. But Meritocracy is a harsh and unforgiving rule on the floating island of Holmstead, and when his ailing mother is killed by monstrous gorgantauns, Conrad cuts a deal to save the only family he has left. To rescue his sister from his uncle’s clutches, Conrad must enter the Selection of the Twelve Trades.

Hunter, the deadliest of all the Trades, gains a fresh recruit with Conrad. Now he must endure vigorous training, manipulative peers, and the Gauntlet—a brutal final test that yields riches and status to whichever skyship crew kills the most gorgantauns. Forced to serve in the lowest of stations and unseen by all, Conrad overhears whispers of rebellion in the dark. Conrad had never known anything existed below the toxic black clouds of the Skylands . . . until now.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Conrad’s father died when he was ten. Explain what Conrad means when he says, “I refuse to be my father, but half of him is me” (p. 1). Discuss how Conrad represents the essence of his mother and father. How is this evident as he deals with the challenge of succeeding in the Trade of Hunter?
- Common conflicts in stories include: Character vs. Self, Character vs. Character; Character vs. Society, and Character vs. Nature. Explain how each type of conflict is present in *Sky’s End*. Cite specific evidence to support your thoughts.

- Theme is the central and unifying idea. What is the main theme of this novel? Identify other themes that support the central one. How is the central theme carried out from the beginning to the end of the novel? Fantasy is said to reveal the truths of the human condition. What is revealed about the human condition through Conrad's character?
- Figurative language is used throughout the novel to create certain images in the mind of the reader. Explain the following simile: "Entire neighborhoods are missing. Flattened. Pillars of wood rise from the earth like the ribs of a corpse" (p. 27). Find other examples of simile in the novel.
- Discuss the basis of Conrad's guilt when his mother dies. How was he devoted to her? What is symbolic about the items Conrad finds in his mother's wooden box? Discuss why Conrad takes his mother's last name and becomes Conrad of Elise.
- Describe the Skylands. The Four Pillars of Meritocracy are Select, High, Middle, and Low. Explain how Conrad and his mother go from High to Low. Why did Uncle take Ella, Conrad's little sister? Discuss why Conrad is determined to rescue her. How does he locate her at the end of the novel? What is Ella's reaction to her brother?
- Discuss Uncle's offer to Conrad. Why won't Conrad accept the offer? Uncle demands that Conrad enter the Selection. Discuss Selection Day. Identify the Trades and discuss their purpose in the Skylands' society. Which Trade is Conrad's choice? What is his reaction when he receives Hunter?
- Conrad is sent to Venator, Hunter's island, to be trained. Describe his training. How and why is socializing part of the training? Why is Conrad reluctant to socialize with the other trainees? Which of the trainees is Conrad's best ally? How does he convince Conrad that he must do more than study?
- Why is there so much bad blood between Conrad and Pound? Pound becomes Captain and assigns Conrad Swabbie, the lowest job. Explain why Pound eventually loses his job. What happens when Conrad becomes Captain? How does he treat Pound? Discuss Conrad's leadership style. Explain why Master Koko believes that Conrad is Master material.
- How does Bryce betray Conrad? What does he learn from this betrayal? Uncle thinks that Conrad is getting too close to Bryce. Explain what Uncle means when he says, "Once a traitor, always a traitor" (p. 378). Discuss Conrad's reaction to this comment.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo Credit: Ashley Gregson

Marc J Gregson is a *New York Times* bestselling author for his debut novel *Sky's End*. He attended the University of Utah, where he graduated cum laude and received his Bachelor of Arts in English teaching. Marc's pursuit of learning has led him into the classroom, where he teaches middle school English. He believes in the power of words and that stories can unite people from all origins. Visit him at MarcJGregson.com.