

Maz'hura: Book One of the Twelve Dimensions

Paul L. Centeno

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Maz'hura is an action-packed science fiction adventure in which a compromised captain is the only one to see the truth.

A space captain must contend with inner turmoil and enemy forces in Paul L. Centeno's high-octane science fiction novel *Maz'hura*.

Captain Shirakaya, in command of the dreadnought class ship *Celestial*, uses her magical abilities to keep her crew safe. But while they're watching the birth of a new star and preparing to harvest the magical ions its formation produces, *Celestial* is attacked by aliens who appear to be similar to the ancient koth'vurians, who were banished by the Goddess Maz'hura eons ago, never to return until the end of the universe; to speak of their return is blasphemy. Shira is convinced that returned they have, and now it is the end times. When she tries to convince her superiors, she is rebuffed and sent on a different mission. Further complicating matters, the attack by the koth'vurians left Shira in a vulnerable state, with her magic harder to call forth. With her career on the line, Shira will do anything to prove that the koth'vurians have returned, even if it means disobeying orders.

Shira is an interesting lead. She is prideful, like all space captains, but glimpses into her softness temper this. She is single-minded in her quest to keep her failing magic a secret, but still puts herself in dangerous situations in which magical abilities are necessary. This leads to a dropped, and unnecessary, plot line involving a near mutiny aboard her ship following the first battle scene. Shira's arrogance leads to strong battle scenes, too, though, in which she is strategic and not often wrong.

The book's battle scenes are choreographed in an engaging manner, working to track all of the characters, and different species, who are fighting at any one time. However, their quantity is excessive and impedes the plot, which is soon slowed by its many instances of hand-to-hand combat and space craft shootouts. Shira is the only character who commands investment; secondary cast members belong to away teams, or appear as survivors of major battles, and are present to provoke emotion, displaying little individuality. It comes to feel as though this is Shira's universe, in which everyone else is as fleeting as passing asteroids.

The novel is stronger when it comes to its quiet moments and political machinations. Shira is seen enjoying downtime with her partner and participating in heart-to-heart chats with her family members and her bodyguard. Her compromised magic continues to degrade as the book hurtles toward its closing, causing trouble. An unexpected ally helps her, setting up the next book of the series.

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DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (February 25, 2021)

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