



Xen'tarza: Book Three of the Twelve Dimensions

Paul L. Centeno

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Xen'tarza is a thrilling space opera in which a mercenary team contends with magic and science across the wide universe.

Having achieved her primary goal of securing a battleship, a freelancer, Shira of Aarda, continues her quest to restore her magic and defeat evil Askaratoth in Paul L. Centeno's third novel in the Twelve Dimensions series, *Xen'tarza*.

Shira's mission is clear: she must find her archaeologist brother, Khal. She hopes that he will be able to translate the text she received from her mentor. After locating him on a dig supporting a military operation, and finding an ancient, arcane artifact, she receives her newest guild assignment: protecting a leader who's soon-to-be enthroned.

The mercenaries complete the mission with the added benefits of recharging the artifact and releasing the spirit of an enemy turned reluctant ally. Khal's discovery of the artifact proves to be key to the translation of Shira's text, leading the mercenaries to a disgraced scientist and a sacrilegious legend that throws into question the nature of the universe itself.

There is a lot going on in this action-packed volume. Shira and her mercenaries continue to take assignments from the guild master in order to survive and stock up on weapons, but these assignments are resolved with considerable speed, and without connecting well to the rest of the story. Skirmishes break out while the team is on assignment, too: each person has a moment to shine in a fight. But as the team zips through the fantastical universe, exploring distinctive planets and worlds, the story becomes unwieldy: there are new faces; familiar faces return; and the background stories of the main ensemble are expanded.

Earlier books in the series shifted the focus from Shira to her bodyguard, Yarasuro; this entry continues that pattern, honing in on a renegade soldier, Dojin, who was once sent to the brig for insubordination. His rebelliousness is on display at all times, as he chafes against the needs of the team and his own personal demons, including his grief over the recent death of his lover and teammate. In contrast: a longtime member of Shira's team is lost, but is not grieved in a substantial manner.

In service to the new universe-altering plot, the koth'vurians, ancient enemies of the primary universe, are not central to the story. Ashkaratoth makes a few appearances, gathering power and still bent on destroying Shira. The final battle with him is cinematic, if anticlimactic in the face of the expansive worldbuilding that precedes it. Still, in spite of the creative liberties taken to resolve the plot, this entry into the Twelve Dimensions series remains an entertaining space adventure.

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DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (January 29, 2022)

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