

Decagon

Capes

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Decagon is a captivating, methodical, and action-packed urban fantasy adventure.

The Angel of Death, on the run for over two hundred years, is out of time in Capes's fantasy novel *Decagon*.

Dalia has walked the Dreaming and Waking worlds for years, trying to stay one step ahead of those who would capture and torture her. Along the way, she's met and created a family with other immortals, whom she finds in the Dreaming, and to whom she explains the world and legends of immortals. These include Titus, who wanders the Dreaming, caught in his memories, unable to find his way back to his sleeping body.

Every night for six years, Dalia finds Titus in the Dreaming. She attempts to help him find his body, allowing her to reach him in the Waking world and bring him to her family, called Nonagon. But Titus's long sleep has left him open to discovery by the Aion, an elite and well-funded organization of immortals bent on finding the Angel of Death. An ambush by Chasers, sent by the Aion, sets in motion a confrontation and a revelation that Dalia has been avoiding for centuries.

Dalia's narration keeps the focus tight on her, but she is a keen observer, and the rest of the cast moves around her in a holistic way, resulting in a collaborative experience. Vignettes about the past, which are marked by years as their chapter headings, showcase each member of Nonagon, including their origin stories, an idea of who they are, and their motivations and priorities. Their casual diversity is also interesting: more than half of Nonagon, and several of those they're positioned against, are not white, and there are Ojibwe, Chinese, and Senegalese characters. They are also diverse in their sexual orientations and romantic pairings: there is a male/female/female polyamorous relationship within Nonagon, as well as a lesbian relationship that is the basis for the collective origins of the immortals.

Most scenes in the Waking involve impressions of places, described just enough for the imagination to build out what is supposed to be there. Exceptions arise in the natural wonders of the swamp where Nonagon live and train, and in the moments when the members of Nonagon pledge themselves to each other as family. The Dreaming landscapes within each characters' minds are described in more robust terms: they serve as a reflection of each person's self.

However, the novel takes time to self-establish. Because its cast is so large, and because each member of it moves on their own, the main story is slowed. Its tension heightens during fight scenes, but is low grade elsewhere, and most often represented with animals: in the Waking, owls, often seen as an omen of death, follow Dalia and watch over Nonagon. In the Dreaming, Dalia's subconscious manifests snakes of all types and sizes when she is emotional. Such imagery is key to understanding which parts of the story are important and which are less so.

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DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (September 1, 2020)

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