

Hall of Skulls

Jamie Eubanks

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In the fantasy novel Hall of Skulls, a young man works to save his true love and to achieve eternal wisdom.

Jamie Eubanks's intricate, inventive fantasy novel *Hall of Skulls* combines cosmic futurism with a timeless tale of love and suffering.

Kai is positioned to become the leader of his people and their government, but he doesn't want to rule. His main concern is Asher, a native of Churi, who he considers to be his soul's companion. Their close bond is apparent early on, in a scene where Kai relaxes next to Asher and shows all the signs of infatuation.

When Asher is abducted by Kai's ancestral enemies, Kai sets out to find her. To do so, he overcomes herculean tasks put in his way by the dreaded Thrakens—the alien invaders who conquered and subjugated Kai's world nearly two thousand years earlier. In the process, Kai travels to the mysterious Hall of Skulls—a repository of ancient wisdom and lost technology.

Kai's hunt for the Hall, as well as his running battles with the Thrakens, make up the majority of the novel and are thoroughgoing in their suspense. Planets, empires, weapons, technology, and assorted bureaucracies are all explained in detail. When the Thrakens are introduced, history becomes the major point of focus, too. But the book's emphasis on world building slows its plot, washing it in a deluge of names and places to explain how the different groups in Kai's universe interact.

Kai and Asher's obvious fondness for each other is also covered in descriptive terms, making Kai's suffering after she's kidnapped a potent force. His motivations are pure and praiseworthy, and he suffers much in order to save her: he enters into battles and endures difficulties in passages that balance physical actions with glimpses into his internal monologues. Kai's embrace of responsibility moves the story forward: as he undergoes his mission to save Asher, he also learns that some burdens must be worn, including his responsibility toward his people as their natural leader.

In the conclusion of this classical tale of love and adventure, Kai's travels lead to a shocking reveal that sets up future adventures. Much of what Kai knew—or thought he knew—at the beginning of the book is stripped away, though the mystery of the Hall of Skulls itself is only partially explained.

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BENJAMIN WELTON (April 23, 2021)

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