

Into the Lightning Gate: Book One of the Gates Saga

Robert Roth

Jetspace Studio

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A cosmic conspiracy ensnares a tech-savvy man in the science fiction novel Into the Lightning Gate.

In Robert Roth's pulse-pounding science fiction novel *Into the Lightning Gate*, a man is targeted by a shadowy cabal of dimension-hopping mercenaries.

Even in diverse San Francisco, Cam has always felt like he stood out. He was abandoned and adopted by a family who despised him, but found a sense of normalcy in his inventions. Now, he tweaks and upgrades consumer products into advanced tech, and parlays this skill into a career as a security consultant.

A successful infiltration leads Cam to a confrontation with a group that's eager to capture him for reasons unknown. Cam and his best friend Tony flee; they are swept up in a conspiracy spanning planets and dimensions.

The book's chase sequences are frenetic, propelled less by information than by Cam and Tony's drive to survive. Cam discovers he can access unusual abilities tied to his heritage; Tony is captured, tortured, and used to push Cam to his breaking point. The friends find allies, but the forces pursuing them remain close behind, even through gates that bridge realities; the gates are patrolled by an agency, and two of its employees, Finn and Tasha, come to align themselves with Cam.

Into the Lightning Gate is a strong setup for the coming series. It focuses on introducing the key characters, world building, and laying the groundwork for what's to come. Still, Finn and Tasha withhold important details about the technology, politics, and cultures of the societies that are aware of the gates from Cam; the stakes of his mission are hazier as a result.

Cam's struggles before he becomes cognizant of his powers and past are a grounding, sympathetic force. He is developed most through the viewpoints of his family, friends, and coworkers; prone to casual drug use, he also has a consistent drive to protect others. But Finn and Tasha are not developed beyond their gate-related roles until Cam forms a romantic connection to Finn, based on their shared fondness for each other's quirks. Their connection is grounded and touching. Still, an exchange between Cam and homophobic bullies in a bar feels included to force commentary, and some of the book's nonbinary characters, who are not developed beyond those qualities, also feel out of place in the story.

A dramatic confrontation with Cam's pursuers precedes the book's abrupt end, which leaves multiple questions open in the interest of future books. More satisfying is the fact that Finn and Cam go over their relationship in detail, drawing subtle connections and making callbacks to the rest of the story.

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JOHN M. MURRAY (May 18, 2021)

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