

LOREHAVEN

FALL 2018



**Morgan L.
Busse**

**FINDS THE GIFTS
OF LIGHT IN
DARKNESS**

**Our panel
studies
Scripture and
the secrets of
FICTIONAL
MAGIC**

**WE REVIEW THE BEST
CHRISTIAN-CREATED
FANTASTICAL NOVELS**

**FIGHT
WEREWOLVES**
in the sinful flesh
with C. W. Briar

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Captain's Log

Fantastic stories are capable of God-glorifying good, but also idolatrous evil.

At *Lorehaven* Magazine, we love excellent fantastic stories!

Especially if we find these stories made by biblical Christian creators.

Stories are created by humans who reflect God's image and use his gifts, whether they know it or not. They can show beauty, goodness, and truth about our world.

But let's not be sentimental. Stories aren't just wonderful or even "neutral."

Stories can be poisonous to our souls.

An epic story can reflect our epic God or tempt us to idolize "epicness" itself. A great science-fiction tale can lead us to ponder human nature and the wonders of technology and exploration, or tempt us to worship man (or alien creatures).

And, as we discuss in this issue's

Roundtable feature, a fantasy can use fictional magic to awaken in us a sense of self-forgetting awe. Or a fantasy can inflame our sinful desires to use anything, even technology or "magic," for our own ends.

That's why, as Christians, we don't ever call stories "harmless entertainment." Such a phrase devalues the God-glorifying purpose of human stories, reducing them to the hollow level of, say, snack cakes, or cute kitten pictures on social media. It also ignores the real threat of stories that humans in our sin can twist for great evil.

What's the Christian's response to good/evil stories? The same as our response to any good/evil person. We practice biblical *discernment* with people and their stories.

Using discernment, we sort out a story's grace and its idols, while being especially careful to avoid our own temptations to idolatry. This takes lifelong practice!

In each issue of *Lorehaven*, we will seek to glorify God. This mission also means we will acknowledge the reality of sin. We won't just explore darker stories, creatures, or folklore. We will also consider stories' real dangers that are often mixed right alongside their benefits.

In every issue, we'll strive to help you, the fan, discern not just the best stories, but stories that are best for you. That way, these fantastic stories can help you worship not yourself, or stories themselves, but the great Author of reality.



E. Stephen Burnett serves as *Lorehaven* publisher/editor in chief, and creates fantastical fiction. He has explored human stories at resources like *Christ and Pop Culture* and *Christianity Today*.

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Lorehaven serves Christian fans by finding biblical truth in fantastic stories. Book clubs, free webzines, and a web-based community offer flash reviews, articles, and news about Christian fantasy, science fiction, and other fantastical genres.

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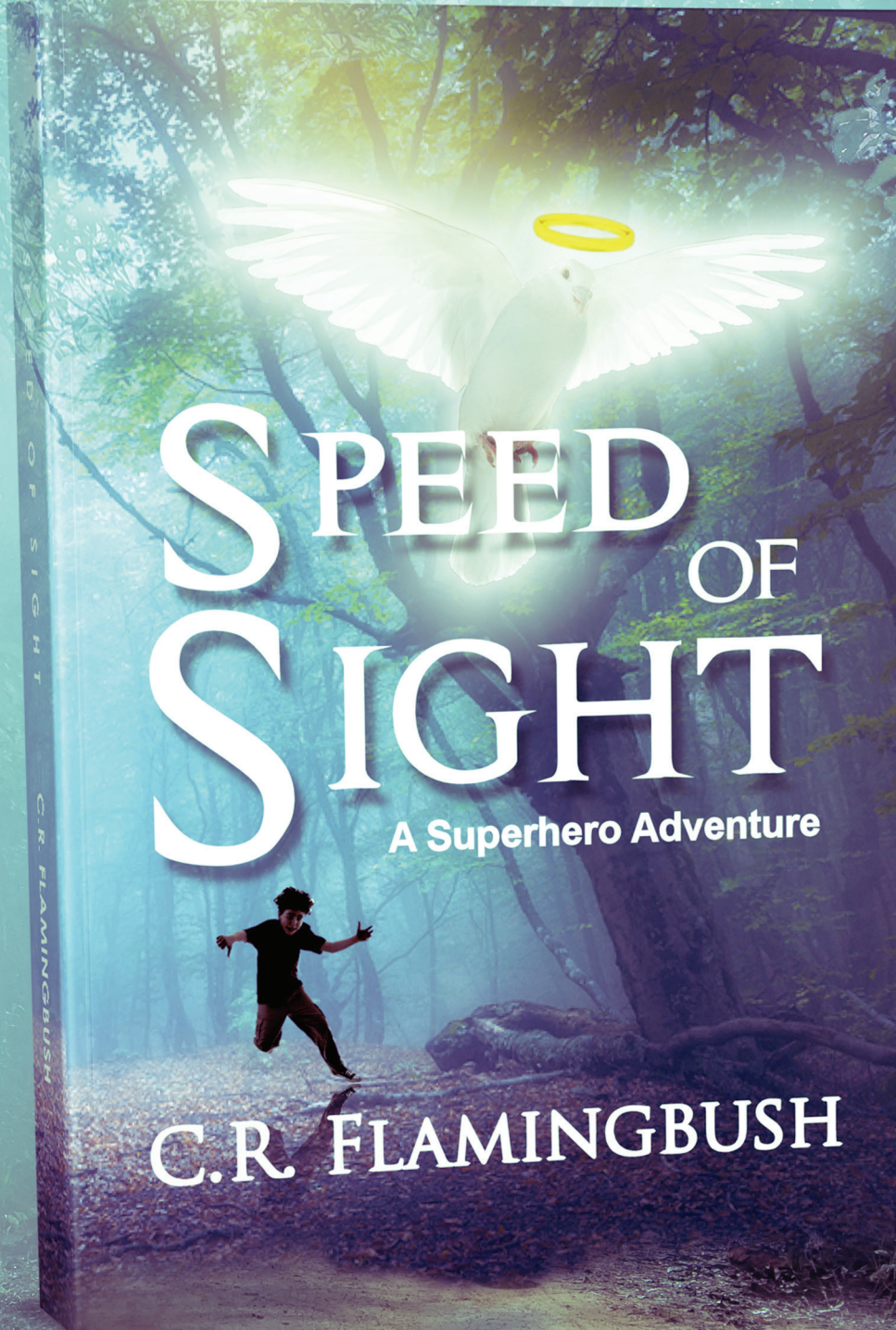
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STAR AMAZON REVIEW



"FRIENDSHIP
SELF WORTH
FORGIVENESS"



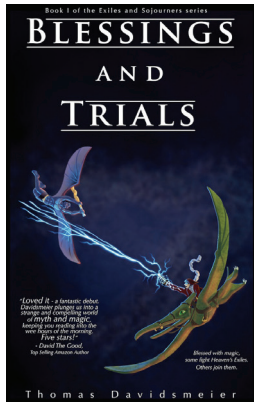
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Blessings and Trials

Set in many times and places, Thomas Davidsmeier's *Blessings and Trials* spans a large and fascinating world filled with angels, either exiled from heaven or sent from heaven to help mankind. In this world, humans receive powerful blessings from God or grotesque powers from fallen angels. For this first entry of a planned series, the various stories seem

largely disconnected. Some events even appear unrelated to any other parts of the story. Still, these flaws don't restrain the work's overall intriguing concept, and later books in the series may make the connections clearer. A strong Christian message and gospel presentation make this book worth a read.

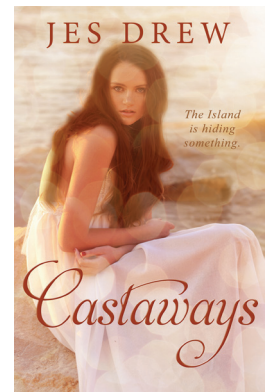
Best for: Teens and young adults.

Discern: A good bit of fighting and killing, even with children present and involved; some liberties are taken with spiritual beings, powers, and gifts.

Castaways

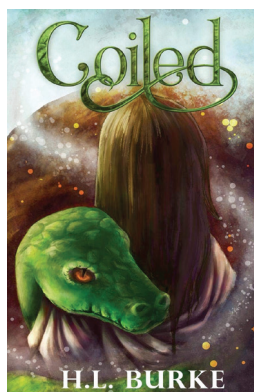
To be sixteen is to have troubles, but Emily has more than her share: distracted parents, PTSD flashbacks, sudden uprootings to new states and new countries. But when a series of calamities maroons her on an uncharted island, she will learn what trouble can be. In *Castaways*, Jes Drew combines contemporary YA with the old fancy of a desert island harboring mysteries. Through the first-person narration of

its young heroine, the book achieves a memorable and entertaining tone. A current of Christian belief runs through the story, and an innocent romance dominates many of the pages. Adults may wonder if uncharted islands are still possible, and if any seventeen-year-old boy could be so impressive, even to a sixteen-year-old girl. But younger readers will take delight in this light, sweet tale.



Best for: Teenagers, especially girls; romance and YA readers.

Discern: Mild violence; peril to children and teenagers; a young girl suffers PTSD after an attempted robbery.



Coiled

Which is worse: being so ugly that others beg you to veil your face, or turning into a ravenous serpent whenever anyone sees you? For Princess Laidra, cursed with internal beauty and a notable deficit of the other kind, happiness may hinge on the answer. When she discovers that the monster scheduled to eat her is actually a comparably cursed prince, Laidra embarks upon a quest to unwind a kingdom-shattering dilemma that an ene-

my intended for evil. But with the gods driven by petty rivalries, arranging divine intervention may prove even more difficult for Laidra than making eye contact with her boyfriend. In *Coiled*, H. L. Burke weaves faux-mythology and complex characterization into a narrative that slithers along at a brisk clip, exploring the pitfalls of attraction and the deficits of polytheism while our heroes' young love buds.

Best for: Teens and adults seeking tender romance set against a backdrop of hostile politicking and mythical machinations.

Discern: Pervasive sexual tension and the frank discussion thereof, some sensuality and innuendo, non-graphic nudity, brief savage violence.

Experiment 93

R. S. Burghardt's *Experiment 93* demonstrates good storytelling mechanics. The story of Nina, an alien-made robot-with-a-soul trying to fit into life on Earth as a high school student, serves a light and enjoyable read. Though the characters are not deep, they are likeable and sympathetic, and the author does well in using Nina's naivete about her new home

world for both humor and bits of insight. If the story has one negative, it's that this light tone cannot support the weight of some heavier themes, such as death, grief, and severe religious persecution. Like the black diamond that reinforces the story-world's structures, shifts to a more serious tone could have better supported the serious issues raised.

Best for: Teens and young adults; science fiction fans.

Discern: Statements about characters' Christian beliefs, such as regarding prayer.





The Gevaudan Project

Misanthropic ideologies, international conspiracies, and experiments in bioengineering have always proved a toxic mix. But when conservationist and former soldier Philip Caster travels to Sumatra to release captive tigers in the wild, he's ensnared in the effects of a plot so insidious it threatens all life on earth. Cornered by an implacable foe, Caster must draw upon all his skills and stubbornness just to survive. And if he makes it out alive, he'll have

a tiger by the tail. With *The Gevaudan Project*, A. K. Preston has spliced together a bone-hard, near-future sci-fi in the tradition of Michael Crichton. Philosophic contextualization imparts thematic depth to the action. Though jungles of overwrought prose impede the narrative, a verisimilitude born of meticulous research shines through every page. This world feels real, and so does its danger.

Best for: Older teens and adults seeking a contemporary creature thriller that confronts the implications of radical environmentalism.

Discern: Graphic violence and terror, disturbing scientific experimentation, brief mild innuendo, and a clinical description of tiger semen extraction.

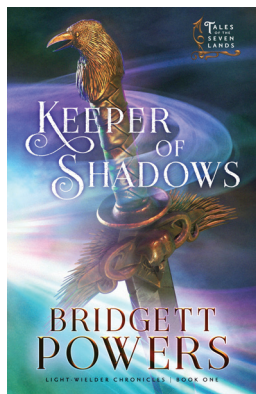
Imani Earns Her Cape

When a merman falls for a fae woman, the outcome can prove all too human. Such is the experience of twelve-year-old Imani Chausiku, a geeky half-fae raised by her magical single mother in Washington, D. C. Fitting in has always been Imani's struggle, but when she journeys to the homeland of her maternal tribe to complete an initiation ceremony, awkward revelations and unexpected threats force her to stand out even more than she

did in Virginia. Meanwhile, the young half-mer ruler of the underwater city of Wanesh bucks tradition to search for his vanished mother—a figure who seems familiar. With *Imani Earns Her Cape*, Bokerah Brumley paints a colorful urban-fantasy backdrop and peoples it with distinctive characters. But interminable angst ends up swamping the action, and loose ends dangle past an abruptly cloying resolution.

Best for: Older children seeking a coming-of-age tale set in a parallel world of magic.

Discern: Mild peril, emotional drama, themes of parental separation, and references to “the universe” as a providential force.



Keeper of Shadows

We are all born to trouble, but some of us are especially so. Lyssanne—debilitated by a painful disease, exiled from home, and pursued across the wilderness by monsters—holds a place of honor among those especially so. But she will learn the secret beginning of her troubles, and maybe even bring them to an end. In *Keeper of Shadows*, Bridgett Powers creates something unusual in fantasy: a heroine

who, physically damaged to the point of disability, can fight only through spiritual strength. The religion of this fantasy world, constructed strictly along Christian lines, coexists easily with magic, sorcery, and otherworldly creatures. The story moves too leisurely at times, but this gentle, imaginative fantasy has magic of its own.

Best for: YA readers; fans of romance, fantasy, and Anne Elisabeth Stengl.

Discern: Mild violence, including non-graphic battles; mentions of murder and suicide; a child witnesses her mother's murder in a very brief but disturbing scene.

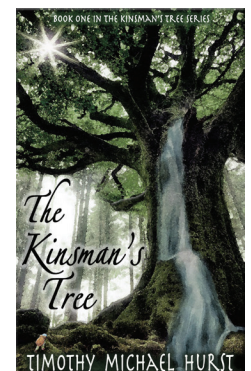
The Kinsman's Tree

Timothy Michael Hurst's *The Kinsman's Tree* is built around the biblical creation account set in a fantasy world, but goes its own way by focusing on the minuscule Etom, a race of three-inch-tall little people. The world becomes more engaging as the story unfolds, but suffers from one of great banes of Christian storytelling—main characters whose perfection

and niceness are less realistic than any fantasy creature. However, readers will find charm in the everyday life of the Etom boy Nat, his mother Nida, and the other Etom who are part of their Eben'kayah. And the novel succeeds at offering real adventure when our heroes meet opposition in their hunt for the Kinsman, the story's messiah figure.

Best for: Children who like old cartoons like *The Smurfs* or *The Snorks*.

Discern: Battle scenes and some characters' interactions with evil spirits (with bad consequences).





Kristian's War

Imagine if John Bunyan sought the help of John Rambo in writing an updated version of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, filled with military action and modern firearms. The result might be like Peter Wisan's *Kristian's War*. Unfortunately, the story is set back by characters' vague actions and decisions. Readers may empathize with the story's pilgrim hero, Kris-

tian, who suffers from a feeling of dissatisfaction, but struggle to see why following the path will help Kristian. More time explaining Kristian's need for a Prince to die to set him free from his burden of sin would have improved the story. However, the writing is terse and focused on characters' actions, making for a quick and enjoyable read.

Best for: Male readers, late teens and older; any reader interested in firearms and the military.

Discern: Lots of violence, including people being murdered..

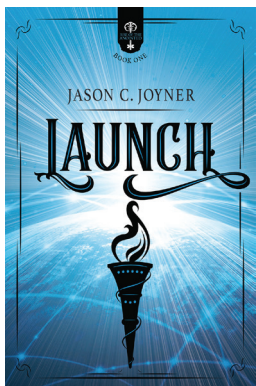
The Last Runner

Shaun Stevenson's *The Last Runner* is certainly well-named. The book opens with the protagonist, Eric, being chased, and ends with him being chased. Throughout the story, Eric survives insane training to be a runner. Then he's sent by his Bookkeeper to perform a very dangerous mission. The poor boy barely gets a moment's rest from

being chased. Some more explanations would have made this story more understandable and given it room to breathe. Imagination dashes back in, however, with the strange and even horrifying creatures intent on getting their hands, teeth, or claws on Eric.

Best for: Young adults, adults, and fans of action.

Discern: Deaths of domesticated animals, and faith portrayed as a leap in the dark..



Launch

Life is full of promise for Demarcus. He's a strapping sixteen, and just discovered he has superpowers. His prospects brighten even more when a tech giant invites him to a conference for America's best and brightest youth. But there he will learn that other people have discovered his powers—and their uses for him. In *Launch*, Jason C. Joyner fuses the idea of superheroes with Christianity, drawing an inspired parallel between superpowers and the

miraculous exploits of biblical figures such as Elijah and Samson. With the old man laonnes, Joyner even revives Christianity's oldest urban legend of the disciple who would never die. The story, built around a core of teenagers, technology, and social media, inhabits its youthful, contemporaneous world with conviction. Fun and never airy, *Launch* offers a good ride.

Best for: Teenagers; fans of superheroes and sci-fi.

Discern: Some violence, often directed at teenagers; adults plot to sacrifice a young girl's life for their plans.

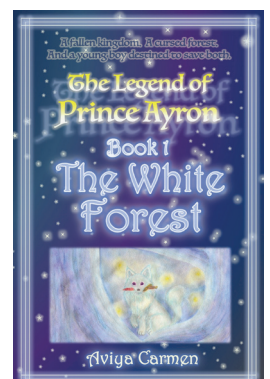
The White Forest

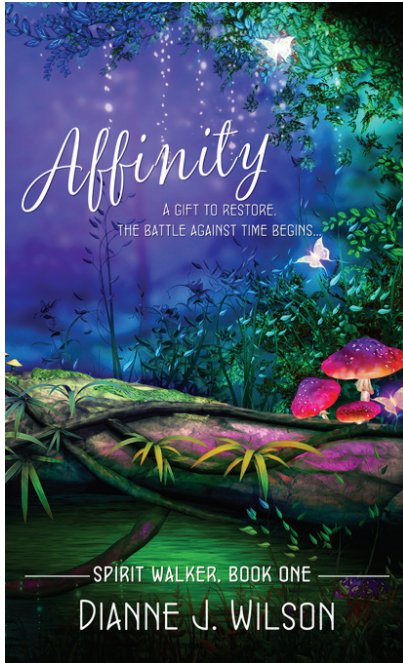
Featuring a young child protagonist and other characters who speak and act and even bicker in child-like ways, Aviya Carmen's *The White Forest* is a story geared for young readers. Fans follow the ten-year-old Prince Ayron's journey through the White Forest to his mother's people, the Zuries, after his father's kingdom is betrayed. But his presence and his

quest could affect the forest, which is itself under a curse. Many elements reference Christian ideas, such as a Rock of Prayer, a serpent as an enemy, and a Book of Wisdom similar to the Bible. Readers will also find references to several biblical accounts, such as creation and the end times.

Best for: Pre-teen readers who like fantasy stories.

Discern: A few references to bathroom tasks; and some details added to biblical accounts (such as God's command for angels to worship man, and Lucifer's refusal to worship leading to his rebellion).





Affinity

We all live in this world. Some of us accept the possibility of other people living in other worlds. But suppose the inexplicable reality is that we all live in two worlds—the waking physical world and its dark mirror image in the spiritual realms—and there is no way to cross the threshold and see the spiritual world in which we move without knowing it.

Unless you have *Affinity*. Then the boundaries can be broken down and broken through.

In *Affinity*, Dianne J. Wilson creates a story of spiritual warfare in the style of a fantasy. Dispensing with the vision of angels and demons hovering over us, Wilson constructs the spiritual realm as a strange landscape where the soul is unveiled and death takes solid form. Her young heroes,

who spend their dreams in the spiritual world, draw out the parallels to the world in which they wake up. And so the battle is joined in both worlds.

A strong spiritual element suffuses the novel, and the heroine's confession of Jesus makes it explicitly Christian. In the spiritual realm, however, God curiously appears under the name of Tau. Certain aspects of the story are left in confusion, and though some may be awaiting clarification in the sequel, others—notably, the concept of the Affinity gift itself—ought to have been firmly established already. Despite its weaknesses, *Affinity* is a creative and original play on old concepts, and if you're willing to take the ride, you'll find it goes places.

Best for: Older teens; fans of spiritual warfare novels.

Discern: Child abuse; violence, sometimes directed at older teens or children; themes of parental abandonment.

Intro to Lorehaven flash reviews

Lorehaven Magazine seeks to serve Christian fans with book reviews in each issue. First, you get a short, convenient flash review of a recent Christian fantastical novel.

We'll describe the characters, plot, and world. You'll get an idea of what themes the story explores. You'll notice, however, that we don't offer star-based rankings or thumbs up/thumbs down. Sure, some stories have objectively good or bad traits. But we hope to review only the best stories, and match these with the best fans.

Second, under **Best for**, we identify kinds of readers we believe will love the story.

Third, under **Discern**, we offer a short list of story elements worthy of discussion.

Please note that “discern” does not mean we avoid an isolated story element, such as a certain word or theme, because we find it offensive. “Discernment” may mean that we must avoid a story if it will

tempt us personally to sin. But in Christ, we may also have freedom to engage with this story as a training member of Jesus's family.

In that case, we feel these elements are worth discussion as fans help each other to find truth in fantastic stories. In your family or church, mature readers may need to read the novel first, then help other readers engage it with truth and imagination.

How we choose reviews

To be selected for *Lorehaven* Magazine review, novels must fit these qualifications:

1. Biblical Christian author
2. Fantastical in genre
3. Published, indie or traditional

Authors can share their books at Lorehaven.com. Our volunteer team will match qualifying entries to the reviewer

who is best suited for each kind of story.

We also prioritize newer novels, so we will consider a book's date of release.

Authors can also consider sponsored (or paid) reviews for older books, or books we otherwise can't select for volunteer review. We treat each sponsored review just like any other review. To learn more, reach out by email to reviews@lorehaven.com.

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THE KAKOS REALM



AN EPIC, FAITH-BASED
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OF GOOD, EVIL, AND
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This story literally had an explosive start and the action continued until the final chapter... everything you love about the paranormal world and much, much more!

Kam's Place Reviews

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Mark of the Raven

Those who walk in dreams wield great power to inspire—or destroy.

For generations, the women of House Ravenwood have abused their gift of dreams.

No, they are not gifted with daydreams or hopes for a better future. Instead, these women inherit the supernatural ability to actually walk in another person's dreams. They're able to share in, and even help to manage, a person's memories and fears.

Such a great gift may help a dreamwalker better know or even love another person.

Or such a terrible gift may help to inflame the dreaming target's worst terror, working from the inside out to ruin or even murder that person.

As readers fall into *Mark of the Raven's* vision, House Ravenwood's heir apparent, Lady Selene, has just received the dreamwalking gift. At this rite of passage, Selene becomes privy to more secrets of her family, their castle and lands, and their part in the history of the land's seven great houses that are each supernaturally gifted.

Selene also learns that her family line was nearly destroyed by an evil empire, left without help from other houses. For Selene's mother, Lady Ragna Ravenwood, that generational grievance justifies many actions, including the fact that dreamwalkers like Ragna have acted more like dream mercenaries. They've sold their gift to any employer who needs to slay a political enemy and make it look like natural death.

What, then, does a young dreamwalker do when

her mother tells her that dream-assassination is the only way to protect your family—and that, by the way, if you don't, she'll just go to your younger sisters and train them to become killers?

This last tension for Lady Selene seems to give this story its primary driving force. As Morgan Busse's first Ravenwood Saga episode, *Raven* is light on action but heavy on familiar-yet-complex character drama, mounting tension, and lush details.

Readers may especially appreciate Busse's emphasis on the tragedy and humanity of every person, both House leaders and the marginalized. In this world, every soul matters—not just the life of Damian Maris, the water-gifted leader of his house who wrestles with the choices of war, but the lives of the castle servants whom Selene has known for years and whose memories she's forced to turn against them.

Such themes could lead to simplistic conclusions: peace good, war bad; love good, assassination bad. Yet Busse doesn't let *Raven* escape into such sentiments. Damien wants to protect his House for peace, but can't do this without also imperiling the lives of his enemies. Selene wants to protect her sisters, and also her own heart from the pain of wounding others, but at the cost of her own humanity. And all the while, their world is haunted by the whispers of some lost and ancient past, when every member of every



Morgan L. Busse has written six novels, including the *Follower of the Word* fantasy trilogy and the *Soul Chronicles* series. She and her husband have four children.

MorganLBusse.com

[@MorganLBusse](https://twitter.com/MorganLBusse)

Explore this novel at lorehaven.com/library/mark-of-the-raven.

House used their supernatural gifts for good.

This is a great way for Christian-made stories to explore magical gifts. It's not the magic itself, but its human limitations—and even its human abuse—that makes it

interesting in a story. For the Ravenwoods, we're certain their sin has separated them from rightful use of their gifts, but not forever. Here's dreaming that fans can share in more stories like this, in *The Ravenwood Saga* and beyond.

Best for: Young-adult and adult fans of medieval fantasy, who love human drama and poignant challenges about character relationships and talents.

Discern: Selene's family drama, which includes a sinful parent and rightful rebellion against her; references to physical attraction, but within a context of covenant love.

‘I Want to Share with Other People Who God Is’

Morgan L. Busse’s fantastic realms challenge us to ponder our place in God’s world.

STORY: E. STEPHEN BURNETT

PHOTO: COURTESY MORGAN L. BUSSE



For Morgan L. Busse’s latest novel, her first image was simple and suspenseful.

“She’s looking down and has to kill the guy,” Busse said. “And she decides . . .”

But saying more would be a spoiler. “All my books usually start with one scene, that all of a sudden I see it clearly in my head,” Busse said. “I’m asking myself: Who are they? How did they get here? And what’s going to happen at this point?”

Mark of the Raven answers these questions, starting a fantasy trilogy with political intrigue and big questions about finding one’s calling—plus unique superpowers.

In this world, Busse’s heroine, Lady Selene Ravenwood, is gifted the power to influence a person’s dreams from the inside. That con-

cept provided exactly the twist on the killer-fantasy-assassin trope that Busse knew her world would need.

“When someone has been given power, what do they do with it? How do they make the choice? . . . What aspect of himself is God showing the world through a person?”

Busse—follower of the Word, wife of a pastor, mother to four children, and author of six novels so far—said she loves exploring how people choose to use their gifts.

“God has given us many different talents and abilities,” Busse said. “When someone has been given power, what do they do with it? How do they make the choice? . . . What aspect of himself is God showing the world through a person?”

As a child, Busse discovered her gift of fantasy fandom thanks to her father. Her mother, a conservative Christian, was strongly opposed to fantasy at the time. (Busse said her mother now happily embraces the genre.) Her non-Christian dad could not get enough of fantasy, starting with works by J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, of course, but also *Conan the Barbarian* and

plenty of fantastical B-movies.

"There was always a part of me who enjoyed having an imagination," Busse said.

Later, when she married her husband, Dan, they had to find inexpensive recreation options while he was attending seminary. At a public library, they found a shelf of Star Wars novels, which led to books by Terry Brooks, Anne McCaffrey, and beyond.

Busse wondered: what if fantasy could help her explore deeper, biblical themes?

"I went into a Christian bookstore and asked them where the science fiction and fantasy was," she said. "They pointed me to the one Frank Peretti book they had."

Fortunately, small presses and indie creators have made fantasy novels from Christian authors, which often explore clear biblical themes, much more common.

Busse got her own start creating stories with her Follower of the Word fantasy trilogy from Enclave Publishing, which released *Daughter of Light*, *Son of Truth*, and *Heir of Hope* from 2012 to 2015. That same press later published her steampunk duology *The Soul Chronicles*, *Tainted* and *Awakened* (2016–2017). (This time the Ravenwood Saga, releasing in 2018 to 2020, comes from Bethany House.)

"There are scenes that I write

where I am literally lifting them up to God in worship," Busse said. "It's almost like I got to draw with my Papa. Draw a picture, paint with him. I want to share with other people who God is, in all his

"There are scenes that I write where I am literally lifting them up to God in worship."

facets.

"I want to write fiction where I am asking and wrestling with my characters these really hard questions about God," Busse continued. "I don't want to shy away [from challenging material] just because I want to have it be a really clean book."

These themes helped one reader, who wrote Busse to say how she empathized with *The Soul Chronicles* novels' similarity to her strug-

"I want to write fiction where I am asking and wrestling with my characters these really hard questions about God . . ."

gle with an abusive father.

Family conflict also plays a big part in House Ravenwood's story.

"It asks: What do you do when you're living under a parent who

is very strong-willed and has their own idea of what you're going to grow up to be?" Busse said.

Raven's male hero, Lord Damian, faces similar challenges when he must use his supernatural gift to defend his people, with terrible consequences. Choices in his story, and Selene's story, won't come easy in this first installment, she said.

"You have to leave everything in God's hands," Busse said. "You can't save everybody. It's a kind of hubris to think that you can save everything."

Busse and her husband can relate. She said they have moved a few times between churches and have spent many years in the messy business of helping Jesus's organized kingdom outposts try to fulfill their gospel mission in the world.

"I know what ministry is like!" Busse said. "But we still keep coming back because we believe in the church. . . . Even then, God is still walking with you."

"I think the whole walk with God is continuing to meet different side roads, where we have to make that choice to keep following the road God has given us," she said. "It's not easy. And I think the more we follow God, the harder it becomes."

Finding yourself in fantasy realms

Morgan L. Busse has written six published novels, with more on the way.

Follower of the Word series

Daughter of Light (2012)

Son of Truth (2013)

Heir of Hope (2015)

The Soul Chronicles series

Tainted (2016)

Awakened (2017)

The Ravenwood Saga series

Mark of the Raven (November 2018)

Flight of the Raven (July 2019)

Book 3 (Spring 2020)



The Secret Identity of Christian Geeks

In Christ, you are a holy, adopted, cosmic ambassador on a mission.

The concept of Superman was born out of humans' common desire to be loved and recognized as significant.

In one interview in "Secret Origin: The Story of DC Comics" (2010), Superman's co-creator Jerry Siegel talked about his inspiration for the hero. Siegel said, "I was quite meek and I was quite mild. And I thought, gee, wouldn't it be great if I was a mighty person, and these girls didn't know that this clod here is really somebody special."

Christian geeks can really appreciate the originally intended concept for Clark Kent. We know what it feels like to be misunderstood or underestimated.

But we must remember that we have immense significance, value, and purpose, even if people around us can't see it. Superman and Clark Kent may have popularized the "secret identity," but Christians have lived with one for thousands of years.

The first three chapters of Ephesians strike me as I think about the "secret identity" of those who put their faith in Jesus. It's easy to blow through these verses without stopping to consider the immensity of what we have and who we are because of Jesus. Here are just a few of the amazing truths we can learn from these chapters.

First—we have been chosen to be holy and blameless (Eph. 1:4).

This Greek word for "blameless" means "unblemished" and "faultless." It's used to describe Christ himself (Heb. 9:14, 1 Peter 1:19) and the future, perfected collection of believers (Eph. 5:27).

Right now we are still broken and sinful people. But God is not looking at us in condemnation (Romans 8:1). We have been legally pardoned in full, and will one day become completely sinless, as Christ is (1 John 3:2).

Second—God has adopted us as his children (Eph. 1:5) and given us an inheritance (Eph. 1:11–14, 18).

Yes, Paul is writing about valuable fa-

miliar love. But if we focus on this, we might miss something hugely significant.

In the letter's historical context, an adopted son gained the same status and privileges of a biological son. Think about that for a second. We have gained all the rights of sonship that Jesus has. We are cosmic royalty, princes and princesses whose father is the ruler of all reality! Immortal, otherworldly creatures look on us with wonder (Luke 15:10, 1 Cor. 4:9, 1 Peter 1:12). One day, we'll even stand in judgment over them (1 Cor. 6:3)!

Third—God's immeasurable power is active in and through us (Eph. 1:19–23) and we are partners with him in his work (Eph. 2:10).

Jesus has been made head over the church (that's us). But Jesus has also been given for the church. And the power he makes available to us as we serve him is the same power that made his dead corpse alive and forever immortal. That doesn't mean we will be unstoppable in our endeavors. It means that God will be unstoppable in his, and we have been invited to be a part of carrying out that work.

We may feel like our careers are fruitless. We might even watch as our ministries fail. But we can always rest assured that, when serving as Christ's body, our efforts contribute to God's unstoppable plans, even when they appear to result in failure.

And that's just what we can see with a quick look at two chapters in Ephesians! If we jump around a little bit, we can start constructing a truly amazing picture of who we are and what we will become. For instance:

- In some hidden way, God has made you into an entirely new creature. You are now a cosmic ambassador from a world we can't yet imagine, helping to bring the vital message that God has made reconciliation possible and free to all (2 Cor. 5:

17–21).

- Your weak or unhealthy body will eventually be upgraded to the kind of physical, yet incredibly powerful, body that Jesus gained with his resurrection (Phil. 3:20–21)!
- You are, and will forever be, a living monument to the universe, reminding all of creation about God's unfathomably rich and undeserved kindness (Eph. 2:4–7).

Our significance is immeasurable. We cannot add to it or subtract from it.

People will look at us and not see any of that reality, as they did with Jesus. But like Jesus, we can know for certain who we really are. And that knowledge will shrink so many of our difficulties in relationships. Instead of taking offense at the words of cruel or arrogant people, we can feel compassion for them.

What we have been given right now and promised in the future, because of Christ, can and should have a very tangible effect on our daily lives. Our circumstances may not change, but how we feel about our circumstances can dramatically change.

We only need to unbind our perspective from the here-and-now, and continually remind ourselves to fixate on what Jesus has done for us already and will do for us in eternity. No matter what life may look like for us this week, we have an amazing identity and purpose that can't be revoked and a future that won't be thwarted.



Paeter Frandsen created Christian Geek Central and Spirit Blade Productions. He produces entertainment and resources, and volunteers at his Arizona church.

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Molding Your Child's Plastic Imagination

We can nurture young ones' creativity for the glory of God.

Have you ever heard people say they're not creative?

Maybe they say they can't draw, play instruments, or write novels.

Creativity and imagination give us more than art or critical thinking skills (ways we evaluate problems from new angles). In fact, imagination is the ability to speculate. This kind of creativity fuels work, daily life, and the worship of an invisible God.

Mirroring our spiritual growth, we can nurture our imaginations, developing this gift for the glory of God. This isn't just an optional enjoyment. It's an act of obedience.

Genesis 1:28 commands us to fill and subdue the earth, implying the use of a God-given imagination to become creators in imitation of God. Just like our own attempts at creating the way God does, children play house, build towers, and drive toy cars in imitation of parents.

But imagination isn't something that grows only in childhood. Did you know that, like your imagination, your brain is plastic? Yes, your grey matter is flexible, moldable, and susceptible to its environment. It even has the ability to rewire and heal. (Neuroplasticity—the brain's ability to change itself—is becoming more widely studied by neuroscientists.)

For years scientists thought that only children have plastic brains. Yet, in the last few decades, they've realized that everyone, regardless of age, has the ability to rewire their brain. The habits we form and the games we play have a much greater influence on our bodies than we realize.

However, your imagination is not just a dreamy fairy world inside your head.

As J. R. R. Tolkien says in his essay, "On Fairy Stories," your imagination shows "images of things that are not only 'not actually present,' but which are indeed not to be found in our primary world at all . . ." In other words, imagination means that you close your eyes and see something that isn't really there, or that doesn't exist in reality.

There's value in that seeing, like peering out from Eden and imagining a world

of possibilities.

Tolkien continues, "That the images are of things not in the primary world (if that indeed is possible) is a virtue, not a vice. Fantasy (in this sense) is, I think, not a lower but a higher form of Art, indeed the most nearly pure form, and so (when achieved) the most potent."

Parents, you can begin to strengthen your child's imagination from infancy. The home environment can either foster speculative thinking or impede it.

For infants and toddlers, begin by redirect your baby's expectations with a game like peek-a-boo. When they get a little older (six months and up), they will start to initiate. Another favorite game of mine is what I call, "Monster Eat You." In this game, I use my best monster voice and pretend to eat my baby with plenty of, "Mmmm yummy Johnny!"

Other activities for your infant include traditional standbys like "This Little Piggy," puppets, and pretending that inanimate objects can talk.

When children reach preschool and kindergarten, they can usually create stories. It's important for a small child to learn how to visualize written and verbal imagery rather than always being forced visuals. One of the best ways to help your preschooler create clear pictures in their head is with Fill-in-the-Blank Storytelling. Co-create a story with your child by asking leading questions. Here's an example:

Parent: "Once upon a time, Princess Silvia went on a walk with her pet dragon. What color was her dress? What did the dragon look like?"

Child: "Sparkly pink! The dragon is green with wings and it breathes water."

Parent: "Where are they going on their walk?"

Child: "They went to the city to see a friend, Princess Rainbow Glorious Butterfly."

Parent: "The two friends decided to go on an adventure. Where did they go?"

Child: "They went to the pool and climbed mountains."

You can also listen to story podcasts,

or pretend with faceless toys or objects—such as casting their crayons as a family, race cars, or animals.

Elementary grades offer a great time for kids to become involved in community theater. This offers many benefits for a child, but acting specifically enhances imagination through empathy for characters. The stage is also less fleshed out than film, and both audience and actors must suspend their disbelief to be fully immersed in the story.

Television in moderation can also feed the imagination. Strange or out-of-the-box movies provide a visual feast, and allow the child to temporarily sink into another person's mind and experiences. Of course, you can also try RPG board games like *Mice and Mystics* or *Stuffed Fables*.

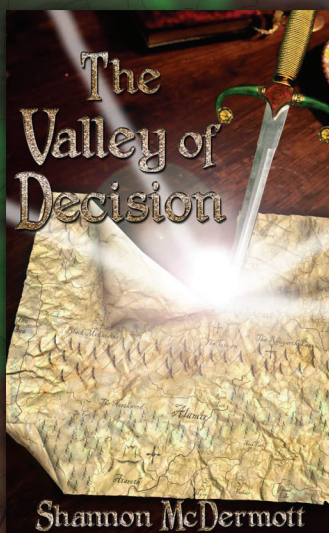
For pre-teens and teens, homebrew tabletop role-playing games or live-action role-playing games have a controversial reputation. But in their simplest forms, these options are merely cooperative storytelling, one of the best exercises in imaginative subcreation. You can also suggest playing the card game *Once Upon a Time*, watching homemade films, and, of course, reading speculative fiction. Writing fiction is also a good creative exercise.

Taking the time to exercise and strengthen your imagination enhances worship. As Nancy Pearcey says, "The ideal human existence is not eternal leisure or an endless vacation . . . but creative effort expended for the glory of God and the benefit of others." In order to for you, your family, even your church to have joy and truly flourish in the Lord, you can't neglect God's mandate for creativity and imagination.



Marian Jacobs writes about Jesus, monsters, and spaceships. Her work is featured at *Desiring God* as well as *Stage and Story*. She and her family live near Houston.

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THE VALLEY OF DECISION

BY SHANNON MCDERMOTT

WHERE THE BLACK MOUNTAINS PIERCE THE SKY, THEY DIVIDE THE SOUTH FROM THE NORTH, ALAMIR FROM THE KINGDOM OF BELENUS. BELENUS, THE UNDYING MASTER OF THE NORTH, COMMANDED KEIRAN – THE CAPTAIN OF THE HOSTS – TO CONQUER ALAMIR. BUT THE CAPTAIN IS DEEP IN CONSPIRACY, AND HE HAS HIS OWN PLANS.

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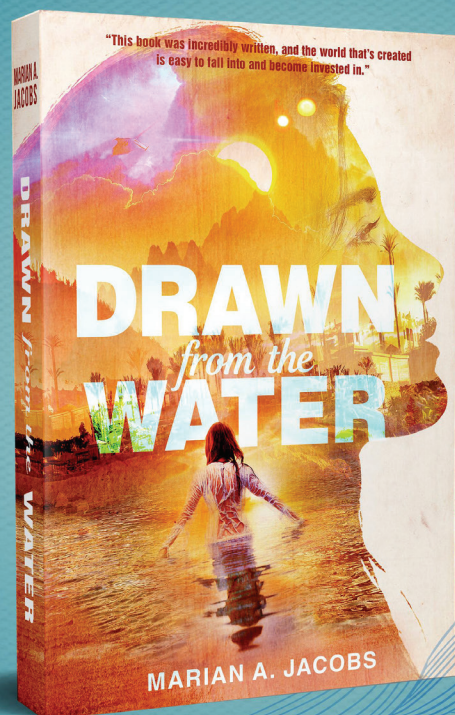
A SAGA OF SLAVERY, FREEDOM
AND CHOICES.



Shannon is a Christian author of speculative fiction, both sci-fi and fantasy. She was born in California, raised on the East Coast, and now lives in the Midwest. Her essays on Christianity, culture, and fiction appear on SpeculativeFaith.com. You can learn more about her and her work at www.shannonmcdermott.com.

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The Christian Roots of Fantasy

The genre once known as “fairy stories” sprang from biblical ground.

On one Saturday evening at the women’s Bible conference, I’d just sold my last book. I was heading to the auditorium for my keynote talk when a nervous-looking young woman plucked my sleeve.

“Excuse me,” she stammered. “Could I ask you why you write books”—her voice dropped to a whisper—“like that?”

“You mean fantasy?” I asked, smiling at her.

She nodded, eyes wide with anxiety and fear.

I didn’t have much time to spare, but my heart went out to her. It wasn’t hard to guess what she believed: that fantasy stories glorify witchcraft, paganism, and the occult, and no serious Christian should have anything to do with them. Especially not one of the main speakers at a Bible conference!

Yet I didn’t feel defensive, because I didn’t need to. Instead, I was happy to tell the young woman why I love fantasy, because this genre offers an opportunity to illustrate biblical truths in a fresh way, and speak to people who might never have listened otherwise.

As C. S. Lewis wrote in “Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What’s To Be Said”:

Why did one find it so hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God or about the sufferings of Christ? I thought the chief reason was that one was told one ought to. . . . But supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday school associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons? I thought one could.

As I explained to my new friend, Lewis had good reason for believing in the power of Christian fantasy to change hearts. After all, the “Holiness” (as he called it) in George MacDonald’s *Phantastes* had “baptized” his atheist imagination and eventually helped lead him to faith in

Christ.

“It’s okay if you don’t want to read fantasy,” I told her. “I wouldn’t ask you to do anything against your conscience. But you may be interested to know that all of the earliest and most influential fantasy stories were written by Christians.”

For example, John Bunyan wrote his fantasy allegory *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, widely considered to be the first novel in the English language.

Yet even before that came Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (1590), an allegorical poem celebrating Christian faith and biblical virtues such as holiness, temperance, chastity, and justice.

In both stories, heroes fight fantastic battles against supernatural, often monstrous foes, and ultimately triumph not by mere human strength but by the power of God.

Many of the stories we call “fairy tales” were also strongly influenced by Christianity.

In these folk tales, the Devil and his servants—witches, evil dwarves, and other malicious creatures—are portrayed as adversaries to be fought, not powers to be worshipped. Christian virtues such as compassion, humility, and faith are rewarded, while pride, avarice, and other sins are punished. And the heroes rarely succeed without supernatural help.

In modern times, many scholars consider George MacDonald (1824–1905) the first true fantasy author. MacDonald was not only a poet and novelist but a Christian minister. His adult fantasy novels *Lilith* and *Phantastes*, along with children’s books like *At the Back of the North Wind* and *The Princess and the Goblin*, were a huge influence on later Christian authors like G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and Madeleine L’Engle. His books even made an impact on the skeptic Mark Twain, who began by disliking MacDonald but later became friends with him.

Lewis and Tolkien, of course, scarcely need introduction, even to people who have never read them. Their epic tales of

humble faith standing up against powerful evil, of selfless sacrifice and glorious resurrection, are deeply rooted in Christian theology and have influenced millions of readers and writers for decades.

Not everyone who reads *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* realizes at once that Aslan is the Narnian incarnation of Jesus, or that the Eru Ilúvatar of Tolkien’s *The Silmarillion* is the same Creator we find in Genesis.

But for anyone with even a passing knowledge of Christian theology, the biblical allusions in both Narnia and Middle-earth are too obvious to deny.

Sadly, modern general-market fantasy has largely lost touch with its biblical roots. Fans need discernment to find good stories. But many believing authors write fantasy in the secular as well as the religious markets. Readers appreciate the glimmers of spiritual truth in the books we write.

It is not (and never has been) true that fantasy belongs to paganism and the occult, even if some Christians may associate fantasy with hippies and drug culture in the 1960s and ’70s, and may recall the “Satanic Panic” of the ’80s.

Indeed, fantasy is no more “ungodly” than any other fiction genre, and in many ways fantasy is less ungodly. After all, other genres deny the existence of a supernatural realm, or pretend there’s no difference between good and evil. But it’s difficult for fantasy to do either without ceasing to be fantasy at all.

And that, as I told my young friend, is why I’m not ashamed to love fantasy, and why I don’t think any Christian needs to be ashamed of loving it either.



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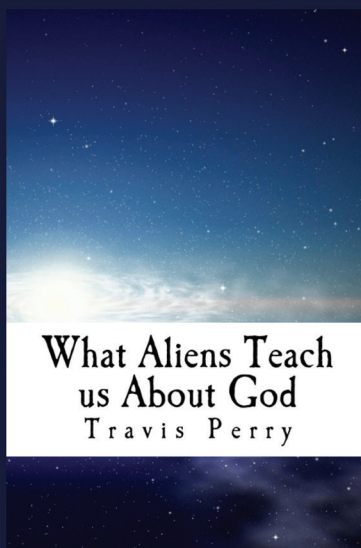


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Werewolf Tales Reveal the Beast Inside

Dark creatures personify our struggle against the sinful nature.

In Romans 7: 19–20 (NIV), the apostle Paul writes: “For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.”

Paul shares an affliction common to all Christians, namely the struggle against the flesh, our fight against sin’s influence on our thoughts and behavior. Even people who deny sin and Christ understand this frustration—the surrender to physical deeds we prefer to avoid.

Sin has a way of controlling us, subverting our intentions, and enticing us to participate in things we know we ought not to do. In Romans 7, Paul confessed he’s not only another combatant in this fight against self, but that he sometimes loses.

Now, my study Bible does not include “werewolf transformation” as a possible explanation for Paul’s struggle, but theologically it could have been, right? Biblical headcanon, anyone?

All right, I don’t actually believe Paul was a werewolf. But the comparison fits because werewolves personify this struggle against the flesh, that is, the sin nature.

The Bible warns that people actually have two natures: the original, wonderful design by God; and the evil, sinful nature that has hijacked that design. We are daily witnesses of sin’s carnage on humanity, so it’s no surprise that the “beast inside” concept is prevalent in our stories.

It’s the implication of giving into evil that has allowed werewolves to persist in our collective lore. Monsters come and go in fiction, but the ones that sink their fangs into our human concerns tend to endure through the generations.

Hollywood has transformed the werewolf, but did not invent this monster. Instead, werewolves present a culmination of many influences and multiple fears. Were-transformation has long been a part of human myth, as a veneration of

animals and a caution against losing our humanity.

For example, ancient Africans, Asians, and Americans shared stories of werewolves, like jaguars, panthers, and tigers.

In Europe, Ancient Romans, Greeks, and Scandinavians told stories of people dressing as wolves or being turned into them by gods (which is also where we get the Greek word “lycanthropy”). In both pre- and post-Christian Eurasia, wolves were symbolically associated with hunters and warriors, and they played a recurring role as villains in folklore (see many fairy tales as well as Aesop’s fables).

In recent centuries, the werewolf design has taken on a more human-wolf hybridization. The silver bullet weakness likely came from retellings of *The Beast of Gévaudan*, which was based upon real attacks in 18th-century France by an unknown creature or creatures.

Meanwhile, lycanthropy as a form of dark magic was a concern among central European Christians. So-called werewolves were burned alongside so-called witches.

Most famous of all was German farmer Peter Stumpp, whose 1589 execution is the stuff of nightmares. The history and motivations behind Stumpp’s story are murky. But without going into detail, we know he was charged with having killed and cannibalized multiple women and children while transformed into a werewolf.

Other people executed for lycanthropy were likewise blamed for those two most heinous of crimes: murder and cannibalism. It’s this aspect that makes werewolves so nightmarish. We’re not only afraid of being attacked by such beasts, but also of our own internal beast leading us to commit the evil we “do not want to do,” as Paul put it.

Werewolves are only one type of this beast.

Algonquian tribes had a variety of stories about the wendigo, a creature who is described as a transformed man succumbing to gluttony, murder, and cannibalism.

In 1886, Robert Louis Stevenson published his masterpiece novella *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, in which a reasonably normal man unleashes the bestial side of himself into the world.

Other horror stories blame external sources as the cause for succumbing to evil deeds. In Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, this external source is the influence of a vampire on innocent people. In William Peter Blatty’s *The Exorcist*, it’s demonic possession; and in Robert Silverberg’s *Passengers*, it’s alien control.

All these stories share a common motif: committing heinous acts that we, in our sober and logical moments, are afraid of committing.

“For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.”

We do not need werewolves or other imaginative manifestations to witness this dilemma. The horror of our sin nature is visible in the daily newspaper headlines and in the nearest mirror.

However, the Apostle Paul assured us that we are not without hope! We have Christ, who is the silver bullet to our inner werewolf, the wooden stake to our inner Dracula, and the antidote to our inner Hyde.

We can turn to the only one with the power to put an end to our monstrous side. Only a few verses after admitting his struggle against the beast, Paul wrote (verses 24–25), “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!”



C.W. Briar wrote *Wrath and Ruin*, a collection of stories featuring figurative and literal monsters. His debut novel, *Whisper from the Depths*, releases January 2019.

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Engaging the Magical Spellcraft of Stories

Our panel explores how Christians discern fiction's magical elements.



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E. STEPHEN BURNETT: Welcome back to *Lorehaven* magazine's Roundtable!

In this feature, Christian fantasy fans explores dangerous ground at the corner of our God-given faith and imagination. As we enjoy and discern these topics, we want to follow the apostle Paul's truth in the book of Galatians, such as Galatians 5:13:

"For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

Each person on our panel professes biblical faith in Jesus Christ. Each friend also embraces Jesus's call to holiness. Yet each person also has different views on how we practice holiness in our everyday lives, and in the stories we enjoy as fans.

In our last issue, we explored the topic of fictional language, like "bad words" and misuses of the Lord's name in a story. Now we move into a similarly controversial theme. But among some Christians, this theme can be even more controversial. And it's unique to fantasy and similar genres: the theme of magic in fiction.

With Jesus's help, and with his glory, grace, and truth (John 1:14) in mind, we'll explore this topic with love and respect for one another.

First, let's suggest a definition. Here's what we mean by the term "fictional magic":

"Fictional magic is defined as a work of fiction that includes supernatural or miraculous events, or practices, that are not common to our real world. These events or practices can have different origins—such as power from a divine source, specially gifted humans, or a series of different natural laws that humans (or human-like characters) can use for different purposes."

Let's explore several issues related to fictional magic and how fans can address this.

1. How have you, as a fan, viewed fictional magic?

MARIAN JACOBS: I have always viewed and engaged with magic as merely fictional and fun. I can't remember a time of ever being tempted to sin because of fictional magic. That said, my views have changed after I've met more fantasy fans who have found this tempting. Although I still think censorship of magic in literature, games, etc., is a poor solution to a heart problem, I'm a little less baffled by parents who remove all fictional magic from their home.

ROBERT TRESKILLARD: As a reader and as a fan, I work hard to think of non-occultic magic in terms of an ancient way of trying to understand things that were beyond their time. As such, I try to not worry any more about it than I might new technology in a sci-fi novel. This allows me to read more broadly than I write because as an author I have my own detailed approach and opinions on the subject.

RONIE KENDIG: My mother, wanting to honor God in all she did and the children she raised, didn't allow us to see movies like *ET* or *Star Wars*. And I have no grudge against her for that because she sought to honor God in every aspect of her life. Now, my approach to magic systems that I read and create is that as long as I am not going against God's word, then I am okay. For TV or movies with magic systems, I look at the source of that magic and its purpose. Does it show the triumph of good over evil? Does it show the hero wielding magic with "honor"?

PARKER J. COLE: I really didn't start to have an opinion of magic in anyway until I got into various Christian circles. Growing up, my parents made sure we didn't do occultic things such as playing tarot cards or calling Dionne Warwick. I knew as I watched TV and movies, I could never do the magic like in the most fabulous movie *Willow*. I knew I couldn't fly on brooms or sprinkle fairy

dust like Tinkerbell. Why? Because my parents told me Santa Claus wasn't real, that we went to the Lord for any request, and that there was no such thing as magic. That's why, when I read stories of magic, I was able to divorce any sort of reality from it.

2. How do you respond to your parents' views of fictional magic?

ESB: Many of our readers may empathize with the memory of being taught, from childhood, that such things are either suspicious or downright evil. Ronie and Parker, you've both shared a very mature response to this, even if you've grown in your own grown-up-level approach to fictional magic. I suggest many Christian fans absolutely need to respond in this mature way, as you both have, to the parents or other authority figures in their lives who have forbidden things from them.

If we can accept that fictional magic is messy—and not all helpful or harmful—then we ought to say the same thing of parents of spiritual authority figures.

PARKER: You have to come into your own relationship with Christ. My parents were just honest about it. I respect what they did teach us because it gave me a foundation in how to respond. Sure, my response has changed over the years because I've heard different things and can lean toward certain aspects with a bit of freedom than I could as a kid. But mom and pops were just doing the best they could with what they knew. Most parents do.

MARIAN: Growing up, my parents didn't intentionally teach critical thinking about magic. I was pretty much allowed to watch anything I wanted on TV. But I was still able to glean that there is a difference between fictional magic and magic in the Bible from simple comments about Ouija boards being evil. That was enough for me to steer clear, since I wasn't tempted by power.

My husband's parents did censor magic in their home, and I would never say their reasons are "dumb." They simply think it's confusing for children and teaches them that evil magic is "fun." I can respectfully and empathetically disagree with them

RONIE: Crowd mentality is powerful, so I am glad for the example my mother set to measure what she did and didn't do

against the word of God. My approach to reading and watching is this: I look at the magic's source, I look at its use in the story, and the motivations of the characters in using that system

ROBERT: We really are all coming from different backgrounds. I grew up very ignorant of Christianity with about every other religion represented somewhere in my extended family. I also came from a divorced home and had little guidance on anything growing up because my mom worked and went to school. Needless to say I got into a lot of trouble and didn't come to faith until I was fifteen. Yet here I am a now empty-nesting homeschool father who had to flip and figure out how to parent my kids in this confusing world. I only have respect for all the other parents out there even if they made different decisions than my wife and I did. We're all just muddling through doing our best. We used to unconsciously think that if we followed the right "formula," our kids would turn out well, but we've learned that there is no formula. God has us all on a bit of a wild ride and we just need to hold onto him, like Lucy holding onto Aslan's mane.

3. Does the fictional magic source (like gifted people vs. natural law) make a difference for you?

RONIE: Yes, I think it does because having a source defines that there is something greater than the character, and I do think that's an important element of the story and mirrors our existence and relationship with God.

If only a character has the magic and it does not have a source, then only the character defines the right and wrong uses of that, and left in a person's hands, I think that's pretty tricky or dangerous ground. It is much as our world is today with situational ethics and determination of right and wrong being only through what is "right for you," and we can see that's not working out so great in a lot of ways.

MARIAN: It does make a difference. I think magic, although fictional in this case, is an unreality, it should still convey something about reality. How it does that can vary. But ultimately, all good comes from God. The story doesn't need to literally talk about God (it can, though) but the magical source should not be the magic



In Exodus 7, Moses demonstrates God's power to Pharaoh by transforming his rod into a serpent. Pharaoh's magicians copy the miracle, but Moses's serpent devours the Egyptian serpents. Image from *Figures de la Bible* (1728), Gerard Hoet and others, public domain.

wielder. Even if the magic being used doesn't have a stated source, the person using it should still take a posture of humility in using something that doesn't belong to them, and which is a power that exists outside of themselves.

Magic can also be a metaphor for the gifts God gives, whether spiritual or physical. When the magician becomes dependent on their own strength and full of pride (in being like God rather than dependent on God), then they have become like the evil magicians in the Bible.

ROBERT: For my own writing, I have the magic come from objects, such as a meteorite/stone, sword, or fang. But I go beyond that and make it clear that the source is ultimately found beyond the object in good or evil.

And so with that perspective, I understand the concern and danger about having the source of magic come from within an individual. But how is this any different from the Avengers, or the X-Men mutant movies? Or how is that different from any natural ability—one man is very strong and so must learn to use his ability in a God-honoring way?

PARKER: I have to go back to the thought that a lot of this stuff wasn't a big deal to me until I got into these types of circles. Because I knew magic wasn't real, it didn't matter what the source was. But I like Marian's point about how even the unreality should point to the reali-

ty. Is the source a Creator with a moral compass? Is it an Infinity Stone made at the Big Bang of the universe? Is it a wand made from the crystallized fire of a dragon's breath lost in the mountains of Abingna? The source does reflect that reality to a degree

ESB: For my part, I can enjoy stories with fictional magic sources of any of the three origins, or a hybrid. For example, in Star Wars, the "magic" of The Force is part specially gifted human, part different natural laws. I enjoy this because our heroes are, for the most part, still following a presumed honor/morality standard such that anger, fear, and more lead one to the dark side, while love, respect, and compassion bring one to the light.

In other words, the story may claim that it's all about "balance" and the magic has no will. But it's all, one might say, a trap. Plot twist: the story was all about a hero's journey anyway, and even the "force" that has "no morals and no mind"—that's a quote from C. S. Lewis—is harnessed for the storyteller's morals and mind, which are hidden in plain sight.

4. What Scripture texts come to mind about magic?

ESB: I'll start with Deuteronomy 18. This message by Moses has a lot to say about many topics, but is often quoted about magic only in verses 9–14.

MARIAN: The two that come to mind are 1 Samuel 28 and Exodus 8.

In 1 Samuel 28, Saul visits the witch at Endor and requests she bring up Samuel's spirit to direct him, since God wasn't answering regarding an approaching army. In Exodus 8, Moses strikes the ground with his staff and the dust turns into gnats. That's the third plague and the first one the Egyptian magicians can't replicate. At that point they admit, "This is the finger of God."

Since I think evil magic and biblical miracles both fall under the modern literary umbrella of "magic," I would say that these passages clearly show that (1) evil magic is real, and (2) God's "magic" is stronger.

RONIE: Ultimately and biblically, Satan cannot create. He can only pervert, so he takes what God has created and perverts it to his end.

Personally, I really love Isaiah 8: 19–20 (NASB): "When they say to you, 'Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,' should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn." I really love that symbolism as well as the admonishment to not seek these things, but to seek God.

ROBERT: Deuteronomy 18 is one of the reasons why I don't like Harry Potter. It's one of my principles that not everyone agrees with. If a role is by nature evil, I believe we should not make a person with that role the hero of a story. Thus the very fact that Harry Potter is a witch is a deal-breaker for me. I know I'll get a lot of hate mail for saying that, because J. K. Rowling is an excellent author in so many ways and so many love her writing. But my issue isn't magic per se, but rather the title of "witch." Note that I have a witch in my own stories, Mórghana, but she is quite evil and I make it very clear that she is a slave of Satanic forces and is suffering for her servitude.

ESB: I've written elsewhere about Deuteronomy 18, but mainly about how the occult practices it warns against are very specifically about (1) someone's intentional choice, (2) based in idolatry, (3) based in a desire to attain revelation from "the divine" (for security, safety, hope for the future). This contrasts strongly with God's promise to reveal a "final prophet" who alone will speak for God.

Readers should decide for themselves, with help from mature Christians, whether they can enjoy a particular story with magic elements, without facing temptation to idolatrous occult practices.

5. What are some hazards about magic in real life, compared or contrasted with magic in fiction?

PARKER: I'll probably upset someone with this because I know it's going to cause issues but here it goes: the Word of Faith and the prosperity movement is, for the lack of a better term, the "magic" of Christendom. It's our version of "the Force." Instead of faith grounded in the person and foundation of Christ, it's a force we manipulate based on belief. Instead of God, the eternal one, the

uncreated Creator, the one from whom all things exist, being the source of our faith, it is a nebulous force we can activate. Mind you, I am not saying don't have faith. I'm not even saying we can't go before God's throne and be bold in faith. However, faith is not a substance used for activation.

ROBERT: This is an important topic because the culture we are surrounded with spans both extremes—from atheistic materialism, where the spiritual does not exist, to the full spectrum of neo-paganism. And while spiritual realms in Christian spec-fic novels is critically important to combat the former, if a novel is not carefully written, it could confuse and/or encourage people to explore the latter.

So authors are not just playing with words. Their choices can and will affect people's viewpoints and maybe even their life choices.

If someone is attracted to what is clearly portrayed as evil and what is clearly shown reaping terrible consequences, then there is really nothing that can be done and their soul is in God's hands. Christian spec-fic can definitely get past some people's "watchful dragons," as C. S. Lewis puts it. But for other readers, the stories might entice those "dragons."

RONIE: I grew up with a mother who had come from Catholicism and converted to a non-denominational faith. In doing so, she was very—strictly—careful about what influences she allowed into her heart and life, and as a result, she took great care what she allowed her children (me and my brother) to read, see, or watch. She was living to the best of her ability a life in faith and servitude. She wanted to honor God. Where is the fault in that? The Bible warns us over and over to abstain and/or have nothing to do with evil, and she was very protective of what she allowed in.

ESB: I definitely agree with caution, and can see a lot of instances where young Christians overreact—even legalistically—against their parent's choices.

Still, I think it's important to acknowledge that yes, sometimes we've had moral panics over things among some Christians. (For example, the infamous Onion article about J. K. Rowling supposedly being a practicing Satanist.) I think a lot of people, then, hear about

this and assume “Oh, that’s just those evangelicals getting worked up over nothing again.” When in fact, there are very real dangers out there, that are being ignored thanks to the (often exaggerated) cries of “wolf, wolf.”

ROBERT: That is sad how Christians can often give a knee-jerk reaction to fake news like that, and it gives us a bad reputation. I think about the “Proctor & Gamble” logo tie to Satanism lie that got photocopied and spread far and wide in the 1970s and ’80s. This urban legend just wouldn’t die. I once found it on a bulletin board at college, promptly went into the library and copied a micro-fiche of an article that debunked it and posted it. Took me fifteen minutes and that was without the internet. As Christians we should be the first ones to think and research and verify before we take up a cause.

ESB: When I was a kid, the urban legend was that there were demonic “messages” or aesthetics attached to particular music rhythm. This isn’t something I was specifically raised to believe. But the notion of it was a “meme” in the educational materials and various church cultures. The idea often accompanied anecdotes about, say, the tribal witch doctor who had just gotten saved and who believed that banging the drums awakened the spirits. In addition to being potentially, um, racist, I now wonder why Christians just sort of assumed the “weaker brother” (to whom the music was associated with past religion) was qualified to teach everyone.

MARIAN: I think you’ve all named most of the myths I would throw out there, so I’ll stick to theory here. Joshua 1:7 comes to mind. “Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go.” I think this is a kind of commissioning not to be extremists and think that the solution to our problems is doing the exact opposite thing—like Aristotle’s golden mean. I think falling into the vices of excess or deficiency is what creates these myths. But being aware of the temptation to overcorrect produces the virtue of prudence which looks to find a balanced and wise solution to the occult and/or fundamentalism.

6. How can Christians address fictional magic for mature fans versus younger fans?

MARIAN: As C. S. Lewis said about the Chronicles of Narnia series, “One day you will be old enough to start reading fairy tales again.” As I’ve said before, often unreality can teach us something about reality that we may have never noticed or known before. The beauty of a fairy tale is that it grows with the readers.

RONIE: While teens certainly do not want material dumbed down, authors must consider carefully the content they present in stories to younger minds who are perhaps not as well-grounded or who are newly formed in their faith. They are young, growing minds and hearts, and we should be attentive and protective of that.

ESB: One of my great hopes is to equip younger readers to pursue Jesus as their greatest treasure so that the temptations of fictional magic, e.g. as a means of escape, or to control their own lives, would increasingly bounce right off them. In other words, when Christians express concern about fictional magic (or other content), I usually don’t disagree. But I do tend to be more solution-oriented. I instead think, “Okay, because that’s a concern, how can we help train younger students to grow into the kind of spiritual-superpowered adults who can ‘handle’ riskier content, and themselves train others to do the same?”

ROBERT: I wrote *Merlin’s Blade* so I could market it either as adult or as young adult. Some agents only accepted one or the other, and by having *Merlin 18*, I would tailor the pitch either direction. The same was true of the publishers . . . some just weren’t interested in young adult and vice versa. Which basically means I didn’t dumb down the books, yet I kept them clean. Middle grade would be a whole different audience, however. For novels in the same genre that are for adults, I would use Stephen Lawhead as an example. Definitely for the mature of both spirit and taste.

PARKER: Mature fans still want the element of wonder. The older we get, we cease to see wonder in the world, but we do search for it. One of the things that has always bothered me about young adult books is that adults either aren’t

there or else act like the stupidest people in the world.

7. How might Christians navigate our different views on this while showing love and respect?

PARKER: My way of handling this is to be prayerful about the situation, no matter what it is. To see individuals as individuals who are flawed, trying to be more Christ-like. We have to make sure that what we’re not judging people by a man-made standard. People are quick to throw Bible verses at folks with their own spin, particularly when it comes to sin, whether public or private, and then stand on a pedestal of righteousness.

RONIE: “Eating our own” is not a way to draw others to the Lord. For Christians, we (actions and words) should point to Christ—that is the purpose of being a Christian, to bring glory to God. Which we do by having a relationship with him and honoring him in our words and deeds.

MARIAN: The Bible is explicit about many things and we should obey and seek to have biblical discernment. Christians who tend towards liberalism can take this too far, exercising their Christian freedom in ways that are not biblical and do not glorify God. Perhaps this is the greater danger for Christian geeks who are tempted to love the world. Yet, in the areas where the Bible is not explicit (such as “Can I read Harry Potter? Should I homeschool my children? Can I be separated from my spouse for the sake of reconciliation?”), these things are made into laws based only on our Christian traditions.

ROBERT: Our stances and beliefs regarding these matters should neither affect the breadth of our fellowship, nor the reach of our loving-kindness. Too often the very medium of social media encourages us to say things we would never say to someone face to face. Although we have strong beliefs in this area, we should follow the old maxim, “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.” This does not mean, however, that we cannot lovingly share our convictions with each other. We just need to do it in the right spirit and in love.

This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.

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holds rich rewards ..."

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burgeoning mysteries,
and riveting action ..."

"... masterfully draws on legends and myths ..."

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new, fascinating territory ..."

"... a romping adventure ..."

"Sudden violence and forceful diction
drive the action forward ..."

"Best for: Young adults who enjoy fairy tales
from multiple canons and cultures."

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its pacing episodic, its science
hard as a vacuum."

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who dream of other realms."

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