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Captain's Log

Young fans are slowly guiding Christian fiction toward fantasy, sci-fi, and beyond.

What could be more enjoyable than reading or creating a fantastical story?

Try this: meeting new fans and helping them find great Christian-made novels.

That was my experience in March 2019. On behalf of *Lorehaven* magazine, I aided our friends at Realm Makers Bookstore at a Fort Worth convention. This bookstore travels the country to set up shop at fandom and homeschool conferences, where hosts can showcase the best in Christian-made fantasy, science fiction, and beyond.

In Fort Worth, we met so many amazing people. They were homeschool moms and dads as well as grandparents. Some were teenagers in search of fantastical books. Many were young children just getting started on their lifetimes of reading.

Many people told us things like:

- "I had no idea these books were out there!"

- "Oh, (name of fantasy-fan child or friend) needs to see this."

- "My child reads these kinds of books all the time. I need to know more."

If people browsed certain books, I could share any *Lorehaven* magazine review of that book. Sometimes I would say, "We love fantastical stories wherever we find them. But we have a special love for stories created by our brothers and sisters in the Church, if they're based in biblical truth and made with excellence."

One grade-school girl, Melissa, proved a big fan of the long-running Christian audio drama *Adventures in Odyssey*. She and I "geeked out" about the show.

A teenage reader, Jeremy, bought books, subscribed to *Lorehaven*, and shared with us how he and his friends were writing collaborative stories in many fantasy genres.

Melissa, Jeremy, and thousands of

other fans are the future of Christian fantasy.

They will "reboot" Christian fiction, driving new generations of books into fantastical genres, which better reflect the scope and wonder of Christ's epic true gospel.

They're discovering *Lorehaven*, Realm Makers, and many other online resources.

They'll find authors who have already spent their lives creating stories with biblical truth and excellence.

And they can also explore biblical articles about fantasy's purpose, and reviews of the best Christian-made fantastical novels, in *Lorehaven* magazine.

One year at *Lorehaven*, complete. Lord willing, we have many more years to go!



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. Magazine print copies are available by request and at special events.

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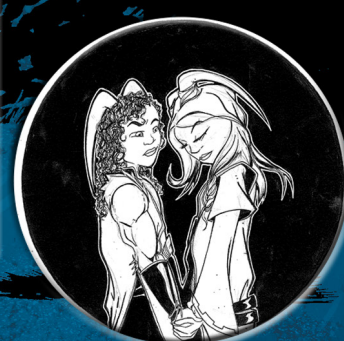
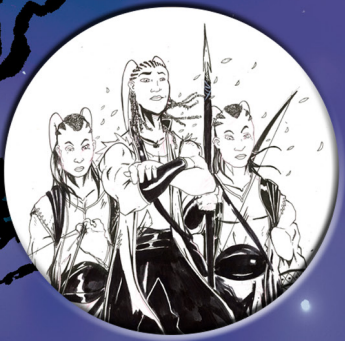
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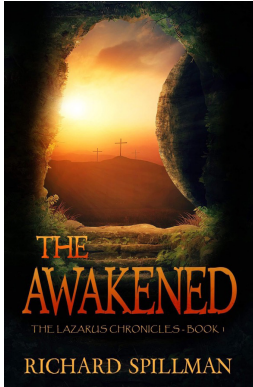
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The Awakened

In Richard Spillman's *The Awakened*, readers find a world in which Lazarus, the man Jesus raised from the dead as recorded in John's gospel, is still alive. Lazarus is joined by other people whom Jesus resurrected since that time. They call themselves The Awakened, and they have formed an organization called SOAR to fight against the "UDs"—people who have been resurrected after death by demons. Readers

track Lazarus's journal entries about his memories of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. Some of these attempts to roll away the stone from unknown parts of Jesus's life can feel forced. Yet this story is set in the modern day. Characters use advanced technology and events break in many different parts of the world, making this biblical fiction also resemble a Tom Clancy thriller.

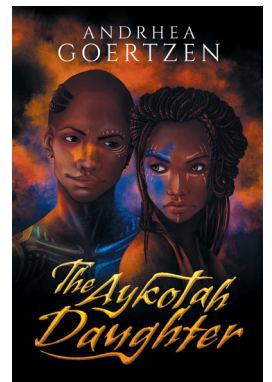
Best for: Discerning adult readers.

Discern: Violent elements, such as terrorist attacks, murders, and one character who is molested as a child. Readers may also challenge story elements, such as Jesus asking Lazarus's forgiveness for raising him from the dead, or reflections of a shallow gospel that emphasizes mankind's goodness.

The Aykotah Daughter

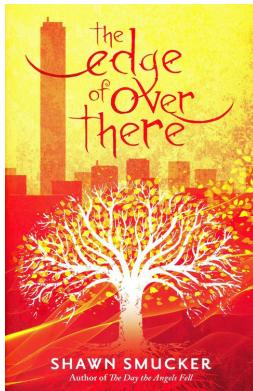
Andrhea Goertzen's *The Aykotah Daughter* follows Miroreka Fakusha as she is thrust into her fate as the king's only daughter—the future queen. She must marry a man whom she has never met, who comes from another tribe, trusting him to lead not only her people but herself. But she is torn between what she believes to be best for her tribe and the

expectations traditions impose on her. Allegorical themes counter tribal spiritualism and reliance on false gods with a picture of complete trust in the one true God. Though the story could have used more editing, and at times the plot is difficult to follow, *The Aykotah Daughter* paints a beautiful picture of true sacrificial love and submission.



Best for: Fans who enjoy edgy romance, multi-cultural settings, and adventure.

Discern: Violence, sensuality, open discussion about sex, implied sex in the context of marriage, and attempted rape.



The Edge of Over There

What if eternal life was a curse? For Abra Miller, it's even worse: a terrible threat that imperils mankind. After Miller slew an angelic being at the tender age of twelve, she was commissioned to destroy the Tree of Life wherever it sprang up, preventing Earth from degenerating into a hive of corrupt immortals. But now the Tree has appeared in a realm-between-worlds where even angels dare not tread.

With *The Edge of Over There*—sequel to *The Day the Angels Fell*—Shawn Smucker unveils a masterwork of lyrical grandeur. It's a tale of deep mystery and fast friendship, told with the poignancy of half-remembered dreams and the immediacy of pelting rain. In the tradition of *Perelandra* and *A Wrinkle in Time*, this story cracks the spacetime doorway to reveal a reality far richer than the world we know.

Best for: Lovers of atmospheric arcana, fans who have already read the first novel.

Discern: Brief bloodless violence; frightening imagery; and extended contemplations of mortality, death, and loss.

Eilinland: Through the Wall

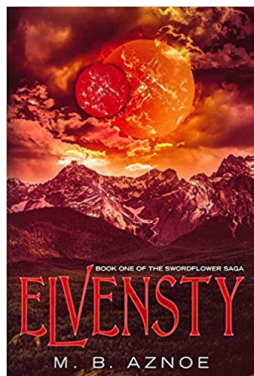
To go forward, some people must first go back. Bailey Davenport's *Eilinland: Through The Wall* follows a team of five warriors—and a last-minute newbie addition—as they venture for a rescue mission into the unfriendly land north of a world-dividing wall. Allegorical elements subtly crisscross this story: from the wall itself, which has only a single gate and seems to represent Christ, to the demon-like beings called

sniws, who bicker and scheme and beset the rescue team. Our heroes, too, fight among themselves like cats, yet never become irritating. Davenport has assembled a cast of characters who genuinely care for each other despite disagreements and hardships. Overall, *Eilinland: Through the Wall* serves a light, entertaining read, with good thematic substance to accompany the fun.



Best for: Fans of young-adult fantasy, though older readers may also enjoy it.

Discern: One character is caught stealing and let off the hook fairly easily.



Elvensty

M. B. Aznoe's *Elvensty* starts with sluggish and unpolished early chapters. But the story ignites when an empath academy's only student Believers—a tall half-Northerner and a Southern lord's daughter—meet for the first time in a deserted chapel, and an assassin strikes. This betrayed couple must flee that same night, with a hastily arranged marriage to ensure their reputation. Adventure begins! Fastid-

ious worldbuilding, diverse cultures, and detailed geography give the tale distinctive flair. Even better, this novel is written by a husband-and-wife author duo, which helps the layered details. Thoughtful tenderness and high action, respectful romance, loyal friendships, nerve-jangling danger, and surprises aplenty keep you on the edge of your seat and leave readers craving a sequel.

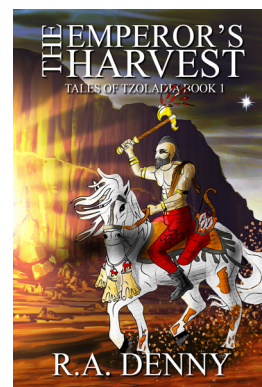
Best for: Fans of marrying-a-stranger romances, harshly realistic terrain, detailed fights, and imaginative twists on culture—including church culture in another world.

Discern: Some thematic elements, including threats to the leading lady, mild and mostly fade-to-black romance between the main couple, and several possibly unsettling deaths.

The Emperor's Harvest

A prophetic sign sets events in motion, and three people from different races journey for a common destination, each meeting difficulties along the way. In *The Emperor's Harvest*, R. A. Denny reimagines elements from the biblical account of Christ's birth in a fantasy setting. In this world, normal humans live with people who have feet like ducks,

folks who are scaled like lizards, and others who can glide like flying squirrels. Readers might struggle to follow the story's viewpoint switches, from first-person to third-person and back again. Main characters' stories become narrative seeds left to germinate into a larger saga of future installments.



Best for: Young adults and older readers.

Discern: Some violence, especially people of certain races being slaughtered for bounty; one final religious ceremony involves duck-people sacrificing other duck-people, and even duck-people men castrating themselves.



For Us Humans

Steve Rzasa's *For Us Humans* takes on big theological dilemmas while wrestling with an alien art heist. Unlike some sci-fi authors who attempt creating new alien races, Rzasa's alien race feels inventive. Occasionally the snarky, smart-aleck antagonism between the main cop duo feels childish. However, once the action ramps up about halfway through

the novel, this adventure morphs into a complex fusion of intergalactic conspiracy, prejudice erasure, redemption narrative, and call to personal revival. The story wraps with space battles and a surprise family reunion, and its theme of divine intent in all things is carried to its full conclusion.

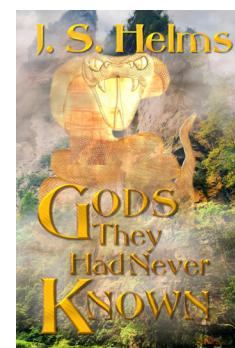
Best for: Fans of sci-fi who like nerdy references and wisecracks mixed with light exploration of biblical salvation themes.

Discern: Some light vulgarity and innuendo, descriptions of female characters' tight blouses, and hero's anger issues. Some violence is lightly sketched or even campy.

Gods They Had Never Known

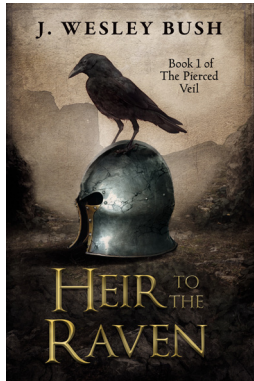
What might the world have been like before the Flood? What if fallen angels could have had children with human women? How did the world become so bad in Noah's day that God decided to send such a severe judgment? J. S. Helms explores these questions in *Gods They Had Never Known*. Its colorful story-world portrays angelic guardians who aban-

doned their guardian responsibilities so they can get close to human women. Children born to them are a rather wild bunch, even when they are dead. While the narrative provides plenty of extra-biblical speculation, it strongly supports biblical morality and the truth of how sin distorts goodness.



Best for: Older readers.

Discern: Some horrific and almost lewd imagery; readers may also consider why, in this story-world, metalworking, medicine craft, and fabric-making is forbidden to humans, as opposed to God's allowance of this knowledge and skills in our age.



Heir to the Raven

Selwyn's dreams have flown far beyond his father's castle. Larissa's dreams are circumscribed by the limits of her small village and broken family. But life has a way of breaking our dreams and changing our horizons. J. Wesley Bush's *Heir to the Raven* deftly creates classic high fantasy. Its large array of characters tread disparate paths, nations and armies tangle together, and abundant detail builds up the

world's complexity without cluttering the story. Religion is defined by an established church devoted to the High King, but the supernatural faie prove more spirited. The novel's refined craftsmanship is roughened by coarse and brutal moments. Yet *Heir to the Raven* masterfully weaves history, politics, and myth into a breathing world.

Best for: Adults, fans of Tolkien and high fantasy.

Discern: Considerable violence that occasionally targets minors; some characters die gruesome deaths; sexual allusions, including discreet references to prostitution and rape, and one joking reference to bestiality; moderate language, including vulgar sexual slang.

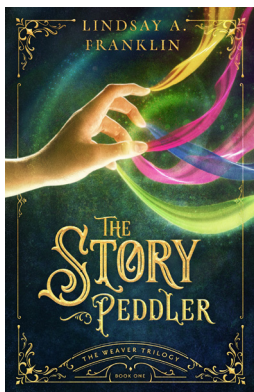
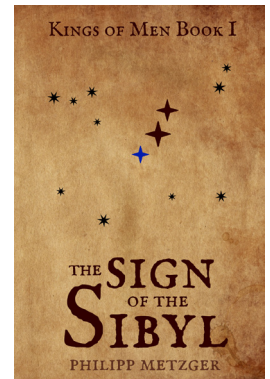
The Sign of the Sibyl

Philipp Metzger's *The Sign of the Sibyl* begins with vivid characters. A dashing young aristocrat open to any madness while pursuing ancient secrets, a steady-minded scholar, and a common-man preacher all set to sail to Barbados. This colorful, colonial cast is transported to a strange sea complete with a sea monster and a maiden as sacri-

ficial offering. The premise starts fast but soon slows in some areas. Scenes of revised Roman history abound with suspense, but some readers may struggle to follow explanations for these ancient plot twists. Still, readers may love how this alternate-universe tale integrates biblical elements as "lost lore" in an alien world.

Best for: Fans of historical action/adventure or Greco-Roman history with a dose of portal fantasy.

Discern: Frequent mild vulgarities and profanities; some characters are crude.



The Story Peddler

In Lindsay A. Franklin's bold adventure *The Story Peddler*, Tanwen has the ability to weave stories into sculptures that she can sell. She dreams of becoming the king's royal storyteller. But art has a way of revealing truth, including truths the king wants to keep hidden. Tanwen is swept into a journey with a band of outlaws and learns more about her abilities and about the king's plans to destroy

any gifted person who might threaten his rule—like Tanwen herself. This story spins a perfect array of delightful characters living with complex magical abilities in a truly unique world. Its adventure, political mayhem, and just a touch of romance reach into the hearts of creatives whom God has gifted to use their talents to serve others.

Best for: Young adults who enjoy a good fantasy adventure.

Discern: Some violence and mild references to physical relationships.

The Worlds Next Door

C. E. White's *The Worlds Next Door* introduces twelve-year-old Janie, who is fascinated by a neighbor's derelict house. From her window at night she sees lights, but no one ever goes in or out. When she and her friend Reggie investigate, they discover the house is a portal to worlds such as Sian, where the ground wobbles, people look like polar bears, and

residents desperately need help from Earth. Soon the kids find themselves getting their sea legs on a perilous mission to rescue Sian. The story appears intended for middle-grade readers, but characters' philosophical discussions lend this story a more grown-up and allegorical feel.

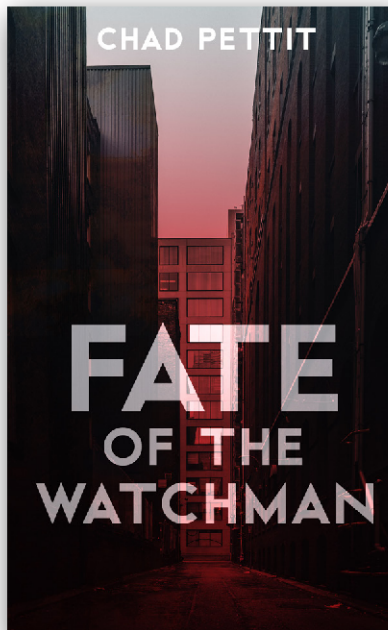
Best for: Older children, yet parents may need to read aloud and explain some words; adult fans of inventive Christian fantasy and thoughtful theological fiction.

Discern: No major content challenges.

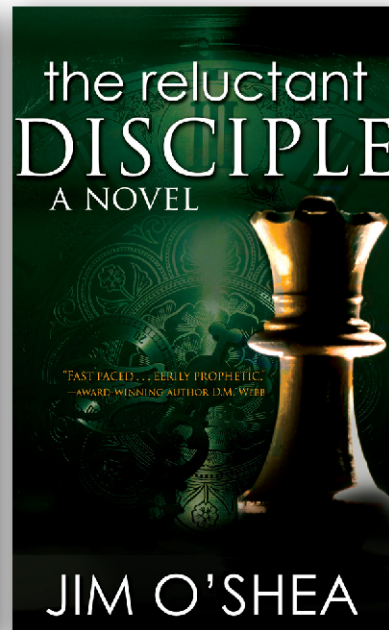


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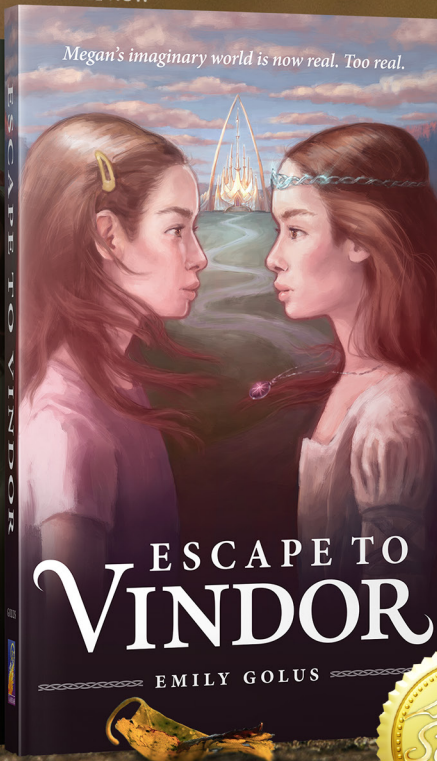
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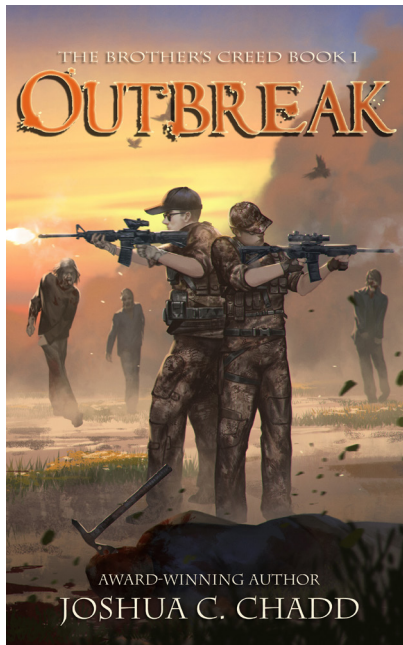


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Outbreak

Luckily for James and Connor, the world ended while they were on a hunting trip. When the brothers returned, they found civilization overrun with the ravenous undead. Fortunately, the hunters were well-armed. With their ally, Emmett, they begin their long journey. But danger obstructs every way, and if some survivors can be found, others will be lost.

In *Outbreak*, Joshua C. Chadd relates the fall of civilization, both to zombies and to the living whose wicked nature is unleashed by anarchy. Heroes ratchet up almost super-human kill counts, but also heavy losses. In keeping with its genre, *Outbreak* escalates to considerable levels of violence as the

protagonists mow through hordes of the undead. Unfortunately, the brothers are equally merciless to their human enemies, killing men in their sleep and shooting one fleeing enemy. The brothers even torture a captive for information. A few mercy killings further muddy the moral waters.

Sure, zombies are ubiquitous in popular culture, but this zombie thriller gets an unusual religious turn. Survivors both affirm and question God. One person speculates the undead are a plague of the biblical end times, and one fanatical priest presents a cruel distortion of religion. Despite its violence, *Outbreak* will doubtless thrill readers who enjoy a good zombie yarn.

Best for: Adults and fans of horror, especially the zombie subgenre.

Discern: Graphic violence with considerable gore and one torture scene; once, several people (mostly women) are beaten, but only the results are seen; moderate language; one instance of a nineteen-year-old person drinking alcohol.

The Reluctant Disciple

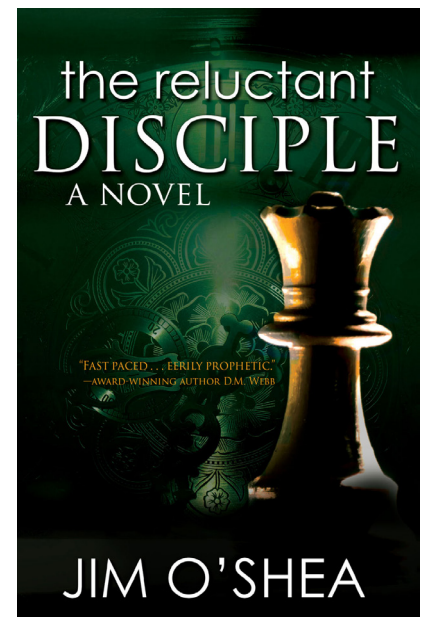
Ryan Kates imagines he controls his life. His paranormal talk show has launched him to stardom, despite the fact that he thinks his callers are all kooks. But as UFO sightings and missing-person reports proliferate worldwide, Ryan must confront the possibility that he's as much a pawn as any of his listeners. But whose pawn? The answer may deceive even the elect.

Jim O'Shea's *The Reluctant Disciple* stuffs its segments with haunted houses, alien abductions, international conspiracies, and eschatological prophecies. It's an end-times mashup for the ages. But the action is often engulfed by exposition, and so many events are happening that entire subplots simply vanish, leaving some readers to wonder if the plots too have been beamed up.

Ryan, in his new capacity as a national

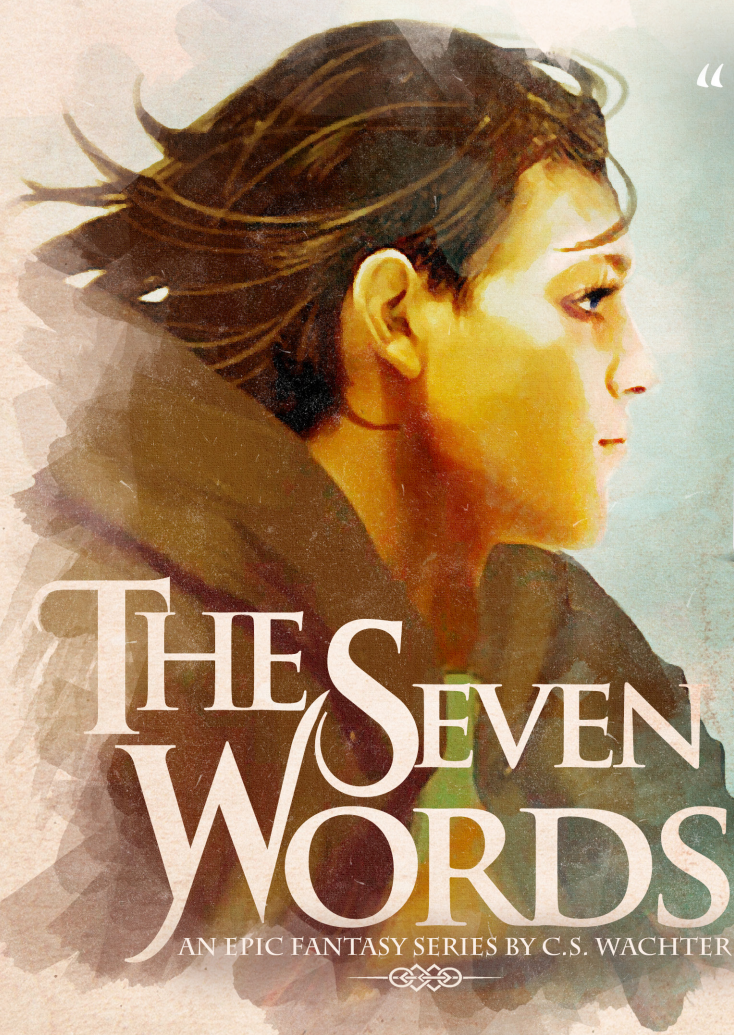
influencer, finds himself beset by figures out of his past. Some of these connections are spiritual in nature, some romantic, and the former generally more compelling than the latter. The villain's terrifying insidiousness, however, is reason enough to tune in. Like an opposition-research project gone too far, the avatar of this story's evil achieves the apex of villainy: persuasiveness. Readers are forced to contend with a spiritual power-play feasible not only within this work of fiction, but the real world too. Meanwhile, Ryan faces an even more daunting challenge: what options remain when he's in checkmate?

Part paranormal thriller, part gothic horror, part *Left Behind* reboot, *The Reluctant Disciple* tours popular thematic attractions via disquieting paths.

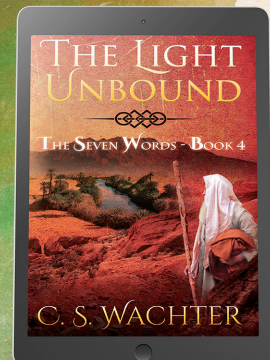
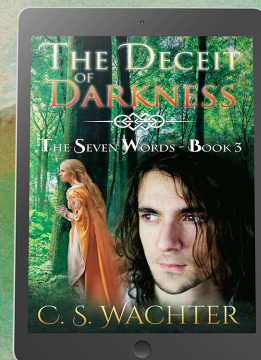
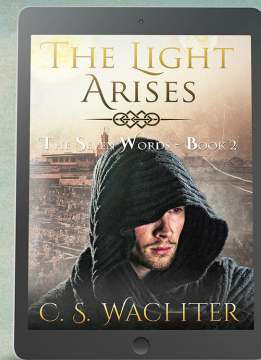
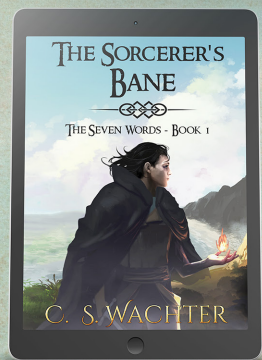


Best for: Older teen and adult readers seeking a more chillingly plausible end-times vision.

Discern: Compelling depictions of false theology, scenes of paranormal horror, references to demonic possession, brief vivid gore, brief sensuality.



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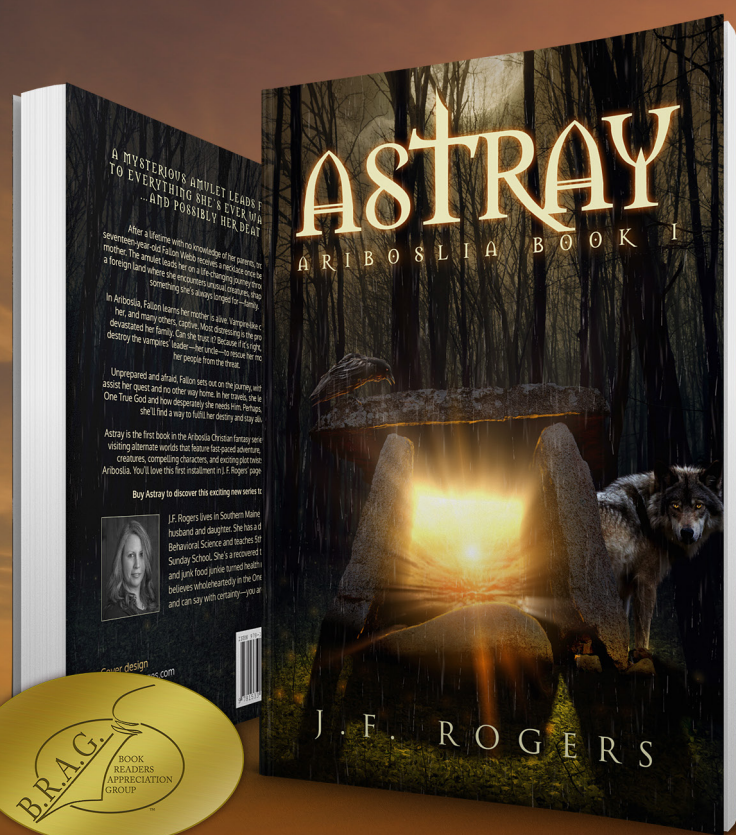


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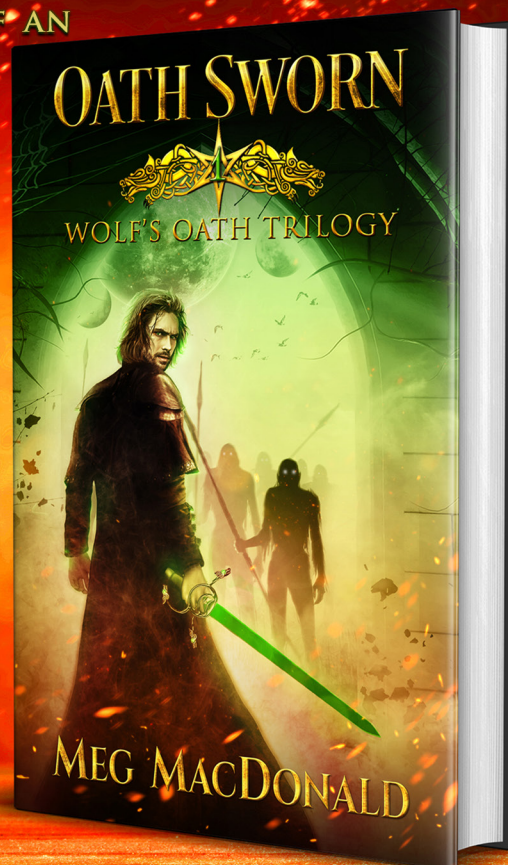
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Oath Sworn is masterfully written in its intelligence and requires the reader to fully engage his/her mind and delve deep into a knowledge of language, including Scottish slang because there is a lot to be found here. - ★★★★★

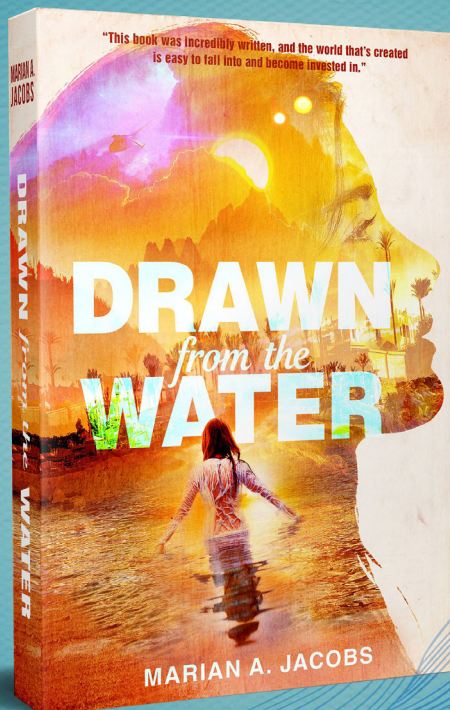
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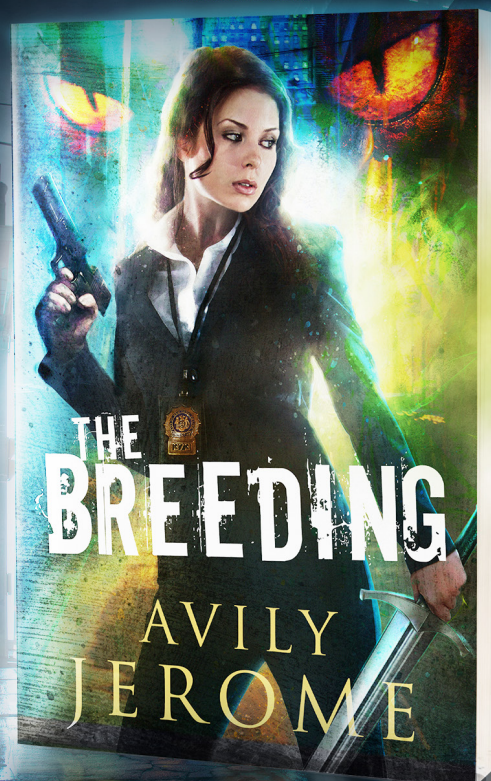
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The Line Between

Tosca Lee's thriller quests toward truth among apocalyptic madness.

If you have ever hated cults—or God forbid, were trapped in any cult-like activity yourself—you'll love to hate novelist Tosca Lee's fictional New Earth International.

In Lee's latest mid-apocalyptic novel, *The Line Between*, former cult member Wynter Roth, 22, is cast out of New Earth. (Already the Christian's heart rages, for the cult's very name is a Satanic slander against God's future dwelling, as in Revelation 13:6.) Cult leaders proclaim Wynter an apostate and shut the Enclave's gates behind her.

At least Wynter has started to prepare for this. She has begun to see past the cult's evils and the lies of charismatic entrepreneur-turned-manipulator Magnus Theisen.

Like many real-life cult members, Wynter was brought into the group as a child. Her vulnerable mother was trying to escape a bad relationship and rebuild her life. And like other escapees, Wynter also fights to adapt to the modern world and healthy friendships as well as the seemingly simple task of thinking independently.

But unlike other cult escapees, Wynter faces an apocalypse—a real one—straight from any cult leader's worst end-times predictions. In this doomsday, people across America are catching a virus that quickly turns into early-onset dementia. Literally, the world is going crazy. Vic-

tims crash their cars and attack one another. Power grids are on the fritz. Somewhere out there you may even find Russians colluding.

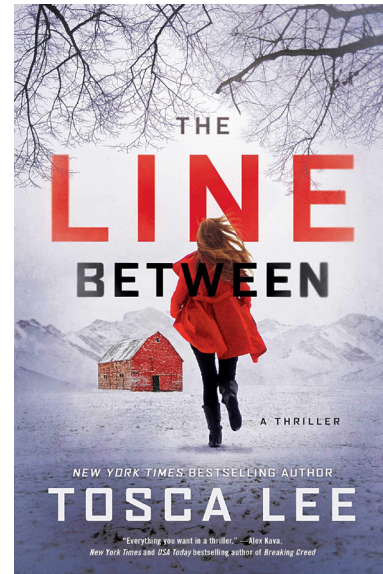
As it turns out, Wynter has the only biological samples that could lead to a cure.

Lee mixes chilling, crackling suspense with thoughtful character growth, as readers follow Wynter's frightening present while also recalling her perma-frosted past. Each character leaps from the page, pressed by experienced storytelling hands.

Wynter herself feels just like a strong yet self-questioning cult escapee. Her female and male friends provide refreshing support, acting as true heroes, yet bearing very human flaws. Meanwhile, our heretical heavy, Magnus, struts across these fictional compounds, acting like real cult founders, yet with his own especially nasty spins.

Lee strikes other story-and-truth balances in portraying the goodness in both non-Christian and possibly Christian heroes. Spoiler alert: Wynter won't go straight from false gospels to the real one. But, from a Christian's vantage, she does meet people whom God has blessed with "common grace." They not only give good gifts to their children (Matthew 7:11), but strive to care for others' spiritually abused children.

Other heroes reflect overtly biblical beliefs, such as a fellow escapee who blesses Wynter with simple, firm,



Tosca Lee has created many multi-award-winning novels in biblical genres, such as *Iscairiot* and *Demon: A Memoir*, and in supernatural genres, such as *The Progeny* and *The Firstborn*. She lives in Nebraska with her husband and children.

ToscaLee.com

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

Explore this novel at lorehaven.com/library/enclave.

and compassionate truth. "Whatever your so-called (or real) infraction, you are not damned," this woman tells Wynter. "You need to know there is life and love in the world. I've seen it. God is far bigger than the Enclave."

To help someone escape false teaching or a cult, this is exactly what you must say.

These truth glimpses give *The Line Between* surprising heart-warmth amongst the chill, while its road-trip quest drives fast through mad territory and never once feels bogged down in snowbanks. Even by the finale, we get hints that our heroes have learned that yes, some-

times you must stay preserved from a world gone mad, but for the greater mission of helping others in that world. As Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote, you can't simply separate from evil people—not even cultists—in order to avoid evil. That very line between evil and good cuts through every human heart.

Sure, we can know such a truth in our heads. But stories like Lee's (to be followed by *A Single Light* in September 2019) help us feel that truth. And sometimes they can even help us escape our own false beliefs to thaw in the freedom of gospel grace.

Best for: Teen and adult readers, especially those who dare to explore the ways real people can corrupt biblical faith for their own abuses of power.

Discern: A few swear words and misuses of God's title; descriptions of violence brought on by an apocalyptic mental-illness plague; acts of spiritual and emotional manipulation, including a villain's attempted seduction; unmarried young man and woman sleep together for comfort, but without any mention of sexual activity.



‘Come With Me! I Have A Story To Tell You’

In Tosca Lee's fictional worlds, heroines find new identities of grace.

STORY: E. STEPHEN BURNETT
PHOTO: COURTESY EMILIE HENDRIX

The kids used to call her “Weird Tosca.”

That’s because, from an early age, Tosca Lee found her greatest love for stories in the science fiction and fantasy genres. She lived Robert Silverberg’s *Lord Valentine’s Castle*, breathed *Star Wars*, and began writing her own short stories and poetry.

“I firmly believed Luke Skywalker was going to come for me in his land cruiser,” Lee recalled. “I had a very vivid imagination!”

Before she became a bestselling novelist, Lee considered two other career fields: first, ballet, and later, TV news anchoring. But while driving with her father one day, Lee began discussing her latest favorite fantasy

novel, Marion Zimmer Bradley’s *The Mists of Avalon*, about the women behind King Arthur’s throne.

Lee suddenly said to her father, “I think I’d like to write a book.”

Her dad replied, “I will pay you what you would have made working as a bank teller this summer . . . if you will spend your summer full-time writing your first novel.”

Between her college freshman and sophomore years, Lee wrote that first novel.

“I love books where you shut the back cover and you feel this sense of longing and pain.”

— Tosca Lee

“I love books where you shut the back cover and you feel this sense of longing and pain,” she said. “You got pushed out, at the end, against your will. . . . It’s almost painful, because with the really good books, you just want to be back in there. I wanted to see if maybe I could give someone else an experience like that.”

From a ‘Demon’ to biblical fiction

Like some first novels, that story never found a wider audience. But some years later, Lee felt drawn to another story. This one would follow a fallen angel who recounts his own memoirs of rebellion against God and corruption of humanity.

Lee finished that story in six weeks and became sure God was helping her.

But Christian companies kept rejecting the book, until NavPress published it with the title *Demon: A Memoir* (2007). (It has since been re-issued by other publishers.)

“To write a book about a fallen angel, it just made sense for me as a Christian to make it Scriptural as possible,” Lee said. “It’s actually the story of grace from an inverted point of view. . . . *Demon* is the story of the Bible. It’s the story of God’s love affair with humans, told from the viewpoint of an outsider who watched it play out.”

Lee later wrote several other biblical fiction titles, such as *Havah: The Story of Eve* (2008), *Iscariot: A Novel of Judas* (2013), and *The Legend of Sheba: Rise of a Queen* (2014). She also co-wrote novels with Ted Dekker from 2011–2013.

Yet Lee felt drawn to dive deeper into contemporary tales for more readers.

“I have a lot of different stories to write!” Lee said. “I also really like sci-

fi. I like fantasy. I like a little romance every now and then. I have many interests as far as storytelling goes. And I do enjoy the process of, on that first page, saying, ‘Come with me! I have a story to tell you. You’ll never believe what happened.’”

Many novelists tend to stick with one genre. But publishers can risk supporting authors whose readers are willing to follow them into different tales, Lee said.

“I call my readers ‘intrepid souls,’” she said. “Maybe I’m just not as weird as I thought I was.”

Finding *The Line Between*

Lee’s thriller duology *The Progeny* and *Firstborn* (2016–2017) follows a young woman, running from her own memories, who’s descended from a serial killer.

Next, Lee had two story ideas. First, an incurable virus escapes from melted Arctic permafrost and plagues the world. Second, a young woman escapes from a cult and must struggle to see the outside world and its graces through new eyes.

Her publisher suggested joining the two ideas. The result: Lee’s apocalyptic thriller *The Line Between* (January 2019) and its sequel, *A Single Light* (September 2019).

“I’ve been fascinated with the idea of cults for a long time,” Lee said. “You see it in a lot of TV drama. . . . We’re fascinated with how these leaders can have this kind of pull over people, and what it is that attracts people to organizations like this.”

“We’re fascinated with how these [cult] leaders can have this kind of pull over people, and what it is that attracts people to organizations like this.”— Tosca Lee

Lee based *The Line Between*’s fictional cult on a variety of groups, blending a little health food obsession, some end-times fear, and a lot of spiritual manipulation.

No matter their religious origins, cults share several elements, Lee said. They’re run by charismatic leaders.

Their members organize efforts to “love bomb” new cult members and make them feel accepted. Then, slowly, the group increases its strictness. They separate new members from their family members and the outside world. They often force members to surrender their property to the group.

“I really feel for the people who come out of these groups, especially because they come out of great spiritual abuse and sometimes sexual abuse,” Lee said.

Next: the stories jump to TV series

Just as *The Line Between* released, Deadline.com announced that Radar Pictures and Marlboro Road Gang Productions want to adapt these novels for a television series. Both firms had already locked in Lee’s *The Progeny* duology for a series at The CW.

Radar Pictures helped produced the Sony film *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle* (2017), and recently sold *The Wheel of Time* series to Amazon Studios.

Lee said the filming and release schedules for either series have not yet been decided.

“Right now, The CW has the pilot script for *The Progeny*,” she said. “So much of this is waiting. This news came out in November, and it seemed like it was very sudden. But this has been in process for four years. . . . It is really exciting. I’m not gonna lie!”

Meanwhile, Lee said she has recently pitched another amazing story.

“If I told you, you would like it,” she said. “It’s cool. That’s all I’m going to say.”

Yet Lee said her stories will likely keep focusing on themes of core human identity.

“I really feel like that’s at the heart of every single story,” she said. “It’s a question of, ‘Who am I, who do I think I am, and who am I really? Who do I feel that I should be, and who am I supposed to be?’ . . . The tension between being stronger than you think you are. And also reaching the point where you know when to surrender. I think, as a person of faith, that’s a tension that we all have to hold.”



How to Geek Out with Godly Purpose

Does our investment in stories build the kingdom or waste our gifts?

As a geek, I often invest lots of time and money in the stories I enjoy. But as a Christian, I often wonder if these investments could be put to better use. How much “geeking out” is too much? Can our hobbies benefit God’s kingdom, and if so, to what purpose?

I’ve been doing geek ministry for nearly thirteen years, and I’m still wrestling to make good choices in my entertainment pursuits. So I’ll not implicitly claim expertise here. Instead, I’ll present how I’ve thought about this issue for readers’ benefit.

Scripture gives many warnings about wealth and riches. That’s appropriate, given our tendency to value gain over giving. Yet we must not oversimplify God’s word. For example, when Jesus told his disciples to sell their possessions (Luke 12:33–34), did he mean *all* their possessions? If so, why did the Holy Spirit tell rich believers to “share” their wealth instead of simply giving it all away (1 Timothy 6:17–19)?

In Ecclesiastes, the Spirit also encourages people to enjoy wealth in this broken world (Ecclesiastes 5:18–20)—an action that surely applies only apart from conflict with our duties to God (see 12:13–14).

Yet Paul’s words echo in my mind: “‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things are helpful. ‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things build up” (1 Corinthians 10:23). Paul also writes, “So whatever you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

These Scriptures show us the importance of our *purpose*. I ask myself: What is my purpose for investing time and money in our entertainment? Where does that purpose fall in God’s intended order of priorities for me?

When speaking on the subject of pleasure, Ravi Zacharias often quotes the English preacher Frank Boreham, who said, “Anything that refreshes you without distracting you from, diminishing, or destroying your final goal is a legitimate pleasure.” I take this to mean that we can overprioritize and indulge in pleasure outside our purpose, or even in opposition to God’s intentions.

As Christians, our final goal is to love Yahweh with all we’re made of. Secondly, we must love and prioritize other people the way we naturally do for ourselves (Mark 12:28–31). So when entertainment refreshes us without negatively affecting these goals, it’s a gift from God! Otherwise, we may need to address a problem.

Here’s how we might keep our hobbies in line with our godly purpose.

First, create a purposeful schedule.

It’s too easy to let our spare time default to our hobbies. But we should first build in regular activities that prioritize God’s kingdom. It’s vital to spend regular time in Scripture study and prayer, followed by time for our families as well as serving and forming deeper relationships in our local churches. Once we build these into our schedules, we can look at our remaining hours for entertainment.

Second, create an itemized budget.

Our money can also easily default toward entertainment. We can prevent this by tracking where our money goes. This starts with scheduled, proportional giving to our local church. Next comes essential costs, such as food, housing, transportation, and savings. After that, choose a modest, experimental amount of money from each paycheck for entertainment.

Our use of money is a big issue in

Scripture, and can reveal what we truly value in our hearts. I highly recommend attending a Crown Ministries small group or reading through Howard Dayton’s *Your Money Counts* with a friend or small group.

Third, test and revise both!

Our schedules and budgets can and should change, especially if our goals bring us stress. We may also discover that we don’t need as much time or energy for our entertainment as we thought. And as we mature during different seasons of life, we’ll benefit from re-evaluating and making changes to our budgets and schedules.

Finally, we can ask these questions to keep our stories focused on godly purpose:

- Am I doing this to “escape” something I should talk to Jesus and other Christians about?
- Is there an opportunity right now to invest in someone else?
- Will this story refresh and prepare me for more invigorated service?
- Am I grateful for this entertainment time, or do I feel entitled to it?

When we enjoy stories with godly intention, shaped by discipline and reflection on God’s word, we gain energy to serve and build connections with others that bring to fruition the very purpose for which God made us.



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

[@Christian_Geek](http://ChristianGeekCentral.com)

‘When I Grow Up, I’m Going to Be the Villain’

Should parents make their kids only play as heroes and good guys?

Does your child choose to play the cop or the robber? A Sith Lord or a Jedi Knight?

Why choose to play the villain at all when you could choose to play a hero?

Parents might think the answer is simple. Villains may have cooler costumes and passionate personalities in need of redemption.

Often a villain’s nuanced backstory and misplaced belief that ends justify means give him greater motivation to act. Humans, in our sin nature, resonate deeply with those kinds of motives.

And what’s wrong with that? Nothing actually. Well-rounded characters, whether on the side of good or evil, are always necessary. The problem is not with making villains interesting—it’s with making good guys boring.

Heroes may not usually have such strong and relatable reasons to be good. Thanks to moral relativism, storytellers may struggle to answer questions like, “Why be moral?” As a result, heroes may choose to be good guys, not because they’ve been redeemed, but because they feel it’s the right path. That’s just plain boring.

For example, among superheroes, Captain America is rather vanilla. (All lovers of Cap, please lower your weapons.) He follows the rules and usually shows a stoic personality. His chosen ethical system often resembles deontology, or “the duty ethic” which makes morality all about dispassionately following rules instead of passionately imitating the heart and characteristics of Christ. We may admire Cap’s commitment, but we also enjoy a more tortured “bad boy” hero like Iron Man who fights his inner self in order to save lives.

As parents, do we fight a losing battle to make goodness look cool when it’s not? Will evil always appear more

attractive? Of course not. But if we see “following the rules” as our highest good, we will weaken our children’s passion for righteousness. We will also restrain our children’s ability to discern stories in which good heroes sometimes need to break rules.

For instance, Cap shatters his stoic stereotype in the film *Captain America: Civil War*. He breaks the rules in order to accomplish what he knows is moral.

We also see similar rule-breaking in Scripture. David eats the holy bread reserved for priests (1 Samuel 21) and sacrifices his “broken spirit” instead of a burnt offering (Psalm 51:16–17). Rahab lies to protect the Israelite spies (Joshua 2). Jesus’s disciples pick grain on the Sabbath (Matthew 12). In fact, the Pharisees didn’t understand the virtues, or fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23) behind the laws, so Jesus often corrects them.

Virtue is the fulfillment of the law (Matthew 5:17, Galatians 5:23, 1 Corinthians 6:12). Christ does not call us to obey the rules like Pharisees; he calls us to be passionate about virtue. Christ was so devoted to goodness that he flipped tables and drove sinners out of the temple. By his example, stoicism has no place in Christianity.

Will such a standard fail to make goodness more attractive? A villain without moral constraint seems more free, creative, and therefore more enticing to young minds. Yet there is a reason “self-control” (or temperance) is a fruit of the Spirit and a cardinal virtue. When we are no longer slaves to our sin nature, we are free to live the way God intended: “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). Structures, including moral and creative structures, actually enhance

creativity and freedom.

Dr. Seuss is a wonderful example of how structure and limitation helped him produce some of the best children’s books ever written. Author James Clear writes, “[Random House founder Bennett] Cerf proposed the bet and challenged that Dr. Seuss would not be able to write an entertaining children’s book using only 50 different words. . . . The result was a little book called *Green Eggs and Ham*. Since publication, *Green Eggs and Ham* has sold more than 200 million copies, making it the most popular of Seuss’s works and one of the best-selling children’s books in history.”

The purpose of rules is to provide structure that teaches responsible freedom.

Games of cops and robbers, then, can reveal that your child’s heart is drawn to evil instead of goodness. But more likely, your children are simply processing the world around them. Parents who forbid this kind of play may find this rule backfiring.

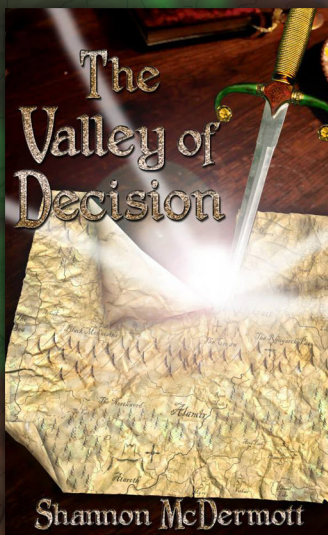
Instead, model a passionate and

active love of goodness for your children. Analyze the imaginative game’s purpose, and guide your child in wisdom and virtue when needed. And be sure to show them heroes that burn with desire for the good of others—heroes that embody the kind of fervor Christ had when he laid down his life for those who didn’t deserve it.



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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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.

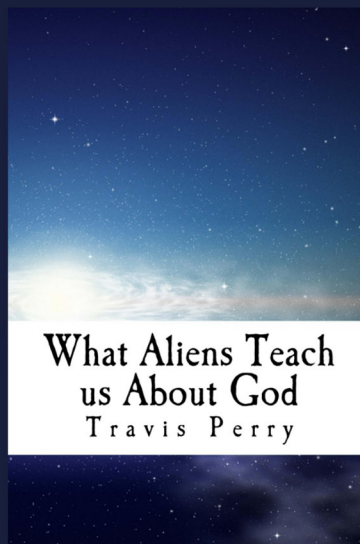


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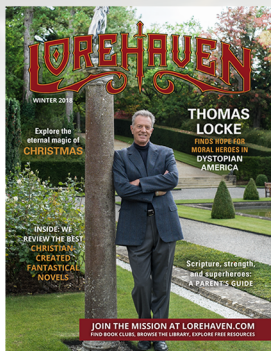
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