

LOREHAVEN

SUMMER 2018

INSIDE:
FANTASTIC
CHRISTIAN
NOVEL
REVIEWS

Our panel discerns
the pros and cons of
cusswords in stories

Nadine Brandes

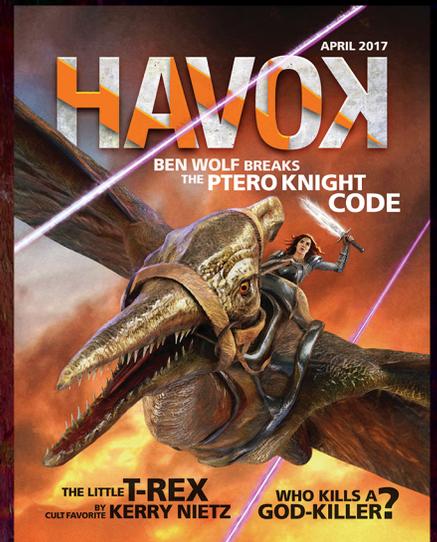
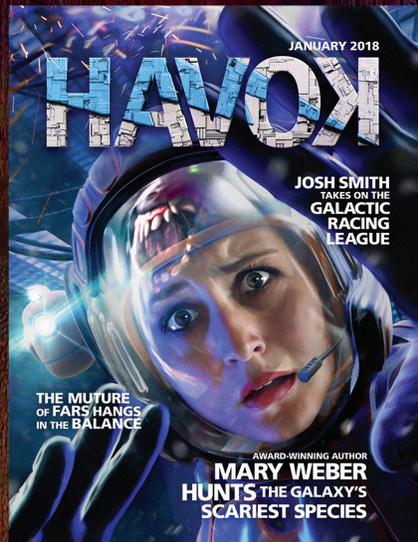
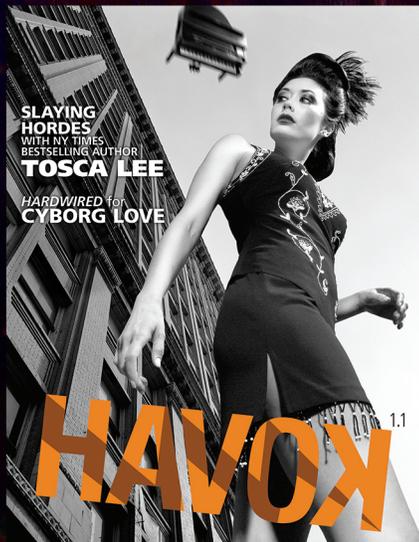
SEEKS OUT THE
MAGIC OF BELIEF

ARK ENCOUNTER'S

TIM CHAFFEY delves deep
into Flood legends

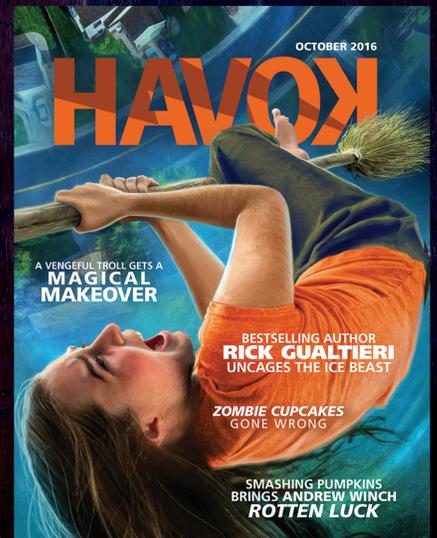
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Captain's Log

Lorehaven's mission: to chase fantasy joys all the way back to their Giver.

You love fantastic stories. Or you know a person who does.

But what are these stories good for?

Some Christians say these stories are “just entertainment.” Why overthink them?

Or we say these stories are for moral education or spiritual inspiration. After all, can't we learn lessons better if they're hidden inside an allegory or parable?

But if we dismiss stories as “just” anything, we belittle stories' humanity and creative power. If we confuse stories' purpose with the goal of nonfiction, we may miss the best ways to study facts, or learn truth about Jesus (especially in biblical preaching).

Stories need some greater reason to justify their existence.

We may find this reason in the same biblical truth that justifies our existence.

An old theological catechism asks, “What is the chief end of man?” That is: What is the highest purpose of human beings? Why did God create us in the first place?

This catechism replies, “Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”

That's why God made us, loves us, and redeems us: to glorify and enjoy him!

All his gifts, including his gift of story-making, help us serve that purpose.

Therefore, we can conclude: “Stories' chief end is to help us glorify God and enjoy him forever.” Or, these stories' purpose is to help us chase true joy in God.

In *Lorehaven Magazine*, you'll find honest yet positive reviews of fantastic novels. In these you can find clear reflections of God's truth, beauty, and goodness. That's the simplest source of fantasy joy. But even when we discern a story's idols or unbiblical ideas, we can also find joy because this helps us become more like Jesus.

We pray *Lorehaven* will help you find fantastical stories that help you fulfill Jesus's joyful purpose in you.



E. Stephen Burnett is *Lorehaven* 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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Masthead

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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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CLEARLY DEFINED EVIL THAT IT
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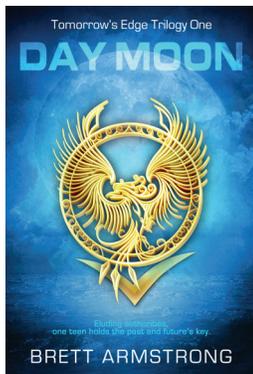


★★★★★
the
Wolves of the Tesseract
series

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

AVAILABLE AT BOOKSTORES OR ONLINE AT:
www.AuthorChristopherDSchmitz.com



Day Moon

If a modern-day Bard of Avon penned a near-future thriller, it would resemble Brett Armstrong's *Day Moon*. As a programmer and art student at the university, Elliott McIntyre's greatest concern is wooing fellow student and artist Lara Hopewell. But when Lara finds a hidden message in a poem written by Elliott's grandpa, they are drawn into a labyrinthine treasure hunt for truth, pulsing with conspiracy and danger. An intriguing masterpiece of character

relationships, marked by deception and betrayal, displays authentic human interactions and motivations on the story's canvas. And the plot is deftly coded with mysteries and surprising twists. Burdened by immersive descriptions and ornate prose, the narrative lacks an editor's touch, yet presents a richly layered world and magnetic plot with need for a sequel.

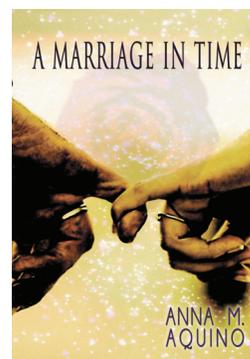
Best for: Readers who enjoy a slower-paced but exciting story, with explicit Christian themes arising naturally from the story flow and characters' beliefs.

Discern: Mild violence, kissing, suggestive elements, and one scene involving lingerie.

A Marriage in Time

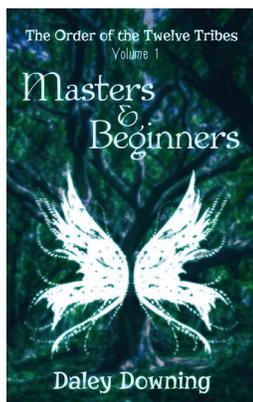
A Marriage in Time offers a passionately emotional story of love and loss and making choices. Mega-church pastor's wife Lacy Stevens is transported by an angel to the time of Bathsheba. Lacy is placed in Bathsheba's household, and serves Bathsheba, powerless to stop the events she knows will soon unfold. But she has a mission she doesn't quite understand: to help Bathsheba face the consequen-

ces of her actions with King David, and to confront her own choices, feelings, and future. Anna M. Aquino paints a rich historical setting for a timeless tale of the bondage of sin, the impact of the choices we make, and the power of forgiveness. While a thorough edit would have made this read even more enjoyable, the story's emotional impact was profound.



Best for: Adults, married women, and those who enjoy Biblical fiction.

Discern: Issues of adultery, infant mortality, and other themes central to the story of David and Bathsheba.



Masters and Beginners

Not everyone who looks normal is normal—this fact can prove disastrous. But the Driscolls, who appear like a conventional suburban family, are secretly members of an ancient order devoted to battling the Unseele, the dark fey, on behalf of humanity. In *Masters and Beginners*, Daley Downing blends the traditional Faerie mythology with biblical ideas of angels, Nephilim, and the war in heav-

en. These diverse elements are skillfully woven into a convincing world, leavened with magical quirkiness and textured with political maneuverings. The story finds its focus on fifteen-year-old Sophie Driscoll, slanting the novel sharply to young-adult fiction. While the story's plot is unfortunately thin, the story's surrounding magic will enchant many readers.

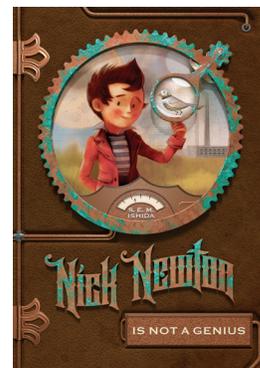
Best for: Teens, fans of the *Harry Potter* series, readers who enjoy fairy tales.

Discern: Three misuses of God's name, roughly half a dozen instances of mild swearing, mild violence, and defiance of parental authority.

Nick Newton is Not a Genius

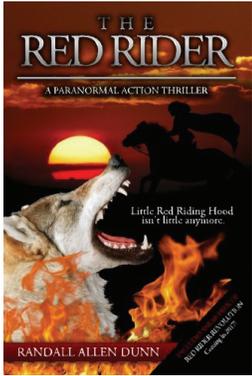
Nick Newton is not a genius. That isn't shameful; you might even call it normal—unless you lived in Nick's house. There, the dazzling brilliance of his mother, father, and older sister shine a painful glare on the fact that poor Nick is not a genius. But he's curious and persistent, and by those virtues he will discover what secrets from the war are hidden in his home. With *Nick Newton Is Not a Genius*, S. E. M. Ishida cre-

ates a sci-fi tale for young readers. Her story plays out in Thaumia, a country of advanced robotics and whimsically named educational establishments. It is peopled with colorful characters, sometimes wrong but always memorable. The plot is simple and the book is never in a rush, but children and grown-ups alike will be charmed by this gentle, creative tale.



Best for: Children, fans of science fiction.

Discern: Characters discuss rumors that a man murdered his parents.



The Red Rider

Red Riding Hood survived, of course. The wolf died. But wolves still prowl the forest, so the story goes on. Randall Allen Dunn's *The Red Rider* cleverly blends the tale of Red Riding Hood with the legend of werewolves. Playing out in a darkly dreamlike version of France, this story digs its roots deep into religion. Catholic Christianity, savage witchcraft,

and whispers of new churches form its conflict and themes. Fantasy yields to horror as the inherent ghastliness of a wolf stalking a little girl increases and spreads until finally overwhelming the original story's fairy-tale aura. *The Red Rider* bears teeth, but horror fans will find it gives an exciting chase.

Best for: Adults, fans of horror and fairy tale retellings.

Discern: Gore, considerable violence, grisly images; not appropriate for younger readers.

The Relic Cycle: The Bloodheart and The Lightningfall

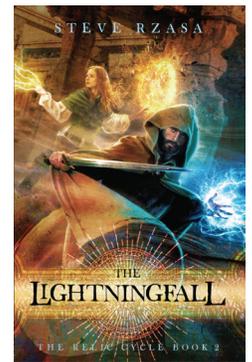
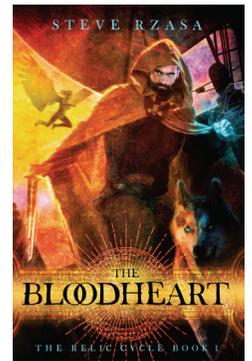
Some Christians may spurn depictions of fantastic magic, yet Steve Rzasa's Relic Cycle series reverses this belief. Here, magic is a person's innate ability granted by the Most High, and anyone repressing magic offends God's created order. That's one blessing, for in this realm of airborne islands and sky-high piracy, our band of heroes—ragtag even amid a melting pot of fantasy races and real-world nationalities—needs all the magical help it can get.

We first encounter Captain Bowen Cord in *The Bloodheart*, where he's caught up in a desperate scramble for a legendary MacGuffin (an object vital to the plot). And as if one ferocious and intelligent villain wasn't challenge enough, Bowen works to keep peace among his strong-willed crew—comprising a were-fox, a winged woman, a faithful dog, and a cryptic orphan—while grap-

pling with the latent threat of his own ice-summoning power. In the end, survival may require a very personal surrender.

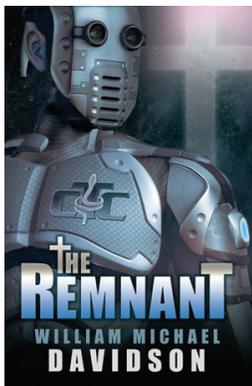
While *The Bloodheart* offers a fairly straightforward episodic quest, its sequel *The Lightningfall* breaks new narrative ground. By taking aboard a mysterious client carrying a powerful relic—another MacGuffin?—Bowen begins an apparent repeat performance. But this time, the line between good and evil isn't so clear. Loyalties will be divided, allegiances forsaken, and the unlikely of opponents find themselves facing off over the world's fate.

Rzasa's first-person, present-tense delivery proves surprisingly versatile, and the intensity of his action scenes compensates for the minimalism of his worldbuilding.



Best for: Older teens and adults seeking a swashbuckling sword-and-sorcery spectacle.

Discern: Unflinching violence, a smattering of language, and brief strong sensuality.



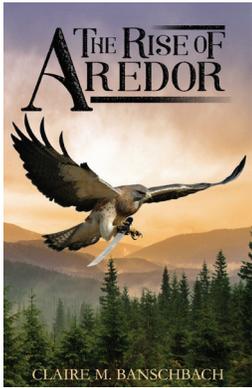
The Remnant

In *The Remnant*, theistic belief becomes a disease, so believers become patients. The government sentences them to humane quarantine—lifelong isolation from society, lest they spread their contagion. But the disease is growing into an epidemic, and the quarantine may end in humane extermination. William Michael Davidson's sci-fi world is comfortable to most of its inhabitants, dangerous to some,

and bleak only to a few. Although the plot proceeds along predictable lines, realistic characters bring life to the story. Religion unabashedly holds the center of the story without overwhelming it. *The Remnant* spins a future of well-meaning tyranny sure to help readers ponder the threat of potential real-world dystopia.

Best for: Teens, fans of sci-fi and dystopian stories.

Discern: Mild violence, a few inappropriate words, discussion of mass execution by poisonous gas.



The Rise of Aredor

The Rise of Aredor follows Corin, a young prince kidnapped and sold into slavery. He earns the respect of his master and eventually attains freedom, only to return home as a man and discover his land under siege by a cruel, power-hungry dictator. Corin determines to free his country. Some of the plotting

and problem-solving elements may seem a bit contrived. Yet with action and intrigue reminiscent of a Robin Hood story, and hope that comes only from deep within, Claire M. Banschbach spins an enjoyable, worthwhile adventure of wartime courage.

Best for: Young adults who like high action and lots of fight scenes.

Discern: Lots of violence in battles and hand-to-hand combat; some graphic depictions.

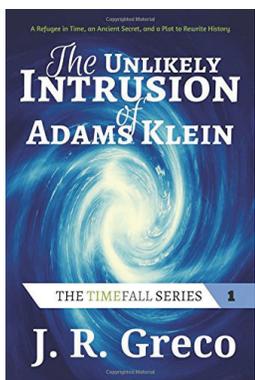
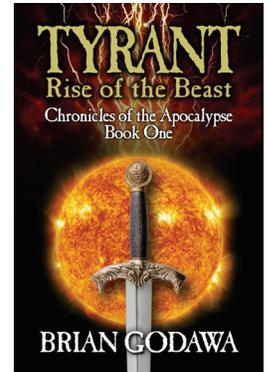
Tyrant

The Roman Empire generally fails to be good, but it never fails to be busy. Apollyon roams the Seven Cities, stirring up violence and plotting to release demons from the Abyss. Rome burns, Nero fiddles, and Christians die. Alexander, a Jewish physician, is drawn into Roman schemes unwillingly; and Cassandra, a Christian merchant, is drawn in more unwillingly yet. Brian Godawa's *Tyrant*

unites history, spiritual warfare, and eschatology in an ambitious epic. *Tyrant* plunges deep into history and theology, bringing up a wealth of detail. Artless exposition clutters the story, however, and too much is told, too little shown. But if *Tyrant* stops too long at some places, it boldly charges in others, and it will find a ready audience among those who appreciate how it roars.

Best for: Adults, fans of Frank Peretti, readers interested in history and theology.

Discern: A few instances of vulgar language; disturbing scenes of death, torture, and one abortion; references to infanticide and cannibalism; sexual allusions, including to rape, homosexuality, pederasty, and one passing mention of bestiality.



The Unlikely Intrusion of Adams Klein

J. R. Greco's *The Unlikely Intrusion of Adams Klein* serves an intriguing story of a boy who is sent back in time to the twenty-first century for protection against a paranoid dictator in a dystopian future. The future world is excellent and very detailed, and the time travel and technology are believable. The characters are fun and engaging, and easily relat-

able, with real-life issues like bullying and crushes intruding on Adams Klein as he runs from robot assassins and tries to get back to his own time. At first the villain was a little too cartoonishly evil, and some viewpoint transitions were hard to follow. But overall this is a fun, engaging adventure with fantastic worlds and action.

Best for: Teens and young adults who like complex worlds and technology.

Discern: Some violence and references to drugs and drug use.

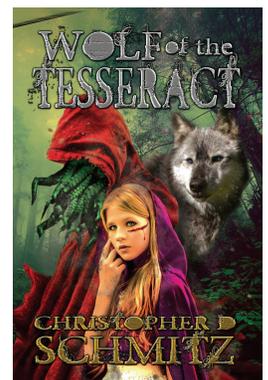
Wolf of the Tesseract

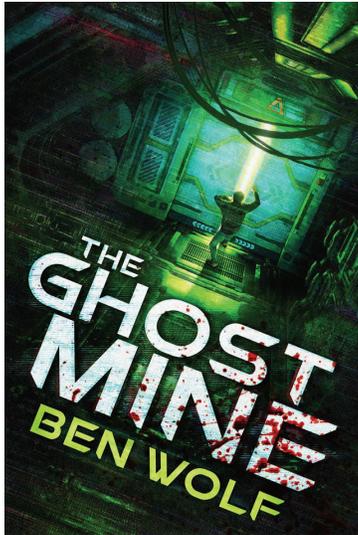
In Christopher D. Schmitz's *Wolf of the Tesseract*, guardian Zabe determines to rescue Princess Bithia, whose blood holds the key to safeguarding—or destroying—the multiverse. Elsewhere, archaeologist's daughter Claire Jones is due to wed a handsome movie star. But when an old schoolmate reappears, Claire's certainty about the future begins to fracture. As Zabe's quest intersects with Claire's life, she must confront the truth of other worlds—

and the secrets of her own. This story's vehicle of Lovecraftian horror and comic book physics doesn't always offer a smooth ride. A rapid start in divergent universes creates dimensional jet lag until the cosmology is explained halfway through. Pulp-style action can seem overdone and characters' morality is never nuanced (with one notable exception). Despite its sometimes confusing plot, however, *Wolf of the Tesseract* is a satisfying adventure.

Best for: Fans of pulp adventure, H. P. Lovecraft, and paranormal romance.

Discern: Stylized action and violence, including gore and dismemberment; discussions of romance and sex; love triangles involving doppelgangers; vague religious and spiritual references; and soul transference.





Ben Wolf writes a variety of types of speculative fiction, all of them loaded with action and adventure.

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Explore this novel at lorehaven.com/library/the-ghost-mine

The Ghost Mine

Ben Wolf's sci-fi actioner escapes the haunts of space horrors.

In space, no one can hear you demand worker's comp.

At least that's how it seems to Justin Barclay, protagonist of Ben Wolf's *The Ghost Mine*. Arriving at his new job as an extrasolar miner on Andrige Copalion Mine 1134—spelled “hell” upside down—Justin struggles to adapt to a corporate milieu stuck somewhere between “prison workgang” and “high-school gym locker.”

All the standard tropes make an appearance—the cruel jock, the ice-cold hottie, the ladies' man, the geeky slob, the mysterious boss—but the harsh environment terraforms them into edgier variants of themselves.

And then things get *really* weird.

Three years ago, something terrible happened in this mine; an “incident” from which it's only recently recovered. But as Justin en-

counters inexplicable glitches and ethereal lights, and as his obstinate curiosity digs him into an ever-deeper hole with management, he's forced to face the possibility that ACM-1134 may be haunted. And what he does with this knowledge may transmogrify the lives of everyone he knows.

Those looking for moral takeaways had best look elsewhere: “be courageous” is about as didactic as *The Ghost Mine* ever gets. The cast's vulgarity is presented without critical commentary, and even Justin himself is more antihero than paragon of virtue. But as the plot accelerates to escape velocity in the book's second half, that one simple exhortation—“be courageous”—becomes a nearly unattainable ideal. There are no easy moral choices when you're struggling for survival against vicious forces bent on destruction.

Best for: Adults seeking a rock-'em-sock-'em sci-fi melee.

Discern: Graphic violence and gore, frequent sexual references, extensive nudity, pervasive strong language, depictions of drug use, mature themes.

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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Elijah David

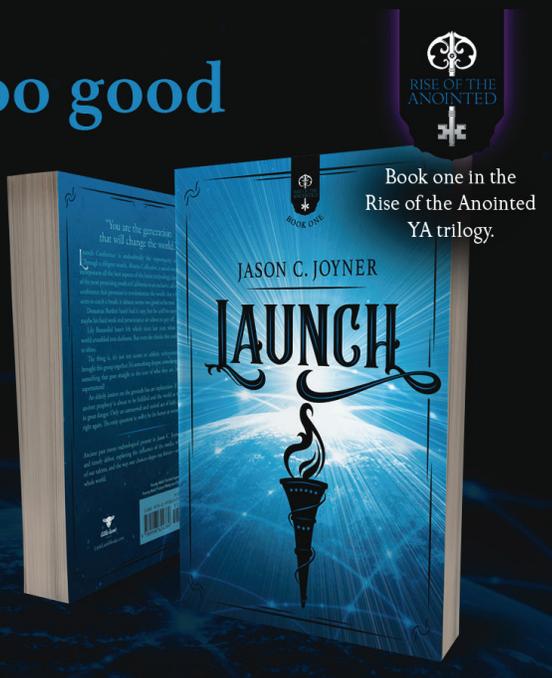
Avily Jerome

Shannon McDermott

Audie Thacker

It's almost too good to be true...

It's not test scores or athletic achievements that have brought this group of teens together for an elite social media conference. It's something deeper, something less tangible, something that goes straight to the core of who they are. It's something...supernatural.



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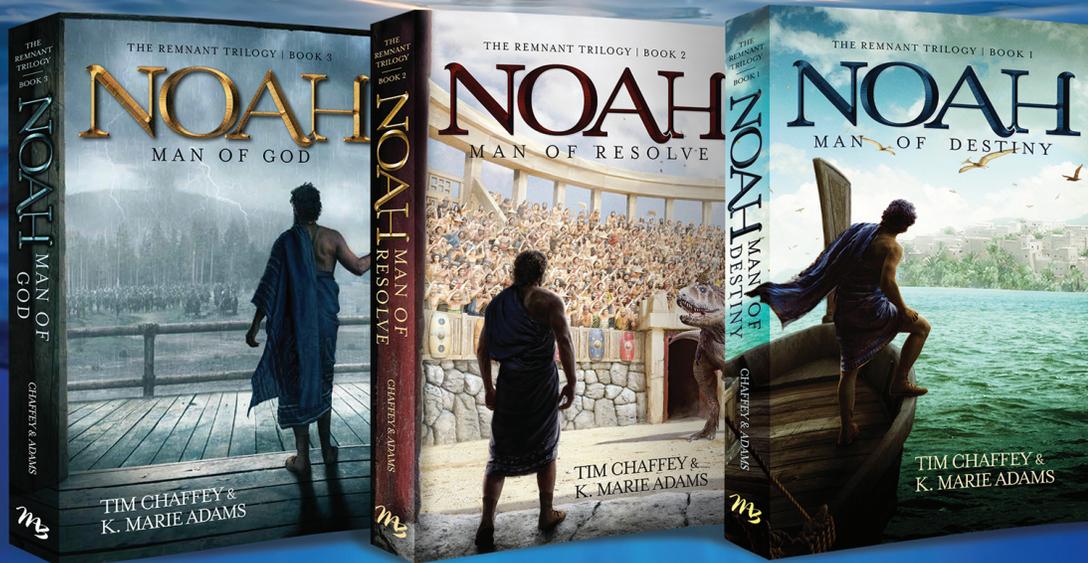
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TIM CHAFFEY & K. MARIE ADAMS



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Fawkes

Guy Fawkes's 1605 gunpowder plot gets a color-magical twist.

No one will care who Thomas Fawkes is until he puts on a mask.

But in this young man's world of alt-historical 1600s England, a mask isn't a criminal instrument or party pretense. A mask gives you power.

If you ally with the traditionalist Keepers like Thomas, you can control elements and objects of a single color, such as brown, black, or green. Or if you ally with the radical Igniters, lately the land's ruling party, you can control two or more colors.

Thomas only needs to guide one color—gray. Then he can help halt the stone plague that's spreading in the land, infecting animals, people, and Thomas's own left eye.

Unfortunately, young Thomas is stuck powerless at St. Peter's Color School. Only his distant father, Guido or "Guy" Fawkes, can give Thomas a new mask. But as for Guy Fawkes, 'twas his intent to blow up the king and Parliament. Then he'll put an end to Igniter persecution, restoring Keeper rule and removing the stone plague's curse.

To get his mask and save his life, Thomas must commit fully to the Keeper cause and the Gunpowder Plot. Unfortunately, he's challenged by Emma, a girl who has Igniter powers and a will to fight injustice, as well as a deeper secret behind her own mask. He's also drawn by the voice

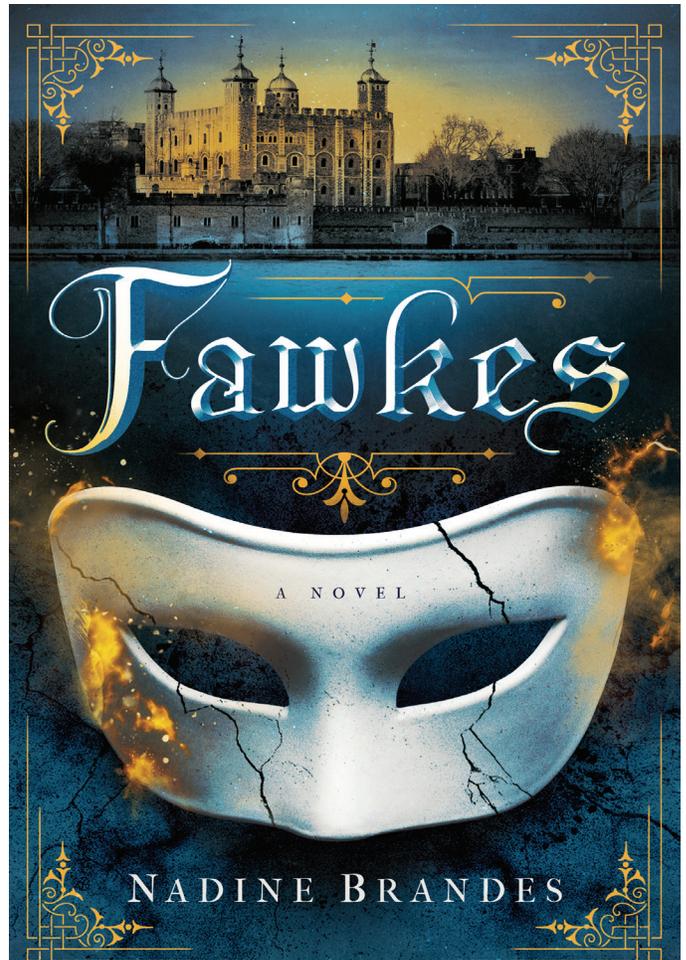
of the one color that every loyal Keeper respects but none would dare actually speak with: White Light, the omnipresent, still, small voice with "its" own agenda as well as an odd sense of quippishness.

At this, some readers may smile in satisfaction (or dismay), assuming, "Ah, here's the simple religious allegory." But Nadine Brandes's story is not so black and white. In style and substance, her historical research shines, and blends surprisingly well with imagined elements like Thomas, Emma, and color magic.

Yes, readers familiar with history can identify figures like King James and Guy Fawkes's co-conspirators. Even Martin Luther gets a name-check. Some may also feel tempted to "decode" the Keeper and Igniter groups to historic parallels (similar to readers who declare that C. S. Lewis's character the White Witch equals Satan). Others may question where the "allegorical" atonement or written Bible appears.

These responses, however, can overthrow the novel's aim: to help us *feel* a young person's struggle for truth in an age where colored light is mixed with darkness.

Yes, despite the presence of potentially whimsical color magic, in this world the Thames still burbles with sewage, maidservants toss waste from windows, and even sincere men can believe and die



Nadine Brandes wrote the dystopian *Out of Time* series and now creates historical fantasy novels. She and her husband are preparing for their first child.

NadineBrandes.com

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

Explore this novel at lorehaven.com/library/fawkes

for false religion.

This is solid, creative, and "useful" fantasy. It reflects the reality where hypocrites, abusers, and power-mongers can darken every point of the belief spectrum.

Thus, young Christians

may especially identify with Thomas Fawkes's journey. This story may help them consider, rather than abandoning color magic or masks altogether, instead following the only Source who creates these gifts.

Best for: Young readers who love slow-burning, character-driven action, and delight in mixing (or sorting) fictional elements and real-life history.

Discern: Moral "gray areas," such as themes of faithful rebellion versus lawful persecution; antiheroes who lay down their lives for false beliefs; and examples of historical racism (which are rebuked in-story).



'I Process Big Questions Through Story'

***Nadine Brandes loves heroes
who fight to find themselves in
the color of truth.***

STORY: E. STEPHEN BURNETT
PHOTO: COURTESY NADINE BRANDES

Nadine Brandes began her storytelling career by thinking about death. As a pastor's daughter,

she grew up enjoying Christian-made fantasy tales. Of course she starting by reading C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* series, yet she also read the newer *Blood of Kings* fantasy series by novelist Jill Williamson.

Brandes said that before she read those stories, "I had never stepped away from a book feeling like my faith had been affected."

Later, a real-life event began to reshape her faith and perspective on stories. An acquaintance of hers died, and Brandes could not help comparing her life to the accomplishments of this young man who had shared her age.

"I process big questions through story. That question instigated the story of my first novel, *A Time to Die*." Brandes wondered: What if a person in a dystopian society, asking the same questions about life, death, and legacy, knew for a fact that she had only one year left to live?

Brandes wrote three books in her *Out of Time* series (2014–2016, Enclave Publishing). Fans began to discover her willingness to explore such themes.

"Mostly I've had positive responses because they are heavier questions that are relatable to a lot of people," Brandes said. "I think for anyone who's had to deal with the heavier questions . . . they have connected a lot with the characters."

Brandes recalls many positive experiences growing up in her church. But like other pastors' kids, or Christians altogether, she still wondered about her own identity. She couldn't help asking herself: who am I, outside of my family? At college, she struggled with her beliefs, especially compared

with other Christians.

Since then, her stories often reflect the theme of finding one's purpose in life, an idea illuminated with new colors in her latest novel *Fawkes* (2018, Thomas Nelson).

In this story, rebel leader Guy Fawkes's teenage son, Thomas, tries to discern which beliefs he'll fight for: the cause of his devoted father, a color-magic Keeper who wants to kill England's king? Or some other truth he's been blinded from seeing?

"The themes of fighting for truth, or even just digging into truth versus what you believe, and why you believe it, really came from the cultural and political climate at the time I was writing it," Brandes said. "It arose from my frustration of wanting to somehow dig into truth and share that with others. And I found that working its way very naturally into the story of Guy Fawkes."

Brandes lived in York, England, for four months after college. When a publisher approached her about a historical fantasy novel, she drew on this experience. She also created a color-based magic system for her alternate history.

It turned out these imaginary additions helped illuminate the real-world history and passions of religious factions, who fought for control over England in the 1600s.

Brandes said she spent two months studying that time period, including primary sources such as maps and Old English texts.

"It was like someone had written the world for me, and I just had to figure out how to translate the manual," Brandes said. "I loved the idea of bringing light into what can come off as a very dark story.

"We can learn a lot from histo-

ry, but history has been taught so many times that there's kind of this veil over it," she said. "The fantasy aspect can bring a newness to history, as well as a current-day view, through new eyes, into themes that were accurate in a historical time period but are still accurate today."

"We can learn a lot from history, but history has been taught so many times that there's kind of this veil over it."

Readers of *Fawkes* will enjoy the story most if they know the difference between history and fantasy, and be willing to embrace both at the same time, she said.

For example, Brandes kept the recorded names and roles of real-life Gunpowder Plot conspirators, including Guy Fawkes himself as well as Robert Catesby and Thomas Wintour. But she embraced the imagination of exploring Guy Fawkes's son, about whom history only speculates, and other characters in and around the tumult of the times. Not to mention the magic system that lets anyone so trained, like Shakespeare-era superheroes, control elements and items of particular colors.

Along the way, Brandes said, she hopes fans will ponder the questions of who they are, in God's light, and how they should pursue truth in a world of murky colors.

"Seek the Source," Brandes wrote in her behind-the-scenes material outlining the themes of *Fawkes*. After all, like figures of fantasy and history right up until our time, "Standing up for what you believe isn't always the same as standing up for truth."



How to Become a Spiritually Leveled-Up Christian Geek

God encourages us to be kind and compassionate, even in our fandom fights.

Do not be alarmed. We're about to try a test:

"The Marvel movies are unintelligent, low-brow garbage, and *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* is one of the most moving, thoughtful and well-made superhero films of the 21st century."

Okay, how did reading that make you feel? Irritated? Validated? Did you laugh?

If you love superhero movies, you likely experienced an emotional response. Sure, I offered an opinion. But many people are bothered to hear those thoughts. They could easily bring tension into a conversation, whether in person or online.

We all supposedly know that reviews and other expressions of opinion are subjective. But sometimes we must remind people of this. A chat between friends gets intense, both are talking louder and faster each passing moment, and then we step back, hold up our hands and say "Hey, it's just my opinion!"

That's not our fault, right? People should recognize an opinion, right?

We may be right that people should be less sensitive to subjective opinions. Yet we can make the situation worse by loading our expression of subjective thoughts with hyperbolic, objective language. We might tell ourselves, and each other, that we're only sharing opinions. But if these are mere opinions, why do we become tense or fired up in a way that gives the topic more weight than mere "opinions" call for?

Sometimes as enthusiastic Christian geeks, or fans, we can become a little too intense for non-fans to spend time with us. When that happens, we have crippled our ability to live out the relational, loving and representative purpose God intends for us.

Ephesians 4:29-32 gives us some great insight as we navigate the passionate conversations of fandom. Let's highlight a few verses we can apply:

"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear" (Ephesians 4:29, ESV).

Here, the Greek word for "corrupting"

means "rotten, corrupt, unfit for use and worthless." It implies a spreading condition, and covers any speech that starts dissension or hurts another person. Instead, Paul commands us only to speak in ways "good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear."

This mentality humbles me. To enter every conversation asking, "How can I bless, encourage and build up this person?" defies my nature. This especially applies to our reckless venting on social media—moments we can unwittingly unleash "corrupting talk" that draws others into sin.

Yet I've seen how God can use the intentional, Spirit-governed words of his people to give his children the grace (meaning "undeserved favor") they need in the moment. And it's thrilling to realize you were his instrument.

Continuing in Ephesians, Paul reminds us, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (4:30). He warns that our careless, hurtful or disruptive words actually grieve the Holy Spirit, God himself, when our words hurt people or encourage conflict.

Friendly debates can sometimes be fun and thought-provoking. But no "friendly" fan debate is worth making someone hesitate to talk to us later. We have God's seal on us, marking us for a monumental purpose. So the Holy Spirit is grieved when we carelessly forget that purpose and wind up irritating someone or stirring up dissension over a trivial topic.

"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (4:32). This Greek word for "kind" has a range of meanings that includes "pleasant," but primarily "fit for use" and "useful." Being kind is about giving others a beneficial, pleasant experience with you. It's a thoughtful, serving, and selfless approach to interacting and having relationships with others.

This focus on others facilitates our tenderheartedness. This Greek word also means "compassionate." Our focus on kindness helps us consider others' struggles and disadvantages, even if they irri-

tate or wrong us. Then we can actually avoid feeling anger and irritation with someone, and instead feel tenderness and compassion for them. In this way we begin to reflect the character of Christ, who willingly suffered and died out of tender-hearted compassion for us, his former enemies (Romans 5:10).

As much as we might like to think of ourselves as rational and logical, we geeks are often highly emotional and led by our desires rather than our God-given purpose. We can easily find ourselves seeing other people (and interacting with them) based on what we're feeling. Which is why it's so important for us to recognize what we're feeling, identify the perspective that is feeding those feelings, and then put on this new identity we have been given, with its new perspective and recognition of what is *really* true and important about life and those we interact with.

In these verses, I see the Holy Spirit calling us to purposeful intent, even when talking about our geeky passions (like the DC/Marvel debate). We're called to constant, tactical awareness of our roles in others' lives, whenever we open our mouths or put fingers to keyboards.

When we approach our interactions with others this way, we enter our new identity as ambassadors for Christ, extending undeserved favor to others on his behalf (Ephesians 4:29). By building relational equity through the grace we give about the human stories we love, we will find even more influence when discussing what matters most.



Paeter Frandsen created Christian Geek Central and Spirit Blade Productions. He produces audio drama, reviews geeky stories, and volunteers at his Arizona church.

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How Does Your Family Read Fantasy?

Parents, try these tips to help children mature as fantasy readers.

In Exodus 31 and 32, Moses ascended Mount Sinai to communicate with God. Meanwhile, the Israelites grew impatient for his return.

So impatient, in fact, that they asked Aaron to make them gods to worship (Exodus 32: 1–6).

They were like small children, quick to disobey when they thought the Lord wasn't watching. And like small children, they needed structure and simple rules to point their hearts toward truth.

Shepherding our children is no different than God's progressive revelation. Parents start by teaching their children through rules, then progressively give them more freedom to make decisions for themselves as they mature in wisdom. We follow the same process when we teach children to think through speculative fiction in age-appropriate ways.

In our spring 2018 issue, I asked parents, "What if your kids don't read fantasy?" Now ask yourselves how you and your kids read science fiction and fantasy together.

With the help of Tony Reinke's book *Lit: A Christian Guide to Reading Books*, I'd like to offer a few parenting strategies on how to connect with your kids through fiction.

Although these tips can be applied to all genres, they are especially important for speculative literature. Fear and censorship are often the go-to response for parents who are unsure their child should be reading about magic.

Remember, these strategies are meant as flexible suggestions, not laws to set up before the world. The goal is to become a critically thinking Christian parent who raises critically thinking Christian children. That might look differently in your home than in someone else's.

First, keep the lines of communication open.

This might seem like a no-brainer, but modern western culture values individualism to an idolatrous degree and that has a huge impact on parenting. Talk to your child about their reading choices, even if you wouldn't have chosen the book your-

self. Make sure they know they can approach you to share concerns about their books.

Recently my preteen niece read Marissa Meyer's *The Lunar Chronicles*. The political themes caused her a lot of anxiety, but she felt comfortable talking with her mother about the story, rather than dealing with that anxiety on her own.

Second, give your children books for private reading and books for public reading.

Reinke suggests how we can determine the right time for your child to read a book:

"It is wise not to read some books because of their timing, not merely because of their content. . . . We are not trying to shield him from the world. We have chosen to limit his private reading diet for the same fundamental reason that we don't send young boys into war. . . . So, too, our children—and those who are children in the faith—need time to grow the deep roots of a biblical worldview before being called to exercise that worldview against the force of culture displayed in non-Christian books."

Timing is important and age isn't always the determining factor. Knowing your child's strengths and weaknesses well can aid them in choosing appropriate literature for their private reading time.

Third, read together to prioritize literature and to teach critical thinking skills.

Reinke continues, "This conviction does not prevent me from reading spiritually challenging fiction books to our children verbally. In those settings I can stop and address concerns as we go along."

Reading aloud as a family is a lost art. When once families would gather to listen to literature together, we now think of reading aloud as something only done for children too young to read for themselves. Yet enjoying books as a family is something we can do with all ages. Fourth, teach your children to stop in the middle of a story.

Reinke says, "Choosing what books to read is often not a yes/no decision but a now/later decision. The same is true for young Christians who are new to the faith. Be cautious of reading literature that you are ill-equipped to read with discernment. Sometimes the proper Christian approach to literature is humble postponement."

When my niece informed her mother of her anxiety while reading *The Lunar Chronicles*, they not only discussed the book and my niece's fear, they also came to the conclusion that she needed to stop reading.

Of course, if you stop in the middle of a book or series, this can feel taboo, or even like failure. Yet, is it weakness to put a book down when you wisely discern—or help your child to discern—that a book is causing you mental or spiritual harm? In my niece's case, she wasn't permanently setting the book down, but setting it aside for a time when she is older.

Proverbs 19:18 says, "Discipline your son while there is hope." This verse harkens back to the example God set with Israel. He disciplined them while they were still young because there was hope. They could go either way, becoming wise or foolish.

If history is any indication, we can assume that our parenting won't guarantee perfect Christian children. Nor is anyone ever beyond God's reach. Yet, young children are naive and teachable. Speculative fiction can shape their imagination in God-glorifying ways, but parents must be wise and understand the needs of their own children when they engage with fiction.



Marian Jacobs chases after three children and writes about Jesus, monsters, and spaceships. She and her family live near Houston, Texas.

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The Sorcerer's Bane

C. S. Wachter flings thematic windows open to sunlight and storms.

On the grand spectrum of emotional resonance, fantasy stories often seem rather limited in scope. There's the Old Fairy Tale—that gruesome cautionary fable. And there's the Modern Fairy Tale—that cutesy romp through wonderland.

Fantasy can be high or low, light or dark, urban or rural.

But in a genre of comedic glades and nihilistic wastes, it's rare to find a tale that spans the gamut as convincingly as *The Sorcerer's Bane*. With this first installment in her Seven Words series, C. S. Wachter flings thematic windows open to sunlight and storms.

Seven words for seven worlds. It's been a thousand years since deliverance from evil was prophesied to the portal-linked planets of Ochen, and now the time of the Light Bringer draws nigh.

But dark forces conspire in secret.

On the evening of his sixth birthday, Rayne, crown prince of Ochen and sole scion of the blessed line, is kidnapped by Sigmund, a dispossessed sorcerer obsessed with vengeance. For ten long years the prince is enslaved and brainwashed in preparation for Sigmund's coup de grâce: the day Rayne is assigned to assassinate his own parents and end the blessed line forever.

Ten years. Easy to write; not easy to live. And the reader is made to live it. With scant respite, the living nightmare of

Rayne's young life unfolds in anguished detail. The subjugation, manipulation, brutality, and vampiric abuse is unrelenting. Despair circles like a vulture. And yet as the darkness grows, pinpricks of light shine all the brighter. This isn't a cynical narrative.

How can *The Sorcerer's Bane* feel so dark and yet remain so bright? The secret's in the scale. Those petty cruelties that daily crush Rayne's spirit are matched in specificity by small kindnesses unlooked-for. Readers behold brief visions of beauty in everyday life, and simple joys like morning light, fresh snowfall, or honey on toast.

When someone is subjected to pitiless degradation, it's so much easier to appreciate the little blessings we otherwise take for granted.

Yes, this is a tale of endurance, but also a parable of compassion. For the friends who sustain Rayne don't know of his true nature. They cannot guess how their faithfulness in the little things—like feeding a dirty slave boy, or leading him in prayer—will shake the councils of the great and turn the knife-balanced fate of Ochen. And is it ever any different in our world?

However, at times *The Sorcerer's Bane* is numbingly repetitious. Its characters pensively speak in an oddly modern way. Its spiritual



C. S. Wachter self-published *The Sorcerer's Bane* in 2018. She lives in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania and has enjoyed Christian fantasy all her life.

CSWachter.com

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

Explore this novel at lorehaven.com/library/the-sorcerers-bane

world has mixed elements: both mystical platitudes and Christianity-in-all-but-name.

Yet despite all this, the story avoids a sense of preachiness, even during actual sermons. That's because every drop of insight dispensed by wise old

men or wise old scrolls is a ladle of water in a desert of pain. It can't be sentimentality when it's earned with blood and tears. And in the worlds of Ochen, the bringer of light must first pass through the darkness.

Best for: Adults seeking astonishment by all of life's horror and splendor.

Discern: Pervasive sadism, emotional and physical abuse, gruesome violence and torment, brief mild language, and some suggestive humor.

Horror Reveals Human Sin in the Dark

Classic novels and films trace their fears all the way back to the Bible.

Horror remains one of the most popular of all film and novel genres.

Just last year, we saw the blockbuster success of a new film based on Stephen King’s horror novel *It*, and many other films, making 2017 the highest-grossing year for horror films in box office history.

Many Christians ask why the genre stays so popular. Is this just a lurid fascination with gore and evil? Or do we find deeper psychological and spiritual issues in play?

Whatever the answer, horror has a long and storied prevalence in human culture.

In his seminal essay, *Supernatural in Horror Literature*, H. P. Lovecraft traced horror stories back to “the earliest folklore of all races.” As we may naturally expect of a form so connected with primal emotion, the horror tale is as old as human thought and speech. This earliest folklore also includes themes of cosmic terror, crystallized in the most archaic ballads, chronicles, and sacred writings.

Of course, one needn’t go back as far as pagan myths to uncover tales of terror.

Dante’s Inferno (1314) conjures profound yet disturbing images. Hailed as one of the great classics of Western literature, Dante’s work details a harrowing journey through the nine circles of Hell, including a virtual bestiary of oddities. Minions of anger, fire, gluttony, and greed, Medusa, the Minotaur, Hoarders and Wasters, Furies, Harpies and “the great worm” Cerberus all make appearances in the *Inferno*. Dante’s work is only one precursor to the canon of classic horror literature.

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) not only created a monster, but explored a creator and his creation, and the inherent problems of tinkering with the natural order. (This theme is later explored by many sci-fi and horror films during the Atomic Era.)

Other early horror stories, such as *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The Invisible Man*, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, all use horror as a way to explore morality plays. Nowadays these stories have been replaced by more exotic monsters and more hideous tales. Nevertheless, their intent remains largely the

same—to employ the horrific to shock us awake.

Some Christians believe horror opposes a biblical worldview, or even serves evil. But storytellers often use the genre to convey religious and moral messages.

For example, *The Exorcist* (1973) is often cited as one of the scariest movies ever made. However, both the film director and author William Peter Blatty claimed the story’s vision is seen through the lens of faith. In his 2011 interview with *The Huffington Post*, Blatty was asked, “Why do you think the story of *The Exorcist*, in its many forms, has resonated so much for so many people?” He responded:

“Because this novel is an affirmation that there is a final justice in the universe; that man is something more than a neuron net; that there is a high degree of probability—let’s not beat around the bush—that there is an intelligence, a creator whom C. S. Lewis famously alluded to as ‘the love that made the worlds.’”

Likewise, the horror genre reflects many biblical concepts. These include an absolute good and evil, angels and devils, Heaven and Hell, or simply the iconography of faith (like crucifixes, sacred texts, rosaries, and statuary).

This does not mean we claim every work of horror is something redemptive. Instead, we simply note that this category often includes consistent appeals to moral absolutes, God and Satan, and invisible agents at war for humanity’s soul.

Even the average ghost story, which recognizes immaterial dimensions or possible life after death, appeals to a biblical worldview. In this sense, the horror genre often traffics in important biblical language and imagery.

Perhaps more people would be startled by the many times we find horror elements in the Bible. In defining the horror genre, the Horror Writers Association in its online article “What is Horror Fiction?” cites the Bible as part of horror’s essential canon:

The best selling book of all time,

the Bible, could easily be labeled horror, for where else can you find fallen angels, demonic possessions, and an apocalypse absolutely terrifying in its majesty all in one volume?

Some Christians frame the Bible as “family-friendly.” But Scripture does not avoid details about evil. Its pages contain scenes of gore, torment, destruction, demons, plagues, sexual deviance, catastrophe, divine judgment, and eternal anguish.

Of course, Scripture’s message is one of redemption. However, that redemption unfolds amidst a dark world. The Bible is not shy about confronting the consequences of our sins, the fallenness of this world, and the terrible price God paid to save us from spiritual separation.

Even after Jesus’s sacrifice, horror remains a very real part of life. Tragedy, evil, crime, the occult, and deviance are mainstays in our culture. Sin has ravaged us, deforming us into moral monsters and alienating us from God. Alternate lifestyles and religious views can take one down paths of despair and deception. For example, see the Apostle Paul’s pictures of horror in Romans 1.

God’s word uses these images of horror to caution us and shock our sensibilities. Horror images contrast with and illuminate what is good and true and beautiful. Eternal consequences are at stake. Whether illustrating a world where demons are real, portraying monsters real or imagined, or exploring the real-life inferno that awaits the lost, the horror genre can be a powerful way to communicate truth.



Mike Duran creates paranormal and horror novels inspired by biblical truth. He also writes articles and nonfiction about biblical faith and supernatural stories.

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Journey into Legend

All the realism and complexity of *Journey into Legend* wraps around an old, blazing vision.

When the famous Dr. Keeling embarked on the secretive Keeling Expedition, he hired Brad Conner for his muscle, nothing else. Brad, a star quarterback and passing student, regarded that as the better part of himself anyway.

But when the expedition for dead bones stumbles over roaring life, Brad will need everything he's got to escape with his skin.

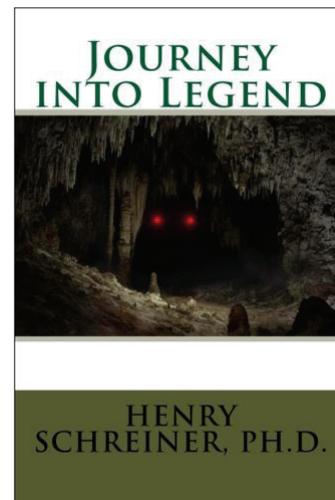
With *Journey into Legend*, Henry Schreiner delves into magical realism. The narrative wants to be believed, taking the form of letters, diary entries, and other documents. Schreiner, a PhD, fortifies his lone fantastical element with careful scientific explanations, and he turns a practical more than a poetic eye on the jungles of Burma.

This insistence on reality while presenting a fantastic story echoes late nineteenth-century ventures in science fiction.

In other ways, too, the novel is old-school. It moves meticulously toward its dramatic moments, declining to hurry. The characters themselves seem to have stepped out from an older world. So much in them, from their dialogue to such quirks as college students communicating by letter, is removed from the twenty-first century.

This novel bends toward religion as well as science. Christianity is plain in the story, and the author briefly forays into the creation v. evolution debate—stopping well short, however, of making a complete statement on either one.

All the realism and complexity of *Journey into Legend* wraps around an old, blazing vision, and those with patience for the journey will find the legend worthwhile.

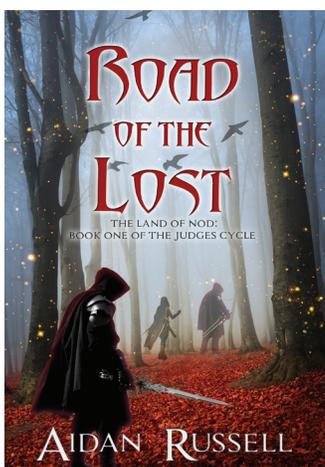


Dr. Henry F. Schreiner is an award-winning research physicist and oceanographer, and worked over 15 years for the U.S. Navy.

HankSchreiner.com
Explore this novel at lorehaven.com/library/journey-into-legend

Best for: Adults; fans of mythical creatures and magical realism.

Discern: Several violent deaths; mild language.



Aidan Russell self-published *Road of the Lost* in 2018. He's a Marine Corps veteran and a fantasy fan since childhood.

ReadAidanRussell.com
[@AidanInNod](https://twitter.com/AidanInNod)
Explore this novel at lorehaven.com/library/road-of-the-lost

Road of the Lost

Aidan Russell creates action-driven fantasy of all the good old things.

Every knight must have a quest. Jerah and Gratas might have hoped for better than chasing lost knights and lost Elven crystals through a haunted forest, with a condescending Elf for company and man-eating Ogres to make things interesting.

But a knight pursues his quest until it ends—or he does.

In *Road of the Lost*, Aidan Russell creates action-driven fantasy of all the good old things: knights, damsels, Elves, monsters, magic.

But despite all these sturdy standbys, the novel never has quite the feel of classic fantasy. Vampires and animated skeletons add a light shade of horror, and the fast pace and vivid sequences of violence suggest a video-game aesthetic.

The world-building is extensive, with poli-

tics, history, and religion all tangling together. At times, too many names and too little clarity foster confusion.

Road of the Lost opens with a vignette of Cain and occasionally resorts to terms like *saint*, *church*, *Pharisee*, and *Knights Templar*. Although the main protagonists are deeply religious, Christianity has almost no presence in this novel. Instead, the religion practiced and proclaimed is thoroughly pagan, from its many gods to its incantations and magic. The final scene suggests that there is a religion of only one God almost lost among other faiths. If so, this concept is held over for the sequel.

Although it turns to religion and international politics, *Road of the Lost* is above all an intense fantasy, moving rapidly from one action sequence to the next.

Best for: Adults as well as any fans of fantasy, Elves, quests, and video games.

Discern: Frequent battles; graphic violence, often including dismemberment; and moderate language.



Flood Legends Rise from the Depths of History

From the Bible to modern flood fiction, we keep encountering Noah's Ark.

You may know the biblical account of a worldwide flood in Genesis 6–9.

But did you know that many cultures have their own tales of a catastrophic flood in the ancient past?

I create storylines and content for the Ark Encounter theme park from Answers in Genesis. In my research, I read over 200 flood legends. I found remarkable similarities between these ancient stories and the Genesis flood account.

Nearly all these legends include details about God or the gods being upset with humanity for some reason. But one upright man is given the task of building a vessel that would protect him, his family, and an array of animals from the deluge. Several tales include details about a rainbow and animals being sent out to check if the land is dry enough.

Skeptics have suggested the biblical author simply borrowed from an earlier story of a large flood in the ancient Near East. But this claim fails to account for the vast number of flood legends from around the globe.

These accounts don't just share details. They share enough differences to show that they are not merely the result of one culture copying another, or one people's revised version of an early missionary's account of the Genesis flood.

Unlike other legends, the biblical account, inspired by God, also describes the only vessel that could keep passengers safe during a world-destroying flood. Also, the vessel of many other flood stories lands on the highest hill or mountain in their own neighborhood. But the Bible does not "localize" the story—the biblical Ark lands on a mountain in a region quite far from the location of the biblical writer.

How do we explain this global flood of flood legends?

Well, the most logical conclusion is that in ancient times, a massive catastrophic flood impacted all humanity. Then, as people began to populate the earth again, the story of the global flood passed down generation after generation. Over centuries, details became embellished or lost. But certain core elements remained.

Today, new kinds of flood legends

captivate the minds of Christian fiction readers. That's because the early chapters of Genesis have served as a sort of Christian "Middle-earth" for fantasy buffs. This era gives authors the chance to create a world full of incredible creatures, terrifying giants, and millennium-long lifespans.

Some authors shift their imaginations into overdrive. After all, they have little need to justify their creations since the great flood eventually obliterates their world, leaving no traces for us today.

Some authors send modern characters back in time to this world. This method lets readers focus attention on the world's mysteries and strangeness. I do this in my own youth fiction series, *The Truth Chronicles*. Four young teens travel to the pre-flood world to see if ancient history supports the biblical or evolutionary worldview. Sam Batterman's *Wayback* novel and the third novel of Keith Robinson's *Origins Trilogy* also use time travel to investigate the antediluvian world.

However, more authors choose to create adventures built around real or imaginary characters from that time. For obvious reasons, Noah is the most common hero. My *Remnant Trilogy* spins a coming-of-age tale as Noah grows in his faith while his world races toward destruction.

This series is more accurately classified as historical fiction. However, others have taken the concept into the fantasy realm. For example, Douglas Hirt's *Cradleland Chronicles* trilogy opens a little earlier in history, with Noah's very pregnant mother being pursued by Nephilim and other evil forces. R. M. Huffman's *Antediluvian Legacy* series follows righteous Noah's heartbreaking adventure through a spectacular yet decadent world.

Both series feature Frank Peretti-esque glimpses beyond the veil into the spiritual realm, where evil spirits scheme against their Creator and twist humanity for their own purposes. Yes, these books are fantasy, but these authors clearly desired to maintain a healthy respect toward Scripture.

Other series interact more loosely with the biblical flood account. These

include Vaughn Heppner's *Lost Civilizations* series, which immerses readers into a full-fledged fantasy set before the flood. Similarly, two of Brian Godawa's *Nephilim Chronicles* books place a strong emphasis on certain details found among ancient Near Eastern cultures.

While Heppner's series barely interacts with the biblical text, using it primarily for worldbuilding, Godawa's novels occasionally contradict Scripture. Furthermore, his reliance upon ancient Near Eastern beliefs often add interesting background to biblical details, but they also lead to bizarre and impossible circumstances.

This popularity of pre-flood fantasy fiction creates interesting parallels to the hundreds of flood legends from around the globe.

In flood accounts, the cultures closest to the Middle East, with legends written early, come closer to the Bible's historically accurate account. However, the peoples who moved far from Ark's landing spot, whose legends were not written for millennia, often contain the weirdest elements while maintaining some truth.

Likewise, in modern flood fiction, authors who want to follow Scripture craft believable tales full of insights into the times and characters. However, authors whose stories rarely interact with the Bible, or depend on extra-biblical data, create tales that contain some truth but also strange and implausible elements.

Whenever we enjoy biblically based fiction, we still face the risk of confusing imagination with truth. Christian readers of flood fiction should examine all stories in the light of Scripture to maintain the distinction between fact and fiction.



Tim Chaffey manages content for Answers in Genesis, including the Creation Museum and Ark Encounter. He writes apologetics works and biblical fiction.

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Engaging That @&*% Our Stories Often Say

Our expert panel explores how Christians discern 'bad words' in fiction.



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E. STEPHEN BURNETT: Welcome to our seasonal Roundtable discussion. We explore dangerous ground at the corner of biblical faith and imaginative fantasy, while striving to follow the apostle Paul's truth in 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.”

Every panel member professes biblical faith in Jesus Christ. Each friend here 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 violence. Now we move into a theme that is actually even more controversial: the use of “bad” language 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. We'll also try to address specific concerns about story language from fiction fans, parents, and faith leaders.

First, let's clarify our definition. By “story language,” we refer to the following:

“Fiction that includes, either in character dialogue or narrative itself, any of these elements: offensive words, crude names, vulgarities, or slang that misuses God's name(s) or misuses biblical concepts/places.”

(In service to our readers, we'll try to avoid using these words in print. However, we may post an “uncensored” and longer version of this discussion at Lorehaven.com.)

1. How do you respond to “bad” language in a story?

STEVE RZASA: Most times I can ignore mild profanities. Some of the heftier four-letter words jar me. Sometimes too many [cuss] words interrupt the story's flow.

I haven't read a lot of stories that use language insulting ethnicity or sex; I feel those show up less often than other profanity. But those make me squirm, only because our society frowns upon them to a greater degree.

LAURA VANARENDONK BAUGH: I also tend to read “through” most profanity in fiction. I interpret it generally as the characters do, meaning a vulgarity dropped during a space marine bar fight doesn't shock me, while the dowager duchess's use of the same word at a sea-

son event might make me pause.

A villain's use of “bad words” can be broader for me than a hero's, of course. I already know that when a villain says, “Don't be such a)*##& about it,” that I'm not supposed to like him, and his gendered insult isn't supposed to be defensible or noble. I'm not keen on gendered or ethnic slurs, but they can sometimes be used by a villain *if* they fit the story, not just “because.”

MIKE DURAN: I respond to profanity in fiction the same as I do to profanity in my daily life. Too much of it is tiresome and it's a sloppy way to converse. But I want to look at a person's (or character's) heart and the tone of their life without counting cusswords. So I don't lose sleep over it.

Add to this the fact that profanity is *entirely* a cultural (or in the case of Christian fiction, sub-cultural) construct, not a Moral Absolute. There is no inherently evil word on George Carlin's infamous list of seven words you can't say on TV.

Absolutely, being around (or reading) profanity can seed your brain and eventually pop out of your mouth. However, proximity to evil is quite different than embracing evil. I mean, if avoiding contact with evil and sin is a prerequisite for holiness, then how in the world can we actually live *in* the world? Unless, of

course, we create our own hermetically sealed culture where “By God’s bones” (and whatever other words we deem foul) is never uttered.

There’s a reason why Jesus was accused of being a drunkard and a glutton. It was the price of loving them. Likewise, we must be willing to tolerate similar accusations for embracing people, stories, and characters that can sometimes be ear-boggling.

MORGAN L. BUSSE: As a fiction fan, I usually avoid most [bad] language-filled books mainly because once I read the words, they’re stuck in my head and I can’t get them out. Then I find myself using such words, and it’s not something I want to say when I’m angry or something I want my kids to imitate.

That goes for anything from cuss words to using God’s name in vain or anything else. It’s a personal preference, but one where I draw the line in the sand quite close to the no-cussing line.

2. What about stories that misuse God’s name or titles?

STEVE: Blasphemies and misuses of God’s name irk me more than “regular” swear words, because they involve God’s name. That’s why I’ve never used them in my writing, no matter what other words make it in there.

LAURA: Bad words with a religious origin is a tougher subject. I live in a world where people frequently use God’s name or its variants as an emotive, and I know what they really mean. However, I also know who they’re talking about. I don’t use any of God’s names inappropriately in my fiction.

ESB: Misuses of God’s name bother me more, and perhaps more so when the genre is mainly intended for children. For example, trailers for *Incredibles 2* frequently feature characters misusing God’s name. Disney/Pixar wouldn’t dream of putting scatological vulgarities in the story. And yet these are okay, I suppose.

MIKE: What do you mean when you say “misuses of God’s name” by a Disney character? It might be worth noting that God’s name isn’t “God.”

ESB: Indeed. God reveals himself as “Yahweh” and then, of course, in the Person of Christ. Yet I think we should respect any biblical title we use, in hu-

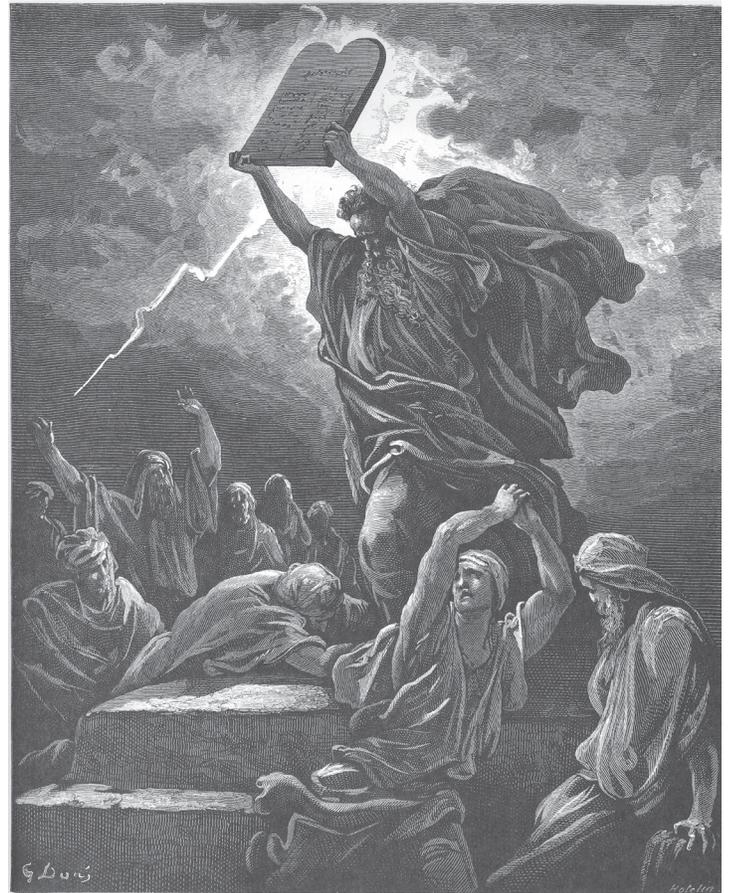
man language, to address him. For example, someone could use the name of Jesus as an exclamation having nothing to do with him. “Jesus” is the Greek version of his name. But it’s still, in a sense, his name.

Speaking only about real-life usage here, I’ve wondered if people could substitute, say, the name of a false or non-existent God (“by Odin’s beard!”). Yet even this seems to betray the fact that we have a subconscious human impulse to use even our words to reduce sacred things. At the very best, it’s meaningless language. Which we do hear in real life, of course, and therefore we could arguably also “hear” in fiction. I just doubt very much we will ever hear this language in eternity.

3. What about language in books versus film or TV?

MORGAN: Either way, I don’t find it surprising and I’m not shocked. I grew up around cussing. (Most of my family is not Christian, my dad was a sailor in the navy, and both of my grandmothers cussed—one in Norwegian.) Since personally I don’t want to use those same words, I choose to limit my exposure to them in media. But I’m not shocked or horrified by their usage. Perhaps a little sad, but why would a person not use God’s name in vain if they don’t personally know and follow him?

MIKE: I doubt I respond differently, but the science probably says the audio-visual is more viscerally impacting. But with either occurrence, written or spo-



God’s third commandment to Israel states, “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain” (Exodus 20:7, ESV). (Image from Gustave Doré’s 1866 painting *Moses Breaks the Tables of the Law*, public domain.)

ken, we must exercise the same vigilance and discipline.

STEVE: I agree, Mike. Though interestingly, the written overuse of profanity bothers me more. Perhaps that’s because growing up, and even through my early adult years, books I read had fewer swear words than movies I watched. They certainly had fewer than my friends and I used in high school, us being heathens and all.

It intrigues me that everyone has varying thresholds, even (perhaps especially) among Christians. I’ll say this: seeing the Lord’s name in vain on paper bothers me more than hearing it, because in audio form, I wince and it’s gone. On paper or the screen, it lingers, even after I’ve moved on, and my brain says, “Hey, remember what he/she wrote on page 45? Yeah, me, too.”

LAURA: I don’t know that I have any strong opinions on hearing versus reading. I don’t particularly like either, but for me personally I don’t think one venue strikes me harder than another. I do

believe other people who say they experience a difference, though. Bring on the controversy!

4. How may Christians respond to story language?

LAURA: I see two general categories of response.

First, there's the invisible response, in which the Christian reader reads over the offending word, may or may not react internally, but doesn't advertise.

Second, there's the offended/moral outrage response, in which the Christian reader advertises widely that he read a word but was really upset about it.

There's definitely a place for quoting offensive content. If I am protesting something moral or ideological, I need to be specific and accurate. But if the protest is "this makes me feel dirty," then I should probably move away from it. Sometimes the adrenaline high and self-congratulation of moral outrage can replace actual discernment. Did that middle-school-boy-style dialogue lead to sin? Or was it just not what she liked? Did she avoid sin by posting her detailed complaints? Did other readers avoid sin by reading them? Did I avoid sin by reading them?

MIKE: Personally, I don't bother much about how other Christians tend to respond to story language. This doesn't mean that I'm insensitive toward concerns. Instead, I've hung in Christian reader circles enough to know the general objections to profanity and don't feel obligated to acquiesce. There's several reasons for this.

First, I don't write for the Christian market. If I did, then I would adhere to the stricter language guidelines.

Second, much of the objections to profanity in film and literature I find non-compelling. Those objections typically come back to matters of personal preference rather than clear-cut biblical restrictions.

Finally, creatives need to stay true to their stories. In other words, if a story demands the inclusion of ["bad"] language, then we should honor the story. The moment a storyteller or artist fears including something controversial because of how a reader or viewer might respond, we sublimate our creative

freedom for another's self-imposed boundaries.

MORGAN: In the end, this response is between the reader and God.

Some people are too sensitive and have a superior moral complex. But some people have legitimate concerns, maybe because of their background, which causes them to be more sensitive to language. For example, I have a family member who wants to change the words they use because now they are a Christian and that kind of language reminds them of their former life. I get that.

But on the other side of the pendulum, there are verses cautioning us on how we speak. Are we edifying those who are hearing us? Is it an appropriate word for the moment? It depends on the situation, the culture, and again, between the reader and God.

STEVE: Some individuals take an author task for including an swear words—even ones that are considered very mild for use in the past thirty to forty years—as if writing the words coming from an imaginary person's mouth makes the author a bad Christian. It isn't that such critics come out and say it, but this attitude is there: "if you were a better Christian, you wouldn't use those words."

5. What are the best arguments against story language?

ESB: For example, some Christians seem to assume that if you read (or hear) a bad word in fiction, then you will inevitably tend to use this word, in a sinful way, in real life. I'll confess: there is some truth to this, at least for me. Looking back, I kept my own language fairly "clean"—until about the time I started watching comedy YouTube videos starring intentionally foul-mouthed hosts. The difference is this: They're using these words to be funny (whether this is acceptable is another issue). But I tend to use these words when I'm angry (which is a sin!).

LAURA: Obviously if something is affecting you, you take steps. If I watch a lot of film noir and I find myself wanting to smoke, I need to come up with an alternate behavior for myself. If I play a lot of *Assassin's Creed* and I start feeling myself tempted to parkour over a railing and down an atrium, I need to resist. (I resisted.) If I watch or read a lot of lan-

guage and start using it in a way that's offensive to others and/or myself, I need to examine that and make a call.

MORGAN: Some Christians are truly concerned about certain language used in fiction. Either they have not thought through their convictions and know where their own line is, or as Laura pointed out, they have double standards (which need to be addressed). However, there are times when the language serves no purpose in the story. And let's be honest, there is an assumption out there concerning Christian fiction that there won't be any bad language, or if there is, there is a really good reason.

STEVE: Christian publishers can rightly make the case that, if they've built a business on books that don't contain profanity, they shouldn't put it in. They're more likely to drive off some readers for those same reasons we've articulated, whether or not we agree with those reasons. I don't think adding profanity to a explicitly Christian line-up will attract new readers. Different stories will do a better job at that than the language used in those stories.

MIKE: There is no disputing that reading and/or hearing profanity can negatively seed our imagination. Listening to people cuss tempts us to cuss. Bottom line. Full-stop. Here's the problem, as I see it: Any contact with a fallen world can tempt us to sin. Living around people with unhealthy lifestyles, values, and habits can influence us to mimic those things. However, as Christians, we can't isolate ourselves from sinners because they might tempt us to sin. In other words, it's wiser for us to cultivate discipline in resisting evil than it is closing our eyes and ears to every possible form of evil we encounter. Separation from the world is a spiritual state, not a literal checklist.

6. How do we respond to Christians with different views?

ESB: For example, let's say we want to recommend a book to someone that has some bad language in it. Do we be proactive and caution that person? If so, is there any way, as Christian fans, for us to do this on a widespread scale? What about fans of different age[s] or maturity levels? How does this affect the issue?

LAURA: Recommending books (or other media) to professing Christians is a lot harder than it should be. For example,

“Sometimes the adrenaline high and self-congratulation of moral outrage can replace actual discernment.”

— *Laura VanArendonk Baugh*

“Separation from the world is a spiritual state, not a literal checklist.”

— *Mike Duran*

“It’s about each person knowing their limits and placing those before God.”

— *Morgan L. Busse*

“Blasphemies and misuses of God’s name irk me more than ‘regular’ swear words.”

— *Steve Rzasa*

“We have a subconscious human impulse to use even words to reduce sacred things.”

— *E. Stephen Burnett*

I remember the first time a lent book was returned to me with, “I don’t read books that take God’s name in vain.” I had honestly not remembered the book had this in the dialogue. But I do remember the feeling of bewilderment. Thus, I generally find it easiest to simply not recommend books or movies to people I have heard complain about content issues, including language. No problem, find your own.

MORGAN: Engage in conversation. Find out why they have different views or needs. Perhaps they [are] more conservative and that’s okay; we all have lines we don’t cross. Perhaps they have kids and they want to know ahead of time [about bad] language, so either they can choose not to have their kids watch the show or watch it with them and dialogue about it.

MIKE: When speaking to other believers, I’ve gotten into the habit of simply qualifying my stories as being PG-13 level, sometimes containing horror elements, and not fitting tightly into a Christian fiction framework. This is typically enough info to allow readers to make up their own minds.

STEVE: I make sure to discuss matters of language when I talk with folks. Sometimes it’s a matter of getting a read on them. If their preferences tend to secular books, I can figure that profanity mostly doesn’t bother them. Sometimes, when we’re talking about their kids, the topic of swear words is front and center. It does come down to knowing the reader and being willing to have a discussion on the matter.

7. How does story language affect real language?

ESB: As we’re exposed to certain language—either from the people around us, or from the stories we explore—how can we, as Christian fans, continue to pursue holiness? How can we glorify our Savior while not being affected by temptations to use anything, including certain words or phrases, as expressions

of sin?

LAURA: Despite all my “liberalist” ranting, I am actually pretty conservative about showing stuff to kids, more than a lot of parents. I’ve challenged inclusions in the kids’ section at bookstores, even though it was a title I myself really enjoyed. Parents and responsible adults need to be very cognizant of what kids take in, and I don’t believe there’s a universal guide for that. Like personal responsibility, it needs to be matched to the reader/viewer.

I have often stepped aside with a parent to show them key pages in my books before either closing a sale or suggesting another book to the kid browsing at my table. I’ve lost sales this way, but I’m still going to eat and it’s the right thing to do.

MORGAN: It depends on each person. I can struggle with language if I’m around it a lot, but my son has no problem. It’s about each person knowing their limits and placing those before God.

MIKE: This likely comes down to individuals. While I don’t think it can be denied that “bad communications corrupt good manners,” we must also acknowledge that we’re called to interact with sinners in a fallen world without having to wear blinders and earmuffs. Reading or hearing profanity can undoubtedly make its way into our own thoughts and speech. But living in a fallen world, in general, can result in the same thing. In the same way that we must remain separate from the world while living in it, we must navigate how to interact with sinners without adopting their habits and values thoughtlessly.

STEVE: I am one of those people who absorbs language around me, so I have to be on my toes. I agree with Morgan’s commentary on the matter, but also echo Mike. We as Christians can’t do the earmuff thing if we want to engage with others.

This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.

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