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WINTER 2018

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CHRISTMAS

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Captain's Log

Magic and memories of Christmas make me long for New Earth.

This month, I discovered I haven't been associating Christmas first with biblical images such as Nativity scenes, shepherds, and stars.

Much of the time, the holiday makes me imagine the time after Jesus returns.

I find myself daydreaming about the eternal era after Jesus has brought Heaven to New Earth. (I believe New Earth will be this selfsame, physical planet, which is judged by fire, then lasts forever under King Jesus. See Revelation 21: 1–5; Isaiah 65: 17–25; Romans 8.)

To be sure, imagination of Jesus's past or future arrivals must be based on biblical truth. Put that right, and the best fantastical images and emotions will follow.

Most of my imaginings aren't based on specific texts, but biblical speculation.

I think of warm, divinely built man-

sions snuggled among cold snows.

I imagine family from across generations reunited to celebrate that ancient Advent.

I dream of all the best parts of Christmas—the joy, wonder, and pure anticipation—all redeemed for eternity. And in this dream, there's no room for any idolatrous abuses of Christmas gifts. No more greed, materialism, covetousness, or stress.

Instead this sinless earth is filled with our Lord's knowledge as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9). Or as the third verse of my favorite carol "Joy to the World" says:

"No more let sins and sorrows grow / Nor thorns infest the ground / He comes to make his blessings flow / Far as the curse is found ..."

Isaac Watts's song isn't actually about Jesus's birth, but his second co-

ming to our (literal) Earth. Scriptural prophecies often similarly conflate the Messiah's first and second arrivals. So does the original New Testament phrase "Maranatha."

Of course, for many of us, the Christmas season isn't only about joy and wonder. This time can also carry memories of suffering, separation, and death. All the cold darkness that bleak midwinter represents. The winter Jesus came to end forever.

In this era between his arrivals, we can grieve and celebrate. We rejoice in his first coming, and groan as we await his second coming and the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:23).

Merry Christmas—and *maranatha!*



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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WHAT FATE AWAITS A GIRL WHO HEARS MONSTERS AT NIGHT ...

"... adventure, suspense, and a curse make this a delightful story. Highly recommended for parents and young adults that prefer fantasy fiction with a Christian-based theme and creative perspective."

~*Christian Book Review*

"A mash-up of *Jack and the Beanstalk* and *Lord of the Rings* ... Forgiveness and salvation are repeated themes throughout the novel.

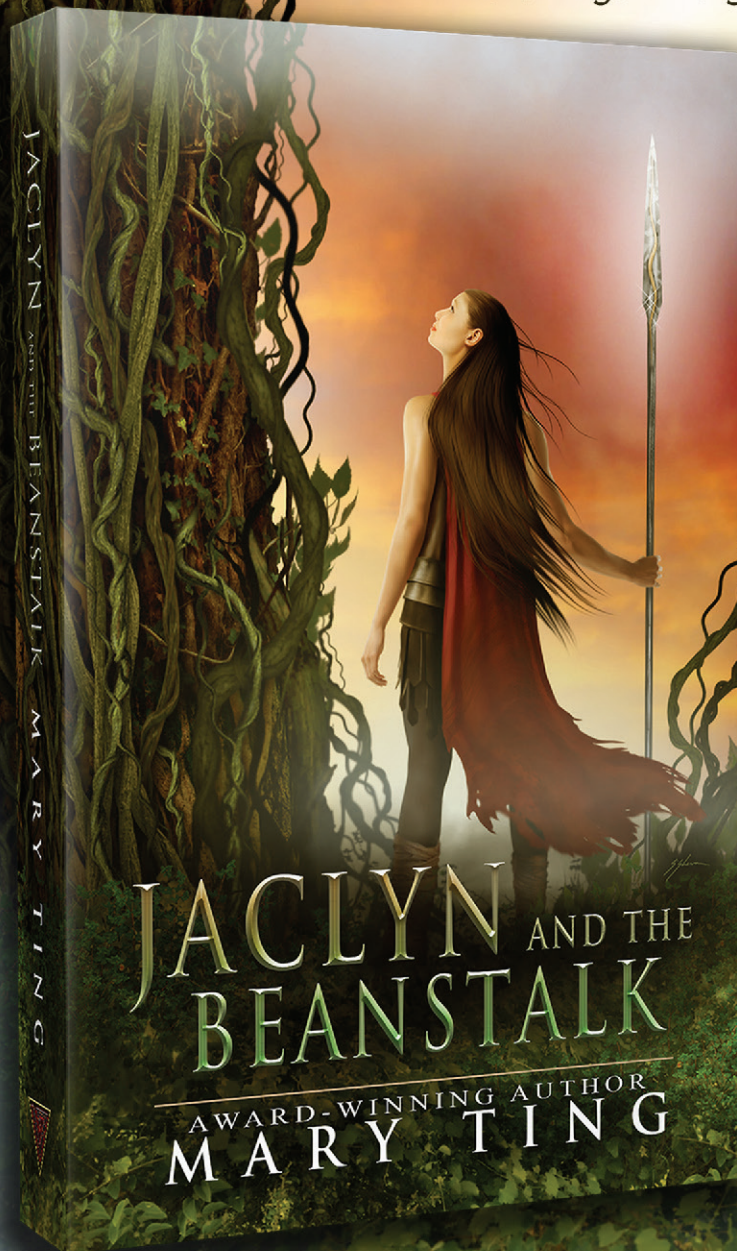
VERDICT: RECOMMENDED for Christian fantasy."

~*School Library Journal*

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Jaclyn and the Beanstalk

Magic beans meet medieval myth in this young heroine's tale.

At night, Jaclyn hears voices in her head. Monsters' voices, she knows, because the cries that destroy her sleep couldn't be tortured from a human throat. It's a terrible thing, to have monsters take up residence in your dreams.

It's worse to meet them in waking life. Soon Jaclyn will know this, too.

In *Jaclyn and the Beanstalk*, Mary Ting retells the story of "Jack and the Beanstalk." You needn't read further than the cover to know that Ting has traded out a hero for a heroine—though Jack is cleverly retained for another role in the story. But her revision goes deeper. Ting unites the English fairy tale with a Christian legend, one of those supernatural fables invented around figures taken out of the gospels.

This union dyes the entire fabric of the story. The weaving of Christianity into the tale, together with an allusion to the Black Plague, tug this fairy tale toward history. Yet *Jaclyn and the Beanstalk* lacks the detail and complexity that mark the recreation of a historical era. The book cannot be taken as historical fiction. It retains its fairy-tale simplicity, though its atmosphere is infused with a hazy air of the Middle Ages.

More significantly, Ting's use of Christianity tints her whole story with religion. No one strays far from Christian belief, not even the villain. To believe in God, however, is not to love him. Religion, so foundational to the story's premise, rouses to a vital force in the story's conclusion. *Jaclyn and the Beanstalk* is a Christian novel.

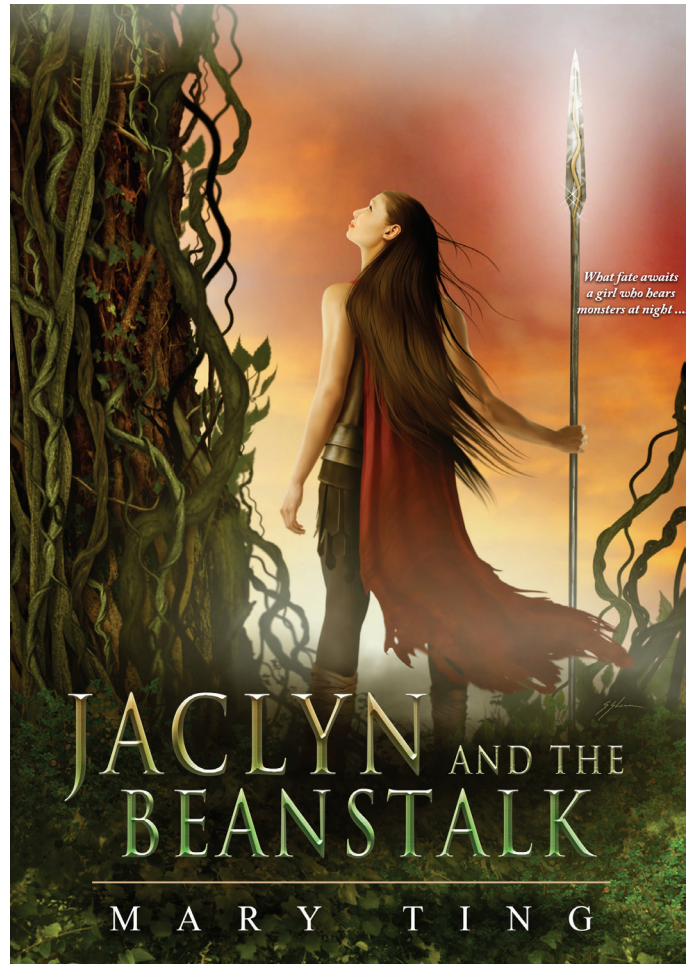


In many ways, this novel appears crafted for young Christian girls: a bold heroine, only sixteen, who takes a stand on her faith and embarks on a romance that ends happily with marriage and babies. Ting ascribes almost instant passion to the romance, but limits its expression until marriage. Yet abstinence does not alone equal wholesomeness, and this romance has unpleasant edges. (For more, please see the Discern section below.)

Mary Ting creates fantasy, sci-fi, and fairy tale novels, including the Secret Knights and Descendant Prophecies series as well as the Crossroads Saga. She lives in California with her family.

TangledTalesofTing.com
@MaryTing

Explore this novel at
lorehaven.com/library/jaclyn-and-the-beanstalk



Whatever the challenges of its romantic elements, *Jaclyn and the Beanstalk* retells the old fairy tale of giants and beanstalks with energy and freshness. Beginning with familiar ideas, it ends in surprising places.

Best for: Fans of fairy tale retellings.

Discern: Moderate violence, including dismemberment; two people are tortured, one in the background (results are later seen); mild language; and sexually charged banter and situations between male and female character presented as healthy.

One story moment warrants a longer caution for young female readers and their parents. In this episode, the male hero follows Jaclyn from the funeral of a loved one. He walks into her bedroom without permission, and offers to help her undress. He insists that she become his wife, kisses her passionately by way of persuasion, and then—as if to underline that he barely waited for the grave to be filled before making this play—he tells her how good she looks in black. The story presents this inappropriate behavior as part of a glorious romance.

Note: The term "discern" does not mean we must always avoid story elements, such as certain words or themes, because we find them offensive. In Christ, we have the option of freedom to engage with any story as in-training members of Jesus's church family. Some readers, however, may need to avoid a story if it will tempt them personally to sin.



Explore the best new fantastical novels from Christian authors. Browse each title and learn more at lorehaven.com/library.



Bramblewild

Mason Bramblewild grew up in the countryside with family and nature and a general wholesomeness. Driven by heartbreak into the wide world, he lives the wandering and violence of the caravans. In time he comes to Thornblack, a hidden city of one law: Let the strong prevail. Audie Thacker's classic-style fantasy *Bramblewild* roams over varied landscapes and stages familiar races, such as elves and dwarves. But

halflings and orcs loom largest in the story and go far beyond stereotypes, while chapels and preachers declare the social practice of religion—a welcome detail of world-building. The author artfully develops different places and cultures, though the attention paid to them sometimes delays the plot. Despite its occasional slowness, *Bramblewild* is an engaging journey with a comforting end.

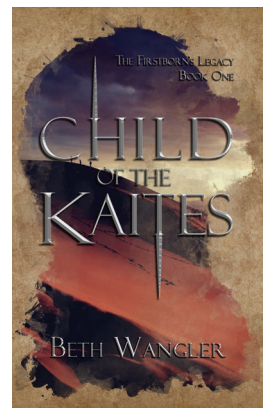
Best for: Teens, fans of traditional fantasy.

Discern: Violence, including wild animal attacks on defenseless victims; implied prostitution and sex slavery; one incident of implied child abuse; a legend, loosely inspired by the story of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel, depicts a man tricked into sleeping with his wife's sisters.

Child of the Kaites

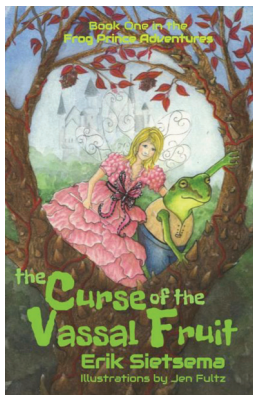
Child of the Kaites retells the Exodus account in a fantasy world. In Beth Wangler's story, two Champions work together to free their people, the Mararians, from slavery to the Izyphor. They must face down false rumors about their people, an Izyphorn sultan who refuses to let them go free, and spiritual beings who fight against them. Angels and demons, respectively called kaites and aivenkaites, feature in

many of the book's conflicts. Despite a somewhat confusing backstory, the Champions, Raiballeon and Saviayr show well-realized characterization, and the overall narrative flies like a thematic arrow toward the real-life account of how God freed his people from Egypt, and then later from the even stronger slavery to sin.



Best for: Fans of young-adult fiction.

Discern: Spiritual battles that could cause some confusion, such as when the demons/aivenkaites are confronted and controlled by use of their names, and when the hero bargains with Aivenah/Satan toward the book's end.



The Curse of the Vassal Fruit

The Curse of the Vassal Fruit starts out as a light and fluffy children's story, but by the end, Eric Sietsema's narrative has some hop to it. Two young protagonists, a frog prince with dreams of becoming a hero and a fairy princess obsessed with tea parties and acting important, have set aside their childish concerns and begun a journey to confront a threat

to their peoples and allies. This journey will continue in future installments. Although it's enjoyable by itself, the novel also features Easter egg-like references to other well-known fantasy stories, which older readers will find humorous and younger readers will enjoy as they grow older and read those other works.

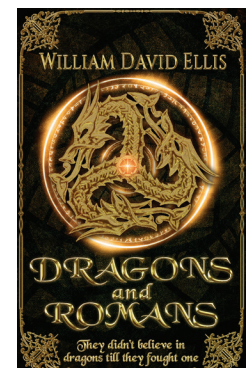
Best for: Elementary-aged kids.

Discern: Minimal objectionable content, such as the child characters' immaturity, the frog prince's disobedience to elders, and the fairy princess's vain and bossy behavior.

Dragons and Romans

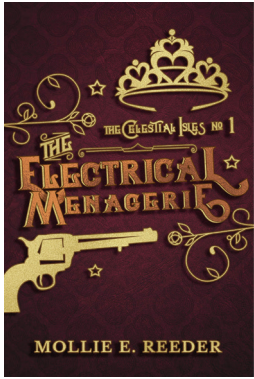
The first Punic War was a close affair. By the third war, no question remained: Rome would defeat Carthage. With earthly strength exhausted, and no thought to heaven, Carthage turns to hell, sacrificing their most innocent to call up demonic power and unleash dragons and spirits on Rome. *Dragons and Romans*, from William David Ellis, blends historical fiction with spiritual warfare and a dash of fantasy. Ro-

man soldiers fight the dragon, but a Jewish woman is gathered by calamity into the Roman camp and fights the powers behind the dragon, guided by a famous (and dead) prophet. The prophet's involvement, and a phenomenon similar to astral projection, may raise theological questions. However, *Dragons and Romans* invests the climactic Third Punic War with high peril, deep meaning, and the spark of the fantastical.



Best for: Adults, fans of Frank Peretti and historical fiction.

Discern: Graphic violence, including death and injury by fire; references to torture; child sacrifice on a large scale, occurring offscreen; moderate language.



The Electrical Menagerie

Mollie E. Reeder's *The Electrical Menagerie* starts out bright and shiny like a circus show, but swiftly morphs into a buddy cop-style mystery. Trick master Carthage strives to prove a childhood illness can't ruin his future, while money-wise Huxley seeks to prove his rich parents are wrong about him, his career choice, and his ability to make a fortune outside of their hereditary one. Both are keeping secrets, but upcoming trials will prove that

partnership works best when based on friendship and honesty. Set in an exotic world of flying horses and flying trains, this story's light touch of romantic intrigue leaves room for richer developments in future. Here, magicians' rivalries are backlit by murder, and the characters, scenery, and action are so well-drawn that the experience of reading this novel feels more like watching a movie.

Best for: Fans of *The Greatest Showman* and *Sherlock Holmes*.

Discern: Very mild violence, murder, kidnapping, and some drugged wine.

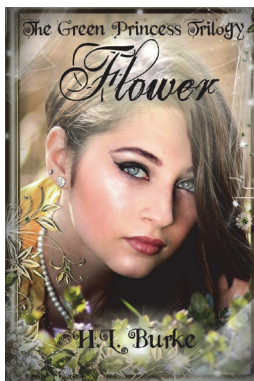
Fairest Son

H. S. J. Williams' novella *Fairest Son* contains familiar echoes: seven "dwarves," a poison apple, a poem of prophecy. But the story is unique. Keeva, a young human woman, hunts in the mountains where she encounters a mysterious man of the fae people—one who hides his face under wrappings, communicates via mindspeak, and

has seven goblin friends/servants. She tells him she's hunting the great wild bear, but she's lying. From there the story unspools a tale of treachery and deceit that leads to redemption. Christians will gladly recognize a type of Christ in one of the characters. Non-Christians will likely also feel the emotional uplift.

Best for: Teens and adults familiar with fairy-realm fantasy and ready to dive right in.

Discern: Mature themes that are delicately handled, but may make the book unsuitable for children under twelve.



Flower

With *Flower*, H. L. Burke's Green Princess trilogy bursts onto a world where magic users have divided into four factions. Each has a hereditary power, such as plants, fire, "the sight," and super speed, and is led by a hereditary master, or Key. Fire-wielders won the magic war, and the Flora Key is supposed to be dead. But sheltered Kitrin's teenage rebellion coincides with faintly manifesting powers, which could endanger her even more than her new, forbidden

forest-friendship with the king's mysterious nephew. Kitrin naïvely trips through the viny path her life has become, unaware that a war amputee (plus a bonded plant-dragon) is hunting the newly awakening greenery magic. The series entwines around the tropes of "young, true love" as well as the Chosen One, but Burke's clever twists keep the story fresh while still delivering on classic premises.

Best for: Fans of princess stories, true love, and creative magic systems, who enjoy watching these leaves unfold; fans of H. L. Burke will not be disappointed.

Discern: Some strong innuendo from side characters, and a fade-to-black, "meant to be" pre-wedlock consummation.

Hideous Beauty

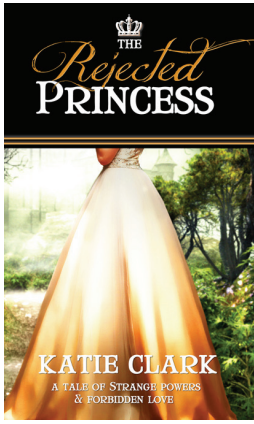
Jack Cavanaugh's *Hideous Beauty* hits an eerie note from page one. Grant Austin's return to his old San Diego high school gives him a chance to flaunt his victory over an old teen nemesis. But said nemesis has sold his soul to a vortex of beautiful destruction, and Grant is discarded after their encounter like a limp plastic bag, convinced he's included in someone's nefarious plan. Adding awkwardness to

injury, Grant can't seem to say anything right to his still-dazzling old flame, his recent girlfriend, or the gorgeous assistant of an angel-studying professor. Good thing they'll band together before it's all over. Playing thematically with half-demon Nephilim and the descendants thereof, *Hideous Beauty* strives to (very) graphically illustrate the war of dark versus light waged unseen by mere mortals.

Best for: Older teens and adults; fans of paranormal thrillers.

Discern: Graphic supernatural depictions, such as demonic possessions, representations of hierarchical demons by name, and recent physical "liaisons" between mortal woman and disguised demons; as well as romantic and physical male/female tension and Nephilim as "born unredeemable" plot points.





The Rejected Princess

Hereditary monarchy may not be known for letting its hair down, but at least it has the virtue of simplicity: there's nothing quite like an inter-royal wedding for preventing war. While Princess Roana of Chester's Wake knows her duty—to marry the haughty ambassador from backwards Dawson's Edge—there's more than her feelings for Prince Benjamin of Lox frazzling her focus. Strange sensory phenomena have been afflicting her of late, and

a clue from her past may unpin a cascade of dark secrets that shake the roots of royal power. With *The Rejected Princess*, Katie Clark has fashioned a cozy political thriller braided with thoughtful ambiguity and adorned with romance. Its characters are bright, its setting an amalgam of the medieval and the micro-electrical, and its social commentary delightfully understated. There's more under this hat than meets the eye.

Best for: Teens and adults seeking romance, political intrigue, mystery, and modern monarchy.

Discern: References to war casualties and to "termination" (an abortion analogue), persistent sexual tension, some making out, and lots of ardent yearning.

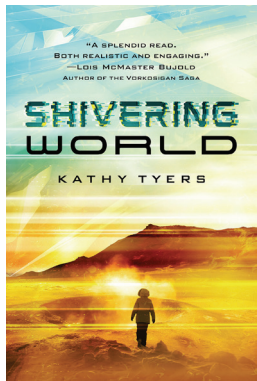
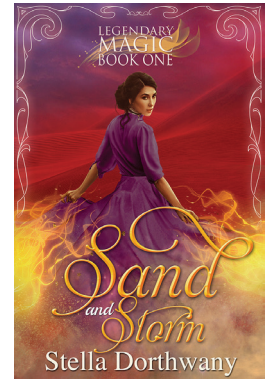
Sand and Storm

Stella Dorthwany's *Sand and Storm* tells a thrilling tale of magic, suspense, and working against the clock to save the world. Two main characters, cousins Faryn and Cora, are thrown together after a long separation. Faryn seeks adventure and finds it in an internship with Shaun Valerian, while Cora wants to navigate a new marriage to a man she barely knows. Both are drawn to an archaeo-

logical dig, the center of a magic spell that could mean the end of the world. They must work together, and with the people they love and hate, to save everything they know. This book is a delightful read, with a unique and well-developed magic system, engaging characters with compelling arcs, and a thrilling plot full of fun twists.

Best for: Young adults who enjoy a fun story in a magical world and appreciate a romantic subplot or two.

Discern: Open discussion about sex, implied sex in the context of marriage, and some sensual scenes.



Shivering World

It's the twenty-second century, and mankind is so over human genetic engineering. Anyone who possesses a tampered genome will be hunted down and irradiated. For Graysha Brady-Phillips, sufferer of a legally incurable genetic disease, this constitutes a death sentence. Unless, that is, she convinces the mysterious Lwuites, terraformer colonists of inhospitable Goddard, to divulge their secrets. But how can she win their trust when her mother, Eugenics Board enforcer, may descend on

Goddard in wrath? Sci-fi luminary Kathy Tyers has revised her 1991 novel of the same title to include pronoun-heavy conversations about Christ. Fortunately, this story grows on the reader much faster than bacteria in a barren biosphere. With scientific specificity, slow-burn character studies reminiscent of *The Vorkosigan Saga*, and subtle romance that out-thaws any greenhouse effect, *Shivering World* is good medicine.

Best for: Adult fans of intelligent sci-fi willing to tackle religious questions.

Discern: Some innuendo and discussions of sex, brief sensuality, murderous scheming, infrequent violence, and discussion of the behavioral implications of genetic engineering.

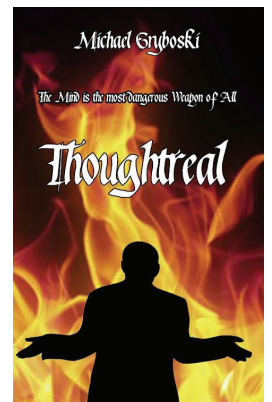
Thoughtreal

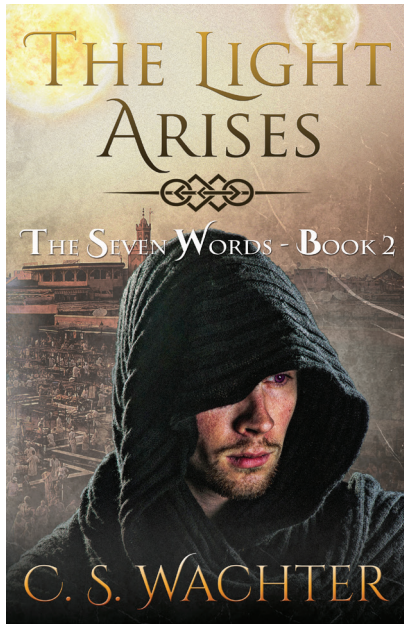
Thoughtreal spins an *X-Files*-like story of law enforcement officers trying to track down people with the power to create and destroy with their minds and imaginations. Michael Gryboski has thought up an intricate narrative that avoids potential tropes while touching on issues like ancient racial conflicts and shallow modern relationships, while exploring

how different religious worldviews can lead to very different outcomes. Readers may only stumble when information about a character or location is delayed, or when the story's perspective suddenly shifts. Nonetheless, most adult readers will be captivated by this story.

Best for: Adult readers.

Discern: A few profanities, one short making-out scene with a few details, and some violence and deaths.





The Light Arises

What's more painful than a childhood spent enslaved to an evil sorcerer? Watching your long-lost parents fall under said sorcerer's influence. *The Light Arises* picks up where *The Sorcerer's Bane* leaves off, with young Rayne Kierkengard restored to his rightful place as Crown Prince of Ochen. Then book 2 of C. S. Wachter's Seven Words series wastes no time upending his world yet again. This time it'll take more than personal transformation for Rayne to banish the shadows. He'll need to persuade all seven worlds to worship the One—the story-world's God-analogue.

This divine mission begins at home, but home grows distinctly unwelcoming after the arrival of Rayne's cousin Brayden. This insufferable aristocrat plots to steal the throne from under Rayne's nose and has been spinning a poisonous web of enchantment over the king and queen since

boyhood. But what's bad for the prince may redound to Ochen's benefit. Rayne departs through an interplanetary portal on an errand for the One, unaware of the desperate gauntlet he has yet to run.

Characterization continues to be a strength of this series: the cast's actions are well-motivated, if over-explained (everyone talks like a therapist). Rayne's burgeoning relationship with the One shines refreshing light on the post-conversion practice of Christianity-in-all-but-name, but also leans a bit too heavily on *deus ex machina* moments. What the story loses through convenience, however, it makes up through the unflinching infliction of distress. It's easy to forget about a sovereign God when the blade of suffering bites—both in real life and in Ochen. *The Light Arises* will leave readers craving the next word for the next world.

Best for: Adults seeking a fantastical exploration of true faith in punishing circumstances.

Discern: Sadistic emotional and physical abuse, gruesome violence, some suggestive humor.



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“Hidden meanings laced within an *ADVENTURE*...life lessons and moral challenges...I recommend it to parents of *TWEENS*”

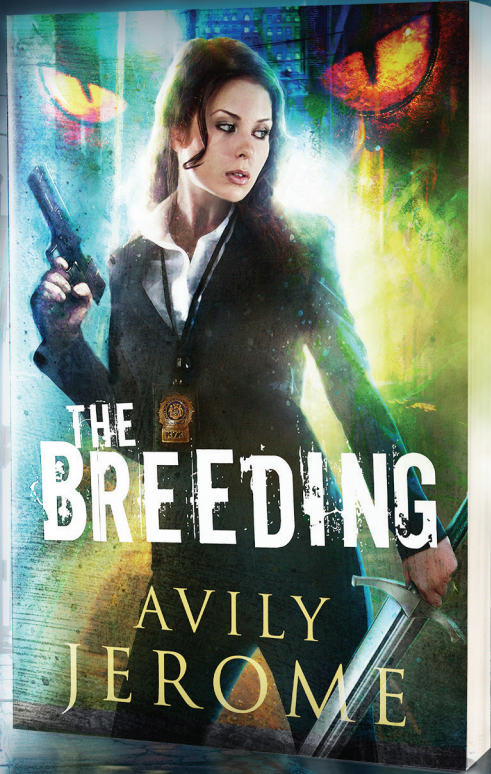


“*GREAT* one to read with your *CHILDREN*”



“A good way to introduce children to the subjects of faith...spiritual warfare”

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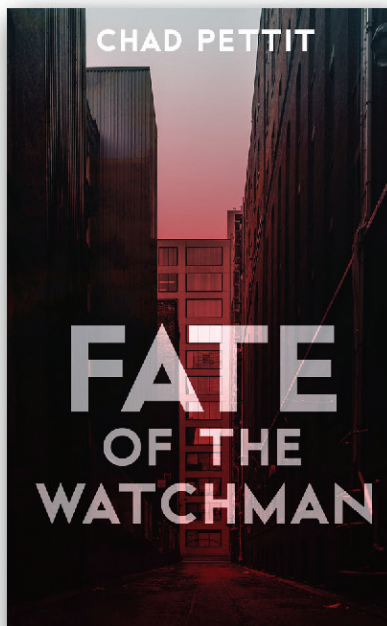
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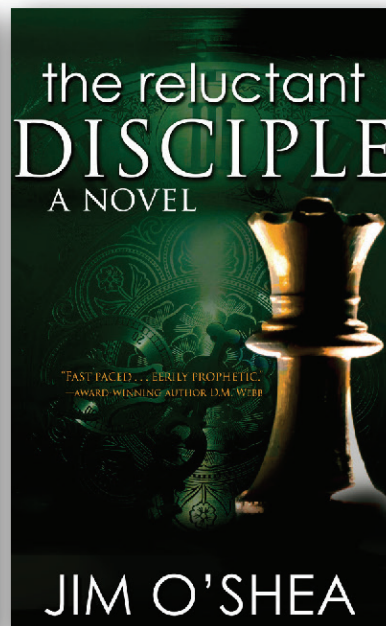
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Enclave

After America falls, white-hat heroes work for a better world.

People like to complain that the United States is doomed to collapse. But who's doing anything to plan recovery for the post-post-apocalypse?

Enter Kevin and Caleb from Thomas Locke's novel *Enclave*. They're two normal yet virtuous young men from the former nation. Several generations ago America fell into financial ruin. Now in the South, life has taken a frontier turn. Corrupt mayors rule the bigger cities called enclaves. What's left of the federal government is off hunting down super-gifted people. These come from rumored genetic testing and are called "specials" or "adepts."

Think Louis L'Amour meets *The Hunger Games*—lite with a sprinkle of *X-Men*.

Other dystopian heroes might brood or tie themselves up in moral quandaries. Some would opt for the ol' new-fashioned love triangle. But sheriff's deputy Kevin is too busy helping smuggle adept persons out of his city. Trader's son Caleb is too busy trying to hide a stash of silver and understand his own telepathy-like special gift.

Both men meet after Mayor Silas Fleming exposes Kevin's operation and Kevin finds himself on the run to Atlanta with Caleb. Their road trip brings hazards like adept-hunting armies and mercenary traders. Militia members from hostile en-

claves could discover Caleb's special gift or secret wealth. Caleb seeks a secure outlet for the mine's secret fortune and a way to resist the enclaves' lawlessness.

Like his characters, Locke emphasizes basic needs in this world. Occasionally a turn of phrase or description may stop one to ponder. Otherwise the style is simple and serviceable. This itself sets up a world that's gone for a long while without niceties.

What about this world's religions? Patriotism? Christians raised in America may inherit a long tradition of expecting the nation to act as a righteous "city on a hill." Or else turn into a smoking crater after divine judgment. Either way, such notions might also seem like luxuries in Locke's post-America. Apart from one reference to the idea of Jesus's second coming, everyone is basically moral-secular. They have somehow inherited only the West's Judeo-Christian tradition. They're blind to the nonsense from today's popular far-right, far-left, or sexual/identity revolutions.

Readers also go without backstory for some time. What led to the Great Crash? What's happening in the rest of the world? We don't learn much. But again, other dystopian stories' heroes seem to afford luxuries like inner monologue. They have no excuse for disinterest in the wider world. In *Enclave*, heroes and author just get on



Thomas Locke has written dozens of novels with worldwide sales of seven million copies. He currently lives in Oxford.

TLocke.com

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

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

with the duty before them. After a while this plainness starts to make more sense.

So does the story's final act. It breaks from a previous constant trot into a full gallop for a finale that leaves readers wanting to know

what's next. Alas, this story may stand alone. But even if so, it leaves young readers without the despair often associated with the "dystopian" genre and with hope to regain a better society.

Best for: Dystopian fiction fans, disillusioned by the genre's teen or disaster angst.

Discern: Mild romance, mild violence, and a few descriptions of injury.



‘I Came to Faith, and Two Weeks Later I Started Writing’

story: E. Stephen Burnett | photo: courtesy Thomas Locke

Thomas Locke grew up in the American South—the setting of his newest novel, *Enclave*. His ancestors were attorneys and politicians. His parents met because they helped found one of the most influential churches in North Carolina.

“And the rigid, conservative Bible-belt perspective of Christianity is something that I was never comfortable with,” Locke said in an interview.

Decades later, Locke has spent most of his life committed to Christ. Now he lives and creates stories in the U.S. and in Oxford, England (a location that offers some historical significance for Christian fantasy fans).

Clearly, something in his worldview has changed.

With a grin, Locke said he traces the transformation to one year in the late 1970s.

He had left Raleigh, North Carolina, studied economics at Wake Forest University, then moved to England to learn graduate-level international finance. Locke worked in this field in Africa, then in Germany, where he ran a global consulting group.

“We started having enormous success, and I was absolutely miserable,” he said.

Locke faced two choices: he could

admit he wasn't happy, or pretend, as he said some successful persons tend to do, that everything was fine anyway.

For him, Christianity wasn't on the table. He'd left that in his past. Among his reasons, he said, was the fact that even well-meaning Christians may falsely call certain behaviors or ideas "biblical." But their standards, Locke said, are based not as much on actual Scripture but on ideas we've inherited from our culture.

Then Locke befriended a monk from the Netherlands, and a Christian husband and wife who were both opera stars. They invited him to join a quarterly Bible study gathering of Christians who worked all across Europe's music and dance world.

This time, Locke saw a gospel greater than the childhood beliefs he had rejected.

"It was really a transformative moment, that sense of being connected with extremely intelligent and ambitious and artistic people who were very intent on their faith," he said. "For me, entering into a Bible-based church and having this opportunity to grow in faith, surrounded by other people, was a really important part of my walk and remaining stable as an individual."

Locke said he realized two big truths related to Christianity and creativity.

First, faith in Jesus ought to motivate creative excellence, not only in opera and music, but in stories in all different genres, including fantasy and science fiction.

Second, belief in the gospel doesn't mean every other religious system is only full of lies. Honest Christians can praise the reflections of morality and truth in other faiths, while still holding to salvation solely through Jesus, Locke said.

Today's Christians must know both truths to engage with today's world, he said.

"We are entering into a time where the readers of your magazine, for example, are going to be facing some very difficult issues that are not being confronted by today's church," Locke said. "But they are living with these things in their daily walk."

Thanks to creative Christians' influence, Locke came to faith in Jesus.

"Two weeks later I started writing," he said. "I wrote for nine years and finished seven books before my first was signed for publication."

Locke's first idea was for a science fiction story—an impulse he attributes to God.

"There was that clear sense of the divine presence, that this is what I was intended to do," he said. "It didn't mean that it was going to be easy."

Running his consulting firm required six- to seven-day work weeks and travel to four countries each week. Still, Locke managed to clear time to write at least twenty hours a week, and later won an award for that first story.

"There was that clear sense of the divine presence, that [writing novels] is what I was intended to do."

—Thomas Locke

Locke later pursued more ideas in other genres, such as contemporary drama and political drama. But he always wanted to return to fantasy and science fiction.

Both genres, however, have been previously shunned by skeptical Christians. In Christian bookstores, most shoppers weren't browsing shelves for a lot of novel covers with dragons, spaceships, or paranormal critters.

Locke said that's likely because the stories might pose too many tough questions—certainly about fictional magic in fantasy, and alien creatures in science fiction.

Now Locke sees the scene changing. Like most bookstores, Christian stores are struggling and many have closed, thanks to competition from Amazon and Walmart books. But Christians themselves, he said, are getting stronger in their faith. They're also not looking for community, or great stories, exclusively in their local churches.

Locke said his Christian publish-

er isn't emphasizing retail in church bookstores. "Today their aim is to offer, to the believing audience . . . books that hold to a Christian moral structure, over books that hold an overt Christian message."

His latest novel, *Enclave* (November 2018, Revell) finds the United States fallen after economic collapse. Large cities, called enclaves, are ruled by despotic mayors, marking the nation's return to Wild West-era frontier law and lawlessness.

In this decaying society, two upstanding men from different backgrounds, along with several of their supernaturally gifted friends, form a plan to push back.

That's the kind of moral optimism Locke said more dystopian stories should have.

"There's no trademark hope for most of these books," he said. "And in all but a very few of the dystopian series, there is no challenge big enough to justify more than one book. . . . The plot becomes circular. It's a sense of repetitive crisis without an answer. Where are they going? What are they hoping for?"

"These stories have thrown the baby out with the bathwater," Locke concluded. "I'm not disagreeing with them. Their worldview is their worldview. But this does not excuse them from accepting the challenge of making whatever they can better."

As for biblical faith, it's latent in *Enclave* by design. Characters' background beliefs are referenced, while the heroes' goal is earnestly and truly moral.

Locke said he will continue to pursue this goal of moral storytelling, whether in sci-fi like *Enclave*, or in his other stories that have attracted the attention of TV producers. This February, Locke visits Los Angeles to discuss two adaptations moving forward.

"My primary focus is to create entertainment that is competitive with what is out there in the mainstream, in terms of the character structure, the writing style, and the dramatic action," Locke said. "At the same time, I want to maintain a sense of moral connection to the Scriptures and to that sense of a higher calling."

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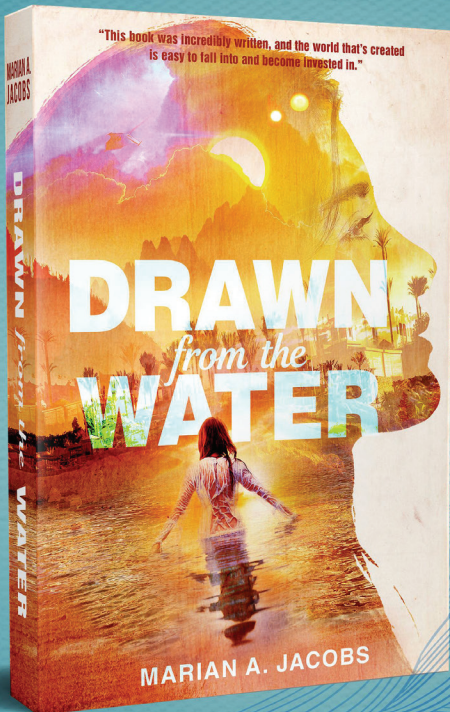
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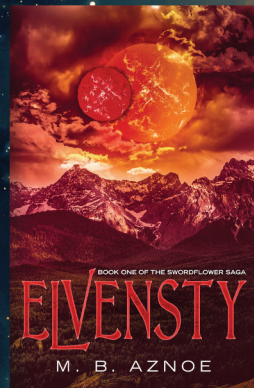
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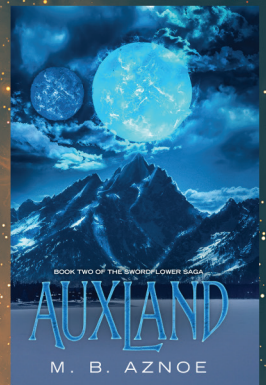
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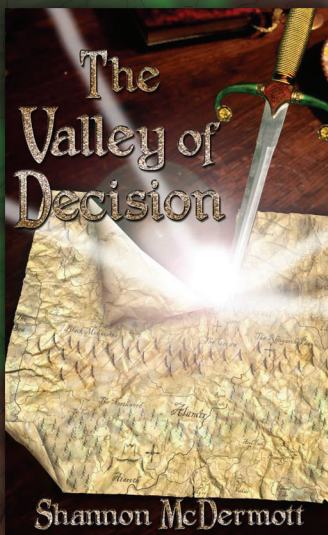
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Shannon is a Christian author of speculative fiction, both sci-fi and fantasy. She was born in California, raised on the East Coast, and now lives in the Midwest. Her essays on Christianity, culture, and fiction appear on SpeculativeFaith.com. You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

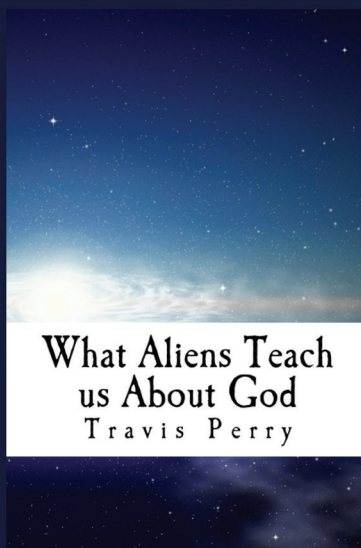


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Are We ‘Introverted’ Toward God?

Jesus came to make our Creator more than a fascinating concept.

I wonder if we as Christian geeks are sometimes more comfortable with God as an idea than as a person.

Granted, God is so unfathomable in so many ways that it’s easy for us to slip into thinking of him more conceptually than personally. But it can also easily become our preference to keep him at a distance.

Many of us geeks are highly introverted. We often prefer isolation from people, who can so easily interfere with our lives. People aren’t “safe” to be around. Don’t we often think the same about God? But Jesus came because God didn’t want to be merely a distant concept in the minds of his people. Yet that’s what he became, as perhaps best explored in the New Testament book of Hebrews.

The book of Hebrews is written primarily to a Hebrew audience, who would have grown up in what had become a rigid, sterile religion shaped by cold academic law. In the opening verses of chapter 1, the author immediately demonstrates how Jesus has ushered in a way of relating to God that is superior to the law and even prophets in the past. Jesus, more than a prophet, has a unique relationship to God—that of a Son. As this unique “son” of Yahweh, Jesus is entitled to ownership of the universe. More than that, Jesus is somehow also God himself, and is actually the agent through whom the universe was created (Hebrews 1:2)!

Verse 4 says, “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (ESV). Just as the radiance of the sun is inseparable from the sun itself, and presents us with a clear image of the sun, Jesus is inseparable from God. He is the radiance and the perfectly accurate visible rep-

resentation of God.

But make no mistake. He is not just a representative. He is God himself. In fact, he’s responsible, at every given moment, for the continued existence of the universe! Science eventually fails to explain why the laws of the universe continue to hold reality together. One step beyond science is the answer: Jesus himself holds the laws of physics together, keeping them consistent and in operation by a continual act of his will.

If God ever seems too big and distant to us, unrelatable in his “otherness,” we can turn to Jesus, knowing that when we look at his personality, we’re not seeing some junior representation of God. We’re seeing God himself.

And Jesus came to enable relationship between us and God. This is portrayed later when Jesus is called our “high priest” in Hebrews 4: 14–16: “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

In ancient Israel, the high priest was ultimately responsible for acting as a “go-between” for God and his people. Now, in Jesus, God himself is taking on that role, essentially saying, “I don’t want to have some messenger running back and forth between us. Let’s just you and I talk from now on.”

These passages from Hebrews lead me to think about my “connectedness

to God” a bit.

If I want to, I can stay pretty detached from God. Part of the way I’m wired as a geek makes it enjoyable to evaluate ideas on a purely intellectual level. This is also a much safer way to evaluate ideas when compared to letting them stew in my heart for awhile. I can read Scripture and say in my best impression of Mr. Spock: “Fascinating.” I can come away from this, smugly satisfied that I pursued examination of truth, without ever allowing that truth to get inside me and challenge, comfort, or encourage me.

Yahweh has never wanted that kind of disconnection from himself. Jesus came to say, “All of these things you’ve heard about me from angels and prophets are not just nice ideas for you to consider or dismiss. But that’s what you have been doing, so I came here myself to tell you who I am, how much I love you, and prove with my actions everything I’m saying.”

If we find ourselves distanced from God, we can draw near to him again by spending time with the words of Jesus. We can of course choose to remain cold toward him. Or we can give his words the value they deserve, allowing them to take us into uncomfortable revelations about ourselves while also providing relief and encouragement in light of his tireless love for us.



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

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The Biblical Source of Super-Strength

How can we teach children to enjoy superheroes as biblical Christians?

Are superheroes real?

Our children would love to think so.

Men and women of supernatural abilities have been a fixation for our culture since the Greek epics. In fact, a boy with comic book in hand is now something of a stereotype. Some have even argued that our society worships superheroes due to the massive number of films, books, and merchandise created to satisfy market demands.

Idolatry is never a good thing, but is there a way to teach our children to enjoy superheroes in a healthy, biblical way?

We usually speak of superheroes as though they're exclusively fictional beings, even alien. But the Bible tells a different story about superhuman power and its spiritual origins in Judges 15: 14–16:

“When [Samson] came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting to meet him. Then the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him, and the ropes that were on his arms became as flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands. And he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, and put out his hand and took it, and with it he struck 1,000 men. And Samson said, ‘With the jawbone of a donkey, heaps upon heaps, with the jawbone of a donkey have I struck down a thousand men.’”

Samson is a clear example of superhuman strength. If he was alive today, we would consider him a superhero. But is he an example for our children to follow? After all, his story is not deserving of a PG rating.

Jon Bloom describes the biblical account of Samson in his book, *Things Not Seen*, as reading “like the story of a narcissistic superhero whose pride destroys him in the end.” And still Samson is listed in the hall of faith in

Hebrews 11. There are certainly huge character flaws in him that we should teach our children not to follow. But Samson's story has one element of faith and humility that is essential for the critically thinking parent with a superhero-loving child.

Bloom goes on to say that, “[Samson] believed that God would bless his gift of strength when Samson needed it. In that sense, every mighty act [Samson] ever did was by faith. And God used him. . . . The tragedy of [Samson's] life is that he ended up thinking more highly of himself than God.”

Although Samson misused his blessing from God to satisfy his own pride, he knew his power came from God and not himself. And that, ironically, is the single thread of humility in the fabric of his life. He knew this so well that at the end of his life, he pleaded with God for his strength to return to him so he might defeat the oppressive Philistines (Judges 16: 28–30):

“Then Samson called to the Lord and said, ‘O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes.’ And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. And Samson said, ‘Let me die with the Philistines.’ Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life.”

For children to have proper humility before God, teach them that his gifts

are just that—a strength that didn't originate from within themselves but from the Lord. To have even greater humility than Samson, instruct them to use those gifts for the glory of God and his kingdom and not their own magnification.

What does that mean for our diet of superhero stories? Although parents may find times when it's necessary to keep children from these stories, it's best for parents to pursue critical thinking over censoring. Parents can sit with their children and engage them in conversation about the heroes after or even during the film or book. Ask questions like:

From where does this superhero get his power?

If the power is outside of herself, is it from a divine being?

Is that being the God of the Bible or a pagan god?

Is this superhero working for his own good or the good of others?

Is the superhero using her power with pride or humility?

A perfect superhero story doesn't exist. But common grace shows us that despite social trends, we will continue to tell stories of humble, sacrificial love—of superheroes giving up their very lives. That superhuman humility, the one that puts others first, makes the very best kind of superpower.



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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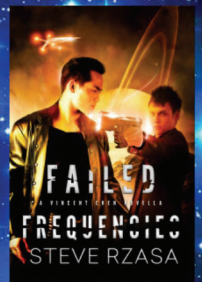
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