

# Harry Potter, move aside. Christian fantasy has arrived

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## Harry Potter, move aside: Christian fantasy has arrived.

**By Juli Cragg Hilliard**

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—Whether their books feature dragons, firefish or sword-wielding soccer moms, writers of Christian fantasy fiction are clamoring for a spot in the marketplace.

Fantasy fiction in general commands a large following and copious real estate in bookstores. But while websites and Christian writing conferences brim with writers working on Christian fantasy, most publishers are just starting to be open to these new books.

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The books may carry overt references to Jesus and Scripture—or simply an understated Christian perspective with clean content, positive role models and unambiguous depictions of good and evil in the style of C.S. Lewis or J.R.R. Tolkien.

Writers use the term “Christian speculative fiction” to include fantasy, science fiction or anything other-worldly.

To raise awareness of Christian fantasy and promote his books, [Bryan Davis](#)

has spoken to 30,000 kids in the last year—including 112 talks in two months, and 12 in one day.

Davis, a father of seven, writes the *Oracles of Fire*, *Dragons in Our Midst* and forthcoming *Echoes from the Edge* series, all for youth audiences.

This month, he and three other authors will try to jump-start interest in Christian fantasy with a nine-day road trip—the Fantastic 4 Fantasy Fiction Tour.

“There’s probably a lot of the Christian community that doesn’t even trust us,” said Davis, who disputes associations with satanic or shadowy influences. He also offers guidelines for choosing fantasy books.

“One of the main things to look for is whether or not the author has a clear delineation of good and evil,” he said.

Another obstacle for Christian fantasy writers, said [Jeff Gerke](#), who writes novels under the pseudonym Jefferson Scott, is that the Christian publishing industry has yet to get behind the genre.

Gerke says plenty of readers and writers of Christian speculative fiction are out there, but the Christian presses mostly target evangelical white women—who don’t tend to be fantasy enthusiasts.

Popular Christian fiction stars Jerry Jenkins and Tim LaHaye (co-authors of the *Left Behind* series), Frank Peretti (*This Present Darkness*) and Ted Dekker (*Thr3e*) command front-table display in bookstores, but their success has created little demand from Christian publishers for writers working on similar themes, Gerke said.

For Christian writers who think mainstream presses might be an option, “it’s a very crowded area, and there’s debate about whether if you write for a secular publisher are you able to be as Christian as you want to be.”

Still, a few new releases include notable offerings.

From Harvest House, [George Bryan Polivka's](#) *The Legend of the Firefish* and *The Hand That Bears the Sword* contain overt Christian themes; its hero is a failed seminarian struggling with his faith.

Polivka said his work is not typical fantasy. "In fact, there's no magic in it. There are lots of movements of God—miracles that happen at just the right moment."

[Sharon Hinck's](#) *The Restorer*, first in a *Sword of Lyric* series aimed at women, is told through the voice of Susan Mitchell, a mother of four who is disenchanted with her ordinary life and wants to be like the biblical Deborah. Then Mitchell is dropped into an alternate world where people think she might be a Restorer, someone "with gifts to defeat our enemies and turn the people's hearts back to the Verses," the books says.

The same publisher, Nav-Press, also released [Tosca Lee's](#) *Demon: A Memoir*. And this month brings *DragonFire*, the latest in [Donita K. Paul's](#) *DragonKeeper Chronicles* series.

Ginia Hairston, a vice president for Random House's WaterBrook division, said, "There is a God-type figure (in Paul's books) but he is not referred to as God.

"There are evil characters that certainly are not referred to as demons."

In September, WaterBrook plans to release *Auralia's Colors*, first in [Jeffrey Overstreet's](#) *The Auralia Thread* series.

Davis, the *Oracles of Fire* author, believes the proliferation of writers working on Christian fantasy serves as a barometer of the supply of readers hungry for it. The power of the fantasy genre, he said, is its ability to create situations for heroism.

“Fantasy opens up the kind of vision,” he said, “to be able to see beyond where we are.”

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