

# Finding God in Fantasy

By  
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**God omnipresent**, always present in all places at all times.

That doctrinal statement might seem a strange place to start an essay on finding God in fantasy. But think about it: If God were not omnipresent, why would we bother looking for Him midst the strange and surreal landscapes of other worlds that don't exist?

However, if God is truly omnipresent, we can approach fantasy with not only the hope that He might be there, but with the confident expectation that He *is* there. At least, I have yet to find a Bible verse that restricts God's presence to the realistic. All usually means all, which would mean He is also present in every story and every storyworld.

Now His presence in story, like in the real world, may not be overt. And just like in the real world, God may be maligned, misrepresented, ignored, or even outright denied. This is common in secular stories, which is why, should we venture to read such stories, we must handle such stories with extra care and discernment. We do not want to accidentally absorb these wrong ideas into our way of thinking. Indeed, due to the metaphorical nature of the genre, we must walk very carefully to compare all we see to the biblical standard, no matter the source of the story, though Christian fantasy tends to be more intentional in its inclusion of God and therefore more accurate in its portrayal. Nonetheless, God will be present somewhere within the story, even if only in the representation of His attributes, such as His sovereignty, love, justice, and mercy.

**So how do we go about finding God in these fantastical worlds?** Just as He has many ways of showing up in the real world, so He can show up in fantasy in a multitude of ways. But here are five of the most common ways I've seen God manifested:

## ***Exact Representation***

Sometimes God shows up simply as Himself. He is called by the names used in the Bible. He has performed the same acts as those recorded in Scripture. His interactions with the world are the same ones we see in our everyday lives. There is nothing metaphorical or allegorical here. The God presented in the story is the God of the Bible.

This manifestation of God is most common in fantasies with a real-world or pseudo-real-world setting, whether contemporary or historical. So you might see God as Himself in urban fantasy, magical realism, high seas adventures, many vampire stories, the real-world part of portal fantasy, and superhero stories. This is also the most common way for God to show up in fantasy's speculative counterpart, science fiction. One series that includes God in this way is John Otte's Failstate series.

## ***Direct Parallel***

God can also show up in a mirror reflection of Himself. That is, the author creates a "clone" of God, as much as is humanly possible. All of God's revealed character, standards, and will are left intact, but often He will appear under another name, and His interactions with the fantasy world may look a bit different than in the real world (though not in a way that violates the essence of who He is).

This is probably the most common method employed by Christian fantasy writers today, especially in subgenres set in completely alternate worlds (e.g. traditional high fantasy or the alternate universes of portal fantasy). Aslan from the Chronicles of Narnia is probably the best-beloved example of this manifestation, though both Sharon Hinck's Drifting Realms series and Jill Williamson's Blood of Kings have wonderful examples of this as well.

### *Metaphorical Type*

This third example is closely related to direct parallel and often is mistaken for it. But whereas a direct parallel claims the character to *be* God, just by another name, a metaphorical type creates a character with a strong resemblance to God. Many of the attributes of God are embodied in this character and thus points to God, but it is done without intending to perfectly represent God. Indeed, to turn a metaphorical type into a direct parallel will often result in wrong theology and a misrepresentation of God.

This version of God's presence is a bit rarer than the first two manifestations, but it can be commonly found in parables, allegories, and stories with extended metaphors. My own novel, *Beast*, applies this manifestation to the character of Majesty.

### *Invisible Orchestrator*

As I mentioned before, sometimes God will hardly be recognized at all in a story. Rather, He is the person behind the scenes, weaving together the events, directing the characters in the way they should go, all to bring about a desired end, whether that be fulfilled prophesy or the defeat of a great evil. Often God is never recognized by name in these stories, and His sovereignty over the events may be barely acknowledged by the characters. Or, as is common in secular fiction, His behind-the-scenes work may be wrongly attributed to fate, another god, or even the writer himself. But the sense will often linger of something bigger at work. Indeed, the events often unfold in ways that would seem too coincidental, even laughable, if it were not for this sense of something *more*.

This style of representing God is also common in Christian fantasy, especially in those stories where the Christian worldview is underlying rather than where a Christian theme drives the plot. *Lord of the Rings* is a prime example of this, as are the more modern works of R.J. Anderson.

### *Signposts of Truth*

This final form of God's presence is probably the least common and is largely restricted to secular fiction. This is because theologically grounded Christians understand that God exists, is sovereign, and is at work in the world. So to write a story where God is not at least present as an invisible orchestrator would be to create a story that denies the existence of God and create a plot rooted in chaos—which directly contradicts a Christian worldview.

Indeed, this is why this manifestation is rare, for even most secular writers instinctively create according to a sense of order, rules, and structure—which points to an orderer, rule-maker, and builder behind the scenes. That is, an invisible orchestrator. But a few stories push even that so far to the background or so distort the source of that orchestration that God's presence is relegated to His attributes and the truths that point to

Him. For there are some spiritual truths so written into the universe that to write in opposition to them will cause a story to ring untrue to readers. For example, the triumph of good over evil, the power of love, and the work of redemption can all point back to God, albeit in an often misshapen way.

### **Conclusion**

Now obviously, these are not the only five ways God manifests Himself in story. And deviations within these five, as well as combinations thereof, can also occur. Moreover, this doesn't mean we can read whatever we wish, simply because God will be present. Again, He can be misrepresented, and as a general rule we should avoid such stories so we don't develop a misshapen idea of Him. However, within each and every story God will be there. So in whatever story we read or watch, let's see if we can spot Him!

### **About Chawna Schroeder**

Chawna Schroeder spends her days working as a professional liar, better known to most people as a novelist. She loves spinning stories and fabricating fantastical tales about characters caught between two worlds—not to mention fiction writing provides the easiest explanation for her imaginary friends. Otherwise people tend to look strangely at a 20-something adult conversing with invisible people.

When Chawna isn't working or meeting other novelists' imaginary friends, you can usually find her poring over her studies in biblical Greek and Hebrew. She has studied both languages under a seminary-trained pastor for several years and has done some teaching of the Greek and Hebrew.

Since she doesn't have a split-personality (despite what family members and friends may contend), these dual passions for fiction and Scripture must share the same mind and therefore often collide. Sometimes that's not a problem; fiction and Scripture meet and part on congenial terms. But at other times they get into a fight. So what is a writer to do? Write, of course!

So Chawna has written *Bearing the Sword*, a curriculum teaching discernment in and through fiction. She also has two fantasy novels published, an allegorical fairy tale entitled *Beast*, and coming-of-age fantasy in pseudo-WWII/Cold War setting.

Not convinced that you trust this strange person named Chawna Schroeder? Stop by [www.chawnaschroeder.com](http://www.chawnaschroeder.com) to find out more about her and the stories she writes, or contact her directly at [imaginationinvestigation@yahoo.com](mailto:imaginationinvestigation@yahoo.com)