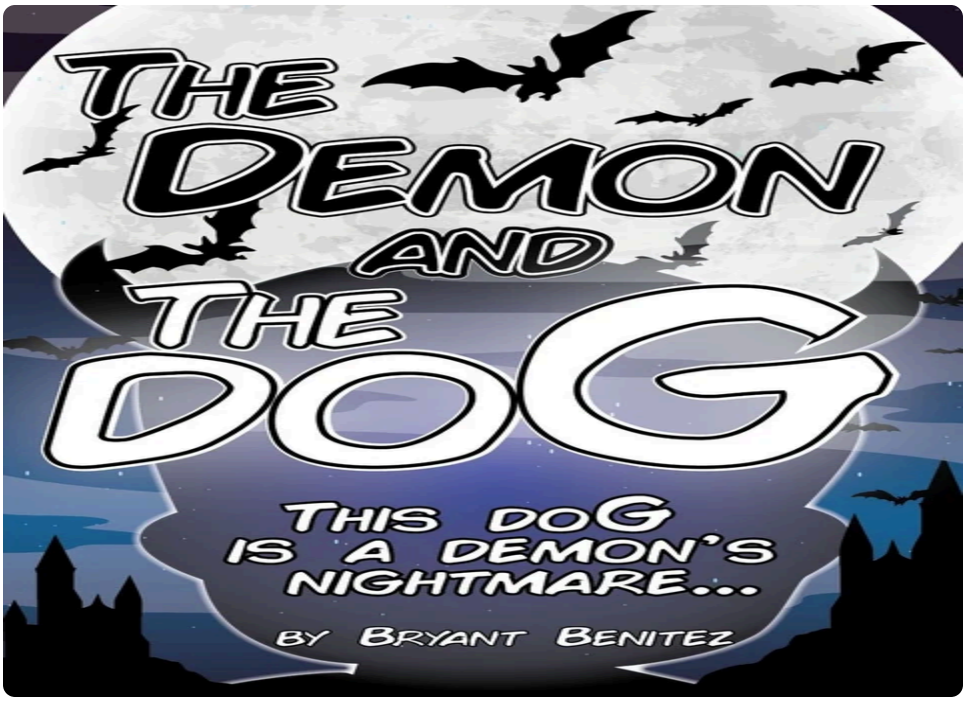
GUIDE

# Faith fiction told from the other side

The demon narrates. The non-believer preaches. Nobody gets lectured, which is why the children who resist being taught are the ones who finish these.

August 1, 2026 · 6 minute read







Faith fiction told from the other side is a simple idea: give the story to the side that does not usually get to tell it, and then stay out of the way.

In The Demon and The doG the narrator is a demon. He has a job at the Demonic Defense, a professional opinion about how it is going, and no idea that everything he calls a success is a catastrophe. In The A.I. and The Alien the story sits with the perspective you would not expect.

On the Upside Down Church podcast Bryant handed the pulpit to people who do not believe and let them preach while he listened, credited on his own feed as the heretic.

One idea, three times, across a decade and two mediums. It is worth naming because it is the reason these particular books get finished by the particular children who do not finish books.

## Why it works on a reader who has their guard up

Most children can tell by about seven when a book is trying to improve them. The moment they spot it they stop reading a story and start being taught, and the resistance that follows is not laziness. It is reasonably good instincts about being handled.

A story narrated by the opposition has nothing in it to resist. There is no wise voice addressing the reader, because the narrator is not qualified to be one. The child is not being told anything. They are eavesdropping on somebody getting it wrong, and working out for themselves where the wrongness is.

That work is the entertainment. It is the same pleasure as a pantomime audience shouting at somebody who cannot see what is behind him. And a conclusion a reader assembled themselves belongs to them, where a conclusion handed over belongs to whoever handed it, and can be handed straight back at about fifteen.

## It is not new, and the gap it leaves is the point

The obvious ancestor is C.S. Lewis. The Screwtape Letters is a senior demon giving career advice to a junior one, and it has survived eighty years of being assigned in classrooms precisely because it never once tells the reader what to conclude.

Lewis wrote it for adults. Almost every guide puts it at fourteen and over, there is no middle grade edition, and the only products aimed lower are study guides for teenagers. So the question is there a Screwtape Letters for kids gets asked constantly and answered with a shrug.

The comparison to these books is not one we invented. It is Bryant's own, published in his own words on his own listing: for readers who enjoy the fun lighthearted style of C.S. Lewis' Screwtape Letters. The difference is that this one is played for adventure and jokes rather than satire, and is eighty three pages rather than two hundred.

## Where it does not work

It needs a reader who can hold two things at once: what the narrator says, and what is actually happening. That step arrives around six or seven, and below it an unreliable narrator is not ironic, it is confusing, and the child concludes the book is telling them the demon is right.

It also cannot teach a named thing on a schedule. If a child needs to learn a specific doctrine by Sunday, a catechism does that and this deliberately does not. You give up control of the conclusion in exchange for the conclusion being genuinely theirs, and if that trade is not one you want, no amount of craft makes the book do the other job.

And some readers, including thoughtful and devout ones, simply do not enjoy irony. They want a hero they can admire straight. That is a preference, not immaturity, and it needs a different book. The longer version of this is here, because a set of pages that only lists strengths is advertising rather than an explanation.

## What it looks like in practice

In The Demon and The doG, Damon is competent. That is the thing to notice. He is not a bumbling comic devil who exists to be laughed at, he is a professional with a caseload and standards, and he is entirely satisfied with how his career is going. Then something makes contact with him, a chase starts, and an unlikely friendship grows with a mysterious visitor who likes jokes.

Nothing in the book stops to explain what any of that means. A reader who wants an adventure about a demon having a catastrophic week gets exactly that, complete, with no sense that anything was withheld. A reader inclined to look at it a second time finds the second book underneath, and finds it themselves.

That is the entire design goal: two complete readings, neither of which requires the other, and no signposting between them.

## Why it matters commercially, and not only artistically

This is the reason the books get finished by children who do not finish books. Reluctant reading in this age band is very often not a decoding problem. The child can read the words perfectly well. What they will not do is sit still for a book that is visibly trying to improve them, and by seven or eight most of them can spot one from the first page.

Remove the improving voice and the resistance has nothing to push against. Add a narrator who is wrong and funny about it, keep the book to eighty three pages so the end is visible from the start, and open with something already happening. That is four decisions, and together they are why a child who says they hate reading finishes this one.

One reader's unprompted summary was that it is a clever concept with a plot that moves along quickly and keeps a reader's interest. Another, an adult, said he could see how young teen boys would especially enjoy it, and that if they get it they would probably laugh a lot. Neither of those is a description of a book about a lesson.

## Who is writing it

Bryant Benitez is a full time hospital chaplain with a Master of Divinity from Fuller Theological Seminary and more than ten years leading churches across several denominations. He says his heart is for those outside of the church.

That is the restraint explained. A chaplain arrives in the worst hour of a stranger's life with no shared vocabulary and no invitation to explain anything, and that work does not reward the direct approach. Readers keep independently describing these books as not in your face. It is an occupational habit rather than a positioning decision.



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Books by Bryant Benitez, pastor and hospital chaplain. Faith-based adventures for younger readers, with the faith in the plumbing, not painted on the front.