



Good and Evil in Modern Fantasy

How morality, moral gray, and redemption shape modern fantasy themes — and why Sacred Grimdark restores weight to good and evil in fantasy.



“Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness.”

— Isaiah 5:20

There are moments in a reader's life when a pattern becomes impossible to ignore. For me, that moment came sometime around 2006.

I had spent years reading fantasy. I loved the genre. I loved its worlds, its myths, its heroes, and its ability to ask questions larger than everyday life. Fantasy had always been one of the places where humanity explored its deepest fears, greatest hopes, and most enduring truths.

Yet the more I read, the more I noticed something changing. The stories were becoming darker. Not merely darker in content. Darker in conviction.



When Good and Evil Began to Dissolve

Again and again I encountered the same assumptions. Heroes were flawed — that was understandable. Heroes failed — that was realistic. Heroes struggled — that was human. But increasingly the stories moved beyond these truths and embraced something else entirely.

Good and evil themselves began to dissolve.

- Every villain possessed understandable motives.
- Every hero carried hidden corruption.
- Every institution was compromised.
- Every cause was suspect.
- Every act of mercy concealed self-interest.
- Every sacrifice was eventually revealed to be foolish.

The message was rarely spoken aloud, but it was present nonetheless: everyone is morally gray. Nothing is truly good. Nothing is worth defending except survival.



When Moral Complexity Becomes Moral Confusion

At first this felt refreshing. Fantasy had long suffered from shallow heroes and simplistic villains. Complexity brought realism. Human beings are complicated creatures. We wrestle with pride, selfishness, fear, doubt, and failure.

But eventually I began to ask a question. What happens when moral complexity becomes moral confusion? There is a difference. Complexity

acknowledges that good people fail. Confusion questions whether goodness exists at all.

That distinction matters. Because once goodness itself becomes suspect, every story begins moving toward the same conclusion. Power becomes the only remaining virtue. Survival becomes the only remaining goal. Hope becomes naïveté. Mercy becomes weakness. Faith becomes self-deception. Sacrifice becomes a mistake.



The Problem Was Never Darkness

I found myself increasingly dissatisfied with those answers. Not because they were dark. Darkness has always existed. The ancient myths knew darkness. The epics knew darkness. The Scriptures know darkness. Tolkien knew darkness. Lewis knew darkness.

The problem was never the presence of evil. The problem was the elevation of evil. Darkness was no longer an enemy to resist. It had become the lens through which everything was interpreted. And eventually it began to feel less honest than it claimed to be.

For if every act of goodness is secretly selfish, if every sacrifice is ultimately meaningless, if every virtue masks another vice, then the story has ceased exploring reality and has begun assuming its conclusion. The conclusion is simply despair.

I could not accept that. Not as a reader. Not as a pastor. Not as a student of history. And certainly not as a Christian.



Goodness Is Real, Too

Human beings are fallen. That much is true. Sin is real. Evil is real. The history of our world demonstrates this with painful clarity.

Yet history also reveals something else. Mercy is real. Love is real. Sacrifice is real. People do lay down their lives for others. Parents do sacrifice for their children. Friends do remain loyal. The faithful do endure suffering rather than abandon truth.

These realities are no less true than evil. In fact, they may be the only reason evil remains recognizable. For we cannot identify a thing as twisted unless something straight exists by which to measure it.

“We cannot identify a thing as twisted unless something straight exists by which to measure it.”

— Marginalia, anon.

Pinned to the door of the Scribe's study.



The Seed of Sacred Grimdark

This realization became the seed from which The Chronicles of the Archangels eventually grew. I did not begin writing with the intention of creating a genre. I did not set out to create Sacred Grimdark. At the time, I had never heard the term.

I simply wanted to tell a different kind of story. A story where darkness was real. A story where suffering mattered. A story where evil possessed

intelligence and purpose. But also a story where goodness was not an illusion. Where faith mattered. Where mercy mattered. Where sacrifice mattered. Where redemption remained possible.

Not easy. Not guaranteed. Not cheap. Possible. The distinction is important.



What Sacred Grimdark Embraces

Sacred Grimdark does not reject darkness. It embraces the reality of darkness more fully than many genres. Its villains are not misunderstandings. Its wounds are not superficial. Its consequences are not temporary.

People die. Kingdoms fall. The innocent suffer. The faithful carry scars. Yet darkness is never granted final authority.

That is where Sacred Grimdark parts company with much of modern fantasy. The central question is not, can darkness win? The central question is, what remains worth defending when darkness appears to be winning?

“What remains worth defending when darkness appears to be winning?”

— Sacred Grimdark — the question beneath the question

The answer is rarely comfort. The answer is rarely certainty. Often the answer comes at tremendous cost. Yet the answer remains. Truth. Mercy. Faith. Sacrifice. Love. Not because they are easy. Not because they

guarantee victory. But because they remain true even when darkness argues otherwise.



Why Good and Evil Still Matter

This is why good and evil continue to matter. Not because human beings are simple — we are not. Not because heroes are perfect — they are not. Not because villains lack complexity — they do not.

Good and evil matter because reality itself is not morally neutral. The choices we make matter. The lives we touch matter. The truths we defend matter. The lies we believe matter.

Fantasy has always been one of humanity's greatest tools for exploring these realities. It asks questions large enough to contain both dragons and redemption. Both kingdoms and sacrifice. Both darkness and hope.

The best fantasy does not ignore evil. It confronts it. But neither does it surrender to it.



Why Sacred Grimdark Exists

That is why I began writing. And ultimately, that is why Sacred Grimdark exists. Not to deny darkness. But to refuse to worship it.

If you want the full definition of the subgenre this essay rests on, read the cornerstone page: [What Is Sacred Grimdark?](#)



Continue the Journey

The questions raised in this essay — good and evil, mercy and sacrifice, intelligent evil and costly redemption — are the moral architecture of The Chronicles of the Archangels. Begin with Book 1, Betrayal, where the fall of Kristov Abhorn opens the long descent and the first candle is lit against it.



Continue the reading at SacredGrimdark.com