



Born of Hell

John Sandycove

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In the Christian fantasy novel Born of Hell, good and evil supernatural forces are seen to shape human history.

In John Sandycove's fantasy novel *Born of Hell*, demonic powers and vices have an impact on human history.

Since the beginning of time, the Fallen Angel has imbued rulers with dark powers. He terrorizes Christian settlements and dominates the continents of Euron and Asion, leaving pain and destruction in his wake. With the assistance of a created race known as the Ogozyl Yagdurlal, evil rulers like Bartukhan and Guneyan contribute to the fall of notable human empires, including those of the Romans and Byzantines. Meanwhile, Christians fight to topple the growing darkness that consumes their lands.

As the story moves through history, philosophical inquiries about the seven deadly sins arise alongside visceral descriptions of evil deeds committed by the Ogozyl Yagdurlal and their current leaders. Imagery of blood and hellfire drives the book's ecstatic coverage of human violence and demonic works. Militaristic exchanges between rulers and their foot soldiers come in, but in sparse order; characters' encounters most often serve the larger push and pull of good versus evil. Few particular characters stand out, and the story comes to seem too impersonal in its approach.

Indeed, the Fallen Angel is the primary recurring character. He witnesses the rise and fall of the many leaders he imbues with his powers, including Sherhan, who grows arrogant after being granted demonic abilities, and who is thus eliminated. But even the Fallen Angel is not developed beyond his indomitable powers and insatiable desire to spread evil. As various rulers struggle to maintain their control over the territories they conquer, the angel strikes with repeated force; descriptions of battles and pillaging dominate and repeat. The Christians' fight for good fades beneath the forcefulness of the angel and those who do his bidding.

The names of the book's nations are spelled in a variety of ways; misspellings are frequent. Still, its world is a clear recreation of human history (here, "Euron" stands in the place of Europe, and "Syrea" of Syria). These decisions muddy the novel's fantasy roots. Further, ethnic essentialism is rampant in the book's regional assignments, with the evil Ogozyl Yagdurlal created from the ranks of Mongolians and Turks. Middle Eastern-coded rulers are most often chosen to receive the angel's help in gaining control over Christian territory, while political movements like democracy, capitalism, and neoliberalism are framed as history's natural progression. This modern Western perspective detracts from the strength of the story as a whole.

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ALEENA ORTIZ (October 19, 2021)

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