

## Revelations

**J. F. Tucker**

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*This family-centered young adult fantasy novel successfully integrates its spiritual themes.*

The first book in a young adult Christian fantasy series, J. F. Tucker's *Revelations* is a well-composed drama in which a teenager fights to prevent the devil from claiming her soul.

As if high school wasn't already difficult enough, sixteen-year old Alexis Neil returns to school with a guilty conscience. Her self-worth and Catholic faith are shaken in the wake of her best friend, Avery's, horrific death. Alexis finds companionship and first love in an exchange student, Rafael, whose friendship provides the stability she needs to recover mentally.

Soon, though, Alexis finds herself caught in a maelstrom of cataclysmic events. These involve a militaristic branch of the Catholic Church known as the Brethren. Alexis's discovery of Rafael's, and her family's, connection to the Brethren leads her to question her relationship to her loved ones, casting further doubt on her already tenuously held faith. This sets the scene for an intense battle between good and evil, with Alexis's soul at stake.

Characterization is somewhat black and white, in keeping with the novel's young adult and Christian themes. Still, it is one of the strongest elements of the book, which effectively explores Filipino family culture within the context of Catholicism. Teen angst and teen romance are handled with a sincerity that is both refreshing and appropriate.

Dialogue conveys the wide range of emotions that its teen protagonists face as they confront death, first love, sibling rivalry, and the alienation and social awkwardness that come with navigating high school life. Glories and failures are both captured with honesty and immediacy.

The local flavor of the idyllic Southern California setting is very visually described, evoking a mood and atmosphere that stands in contrast to Alexis's battle against interior darkness. There are even clever in-jokes, such as a note about the incompetence of Pacific Gas and Electric, whose inconsistent services figure into the ensuing spiritual battle.

Pacing in the first third of the novel is flat; it takes its time to set up Alexis's intentions, and the story is somewhat predictable in the meantime. However, midway through the novel, the action explodes. The story becomes a fast-paced adventure whose intensity does not relent until the end.

The mystery wrapped within the story feels unfinished, though this may serve to set up future books in the series.

*Revelations* is a family-centered young adult fantasy that successfully integrates its spiritual themes.

NANCY POWELL (June 23, 2017)

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