



## Satan's Stronghold

**Robert Gallant**

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*The book's constant use of verbal volleys, unexpected events, and ventures into the dark and dangerous bayou keep the plot going at full-tilt.*

Robert Gallant's *Satan's Stronghold* explores the complexities of relationships and the nature of evil while taking readers on a fast-paced jaunt through the swamps of Louisiana.

Recently orphaned graduate student Chesney becomes suspicious when Travis, claiming to work for the DEA, shows up at her door, offering a chance for vengeance against the drug dealers that killed her mother. The champion swimmer wonders whether she can trust Travis's claims that he needs her help to bring down a meth lab in Atchafalaya Basin. When she reluctantly agrees to become involved, the line between good and evil gets even murkier. Can Chesney survive this ordeal?

The author maintains suspense and crafts well-rounded characters by giving every man Chesney comes into contact with, including Travis, likable qualities mixed with deceptiveness. As Chesney wonders which of these beguiling men she can trust, the audience has the same problem. Wondering who is manipulating whom for what purpose keeps the pages turning. The steamy Louisiana setting becomes a character in its own right as Gallant firmly situates his book amid the region's unique flora and fauna.

While Travis's teachings help transform Chesney into a warrior, some of his lessons strain credibility. It seems difficult to believe that a woman in her mid-twenties, whom the book describes as being attractive to men, needs to be taught by a man how to use her body and sex appeal as weapons.

But Gallant makes up for this shortcoming by also portraying Chesney as a quick learner who uses creative methods to fend for herself when she is seemingly trapped. For example, the way that she gains a captor's trust bit by bit, ultimately using what little freedom he gives her to escape his clutches entirely, makes for a masterfully detailed plan that few prisoners would think of. Her resilience and resourcefulness make her a character to root for.

The book's constant use of verbal volleys, unexpected events, and ventures into the dark and dangerous bayou keep the plot going at full-tilt. Short, dialogue-heavy chapters lend the novel an urgency found in well-done action movies. Gallant also excels at on-point, unique similes, such as describing a man's fear thus: "His hand crunched into the beer can like a man clinging to a window ledge ten stories up."

Besides Chesney's obliviousness to her sexuality, the book cover is problematic. On the front, it is difficult to differentiate the black title type from the black silhouettes of the characters. The dark title fades into a background of fog, which renders everything even harder to distinguish. The back-cover copy describes the story in too much detail, and names too many characters.

This tale is a powerful thriller with a strong female protagonist.

JILL ALLEN (December 1, 2015)

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