

## Earthly Vessels: Magical Realism, with the Forces of Light and Dark Battling on Earth

David T. Isaak

Pamela Blake

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*Subverting genre motifs, the exciting metaphysical novel Earthly Vessels troubles its way through religious traditions, different planes of existence, and reincarnation and the beliefs behind souls.*

In David T. Isaak's perspective-bending novel *Earthly Vessels*, myriad belief systems are the foundation for a unique, delightful adventure.

After an erotic yet nonchalant run-in with a cult in the late 1960s, self-proclaimed free-loving hippie Crystal becomes pregnant. As a result, and unbeknownst to him, Crystal's son Arby has the makings of someone special. But it's only well into his adulthood, when a freak occurrence spotlights his special talent, that all powers on Earth and beyond take an intense, dangerous interest in him. Arby then has to call into question his life experiences, wondering who and what he truly is. Meanwhile, a malevolent force threatens him, his loved ones, and perhaps the whole world.

Subverting genre motifs, the novel troubles its way through religious traditions, different planes of existence, and reincarnation and the beliefs behind souls. All such topics are melded, stretched, and honed to tell Arby's singular story, which teems and gleams with new life. Arby himself is a sarcastic hero with a dark sense of humor that belies how kind, compassionate, and curious he is. As he gets to know himself better, he begins to hope that he will be able to leave the world better off than when he entered it. And his story is complemented by Crystal's thoughtful, whimsical, and grounded voice: her sense of self is keen, so that even those who go against Arby find her to be formidable. Arby's macabre, entertaining central foe—known as Benedikt von Fleischer, the Tanagrim, and the Flayer—exhibits such suave cruelty that he is fascinating, all while inhabiting all planes of existence as an indomitable force of evil.

The book weaves elements of history, science, and metaphysics—plus a smidgen of sex—into its exciting pages quite well. Its prose is warm, quick-witted, and soaked in irony. Its point of view oscillates between a godlike omniscient force and the voices of the earthbound characters, all without losing its center. Through these multiple perspectives, worlds unfold—multiple, complicated planes of existence that evade easy visualization but that nonetheless burst with life and are infused with realism. It helps that the rules and mechanics of the book's world are filtered through Arby's fresh, inquisitive perspective. He meets kindred souls whose rich histories and particulars he honors; each leads to an epiphany, joy, or pain.

*Earthly Vessels* is a captivating fantasy novel that tracks the forces of good and evil on all planes of existence.

NATALIE WOLLENZIEN (April 20, 2024)

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