



Leftwich Blues/Elfwitch Rules

Jeffrey Cummins

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Leftwich Blues/Elfwitch Rules is an engaging fantasy novel in which teenagers in an alternate reality receive powerful messages about faith and family.

Adventure, alternative worlds, and the strength of family come together in Jeffrey Cummins's riveting young adult fantasy novel *Leftwich Blues/Elfwitch Rules*.

Chayse and Reed Leftwich are twins. They live in the rural Ozarks with only their mother. They are often left on their own while she works nights to provide for them. On one such evening, Chayse and Reed are confronted at their house by a strange woman, Miss Crutch, and two unfamiliar men who insist they are from child services. The children are taken to family court, where the judge determines that their mother is unfit to care for her family.

A young couple, who appear to be upstanding citizens and eager parents, are granted custody of the children. However, when their foster parents take them cave exploring only to trick them into entering an alternative world, Chayse and Reed discover that they are not doting parents, but rather the servants of Miss Crutch, who isn't a child services agent at all but rather a powerful sorceress known as the Elfwitch.

In the divergent narratives of Chayse and Reed, the novel shows how each person reacts to authority, fear, and questions of faith. Chayse's nature as a people pleaser, along with her desire for acceptance and stability, leads her to abandon her brother and ignore his suffering in order to protect herself, even if it means aligning herself with an evil entity. Reed rebels against the Elfwitch and refuses to give her what she wants; however, he rejects her out of anger, spite, and his anti-authority nature, and not out of any moral imperative to protect himself or his loved ones. Only after the two spend time in their respective situations do they realize that they serve a purpose bigger than themselves and that they need to look beyond their needs in order to save both this new world and the world they have always known.

The novel holds attention with its vibrant imagery, rich characterizations, and captivating story with a Christian message (here, hope and belief in God sustains people through difficult times). Drawing on symbols of light and darkness to highlight the dichotomy between faith and science, the novel casts those who uphold the values of God as noble and good, and those who question or even mock the idea as evil. However, the book's design and prose undermine its delivery. The front cover incorporates images that hint at the story within but that do not connect to one another. Further, convoluted sentence structures, inconsistent spacing between clauses, and abrupt transitions make for stilted reading, while missing and incorrect punctuation marks impede the story further.

Still, *Leftwich Blues/Elfwitch Rules* is an engaging fantasy novel in which teenagers in an alternate reality receive powerful messages about faith and family.

GAIL HOFFER-LOIBL (November 12, 2022)

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