



The Penitent :Part II

A. Keith Carreiro

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The Penitent: Part II is a thrilling religious fantasy set in a future when Jesus has been forgotten, but is about to come roaring back.

A. Keith Carreiro's exciting religious fantasy *The Penitent: Part II* imagines a world wherein religion has a chance to be reborn.

Matthew, a true believer, chooses to live apart from others to follow Jesus in a woodland refuge. Then Matthew discovers a child, left to die in the woods after her family was murdered. He decides to raise her as his own.

The girl, Evangel, forms a bond with three wolf pups, showing that she is much more than she seems. When violence enters the pairs' Edenic refuge, it takes a divine intervention for them to survive. Everyone involved is forever changed, having been touched by the grace of the true God.

The novel is set in a distant future with recognizable elements from the contemporary world. It begins with a lecture from a professor of the Old Earth who speaks about a coming singularity that will allow both humans and Lucifer to carve out a place in creation. That lecture ends with a warning about the coming apocalypse—one that took place well before the story began. Matthew and Evangel's tale charts the world's return to God and faith; it is a dramatic and exciting undertaking.

This post-apocalyptic fantasy also includes roving bands of outlaws, monastics hiding behind priory walls, and glorious knights on horseback. A shadow of Christianity remains, but the world's leadership has used the religion to reinforce their power. Detailed descriptions of life in the priory, and in the woods surrounding it, arise; the wider world is unexplored.

Matthew and Evangel are timeless examples of faith, rising to each new change and challenge with willingness to follow God. They are developed most early in the text, as when Evangel describes a dream about a "carpenter. I saw soldiers nail him to wood," whom Matthew says is central but forgotten. When it comes to their faith, they have a sense of mythic wonder.

The book's supporting characters are more conventional, including a ruffian with a heart of gold, an abbey prioress whose evil is delightful, and a mysterious groundskeeper who is more than he seems. Their conversations have a courtly air, and feature bards singing poetry and knights striving for justice. The focus is most on Evangel and Matthew, their spiritual growth, and their connection to God as their new piety draws the ire of the establishment. Their late trip to the priory becomes harrowing with violence and dread, leading into the opening chapters of the next book in the series.

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JEREMIAH ROOD (July 4, 2020)

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