

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

PUBLIC DOMAIN



An illustration of “The Hare and the Tortoise” from “Aesop’s Fables,” published by Bantam & Co., London, 1912. It is perhaps the most famous of all of Aesop’s tales.

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Aesop’s Fables

They’re Not Just for Children

A cornerstone of Western culture that continues to speak to us

JEFF MINICK

The canon of Western literature is like some storied gold mine, deep and old, and filled with riches. The Bible. The “Iliad” and the “Odyssey.” The “Aeneid.” “The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius.” “The Canterbury Tales.” Dante’s “Divine Comedy.” The plays of Molière and William Shakespeare. Jane Austen’s “Pride and Prejudice.” Tolstoy’s “War and Peace” and “Anna Karenina.” This short list only skims the surface of the hundreds of notable books from the last

One often overlooked architect of Western culture is a man shrouded in the mists of time.

3,000 years. Philosophy, scientific treatises, histories and biographies, poetry—the inventory of writers and their works seems inexhaustible. Philosopher Roger Scruton (1944–2020) spent a lifetime exploring these treasures. “The culture of a civilization,” he once stated, “is the art and literature through which it rises to consciousness of itself and defines its vision of the world.” Scruton’s declaration is true of all the world’s great civilizations.

Continued on Page 4



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HISTORY

The Scotland Witch Hunts and the Reign of Terror

PAUL J. PREZZIA

What does the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution have in common with the witch hunts in Europe? More than you might think. It's interesting that in our current climate with its wide cultural gap, "conservatives" denounce the Terror and "progressives" exorcise witch hunts. Yet, while apart in time and place, the events are eminently comparable.

Before getting deep into this, a little history refresher is in order. By "witch hunts," I'll be referring to the European witch hunts, events that occurred mostly in the 15th through 17th centuries. The European witch hunts in general, or the question of Satanism, is too large a topic to address in one article, but I'll focus on one set of witch hunts: the North Berwick Witch Trials that took place in Scotland in 1590. These trials are a good example of the whole three centuries identified by scholars as the European "witch craze." They are a good example because just as in almost all the other witch hunts, the roughly 70 victims were killed not by mobs but by the legal process itself.

Meanwhile, the Reign of Terror marks one act in the much larger drama of the French Revolution. The revolution started in 1789 and is generally held to end with rise of Napoleon in 1799. The Reign of Terror takes up less than a tenth of this period, from the fall of 1793 to the summer of 1794. While the Reign of Terror claimed at least 260,000 lives, considering war and mob violence, this article is concerned only with the 2,596 men and women who were sentenced to death by the Revolutionary Tribunal, a court set up by the revolutionary French government to try political crimes.

Dehumanization

Both the Revolutionary Tribunal and the North Berwick Witch Trials required certain beliefs and language to fuel their demands for blood. It was a rhetoric that made out its targets to be a different breed of human, or even less than human. In the North Berwick Witch Trials, this rhetoric was widespread. It was used by men of state, such as James VI, king of Scotland; it was even used by the witches speaking about themselves.

Take Agnes Sampson. Accused, she maintained her innocence in spite of torture, that is, until it was required that her body be searched for the "Devil's mark." After she endured this humiliating experience, perhaps doubly humiliating for a woman in a Christian society that demanded modesty, it was claimed that this "mark" was found in her private parts. Finally, according to "Newes from Scotland," Agnes confessed that "the Diuell" made her and the other witches "kisse his Buttocks," after which, "he receiued their oathes for their good and true seruice towards him." Already placed outside the pale of humanity by the words and actions of those around her, Agnes upped the ante and cast herself as a witch.

During the Reign of Terror, just as in Scotland a century before, the leadership of the state played its role in furnishing the dehumanizing rhetoric that its court would implement. Aristocrats were condemned by their birth, whether they were on the side of the revolution or not. No Rights of Man for them; they must not be human anyway. Then there were all the other kinds of "counterrevolutionaries." Who was included under this designation? The legislation listed such criminals as "those who have sought to inspire discouragement" or who "disseminated false news." What was the punishment, according to this legislation? "The penalty provided for all offences under the jurisdiction of the Revolutionary Tribunal is death." This penalty is only sensible, given that the greatest of the "Terrorists," Maximilien Robespierre himself, had maintained in one speech that there were "two peoples" in France: the patriots and the counterrevolutionaries. Why consider mitigating any punishments for a "people" who had no human rights to begin with?

The Courts

We've already begun to consider the role of law while considering the role of beliefs and rhetoric in these persecutions, and that is fitting. One mark of any good witch hunt and witch trial is how closely they muddle together the judicial system and mere opinions. Surely no court is ever completely unbiased by whatever opinions are popular and "in the air," but the degree to which the witch trials mix them is unique.

The North Berwick Witch Trials are perfect examples of this because they were promoted by the king of Scotland (and England), James VI, and because the same James VI wrote a treatise on witchcraft, called "Daemonologie." The private theorist of witchcraft was also a witness for the prosecution, a prosecutor, and if not officially a judge, a major influence in the sentencing.

The Revolutionary Tribunal is hardly a less perfect example of the mixing of opinion and judicial power, given that Robespierre was a public speaker, a legislator, and one of the men who brought the tribunal into being. "Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution" recounts how Robespierre's preoccupations with "unmasking" traitors were frequently mirrored in the judgments of the courts: His co-revolutionaries were condemned to death on trumped-up charges because they were merely suspected, for example, of having "aristocratic blood." Robespierre's obsession with "republican (that is, revolutionary) virtue" showed up in the tribunal's condemnation of 22 men of a different political party to death. The

Comparing an event in the French Revolution to a witch hunt gains us greater and deeper understanding of both events.



Late-18th century portrait of Olympe de Gouges by Alexander Kucharsky.



Suspected witches kneeling before King James VI, from "Daemonologie" (1597).



The execution of Olympe de Gouges, a feminist writer, during the Reign of Terror.



"A Capital Execution, Place de la Révolution, circa 1793" by Pierre-Antoine Demachy. The Museums of the City of Paris.

shared reason was that they lacked "virtue." What was the proof? They did not support all the extreme measures that Robespierre desired to take in exterminating the unvirtuous.

Shared Beliefs

Finally, a shared phenomenon of self-cannibalism unites these two series of trials. Innocent or not of other crimes, the women and men brought before the courts in North Berwick or the Revolutionary Tribunal in Paris were very often people who shared the same outlook as their persecutors. In the witch trials, people who believed in Christian teaching regarding the power of the devil condemned people who believed in Christian teaching regarding the power of the devil. In the Reign of Terror, people who believed in the principles of the French Revolution guillotined persons who fully believed in the principles of the French Revolution. The most extreme example is the trial and execution of the female author Olympe de Gouges, who had written a work titled "Declaration of the Rights of Women" and who repeatedly voiced her good revolutionary sentiments throughout her trial.

Comparing an event in the French Revolution to a witch hunt gains us greater and deeper understanding of both events. It also broadens one's capacity for understanding human nature, to see the common political venom in two situations: one commonly thought of as "religious," and one associated with "enlightened" principles. It sheds light on the potential that new-fashioned moralisms have for violence, when they are dehumanizing and when they get adopted by the official legal and judicial system. Finally, it reveals one hidden danger of insisting too much on ideological purity. You may end up hurting the very people who are on your side. You may even condemn yourself.

Paul Joseph Prezvia received his M.A. in history from the University of Notre Dame in 2012. He now teaches at Gregory the Great Academy and lives in Elmhurst Township, Pa. with his wife and children.

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“The Lion and the Mouse” illustrated by Ernest Grisot from “Aesop’s Fables,” 1869.

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An illustration of Aesop’s fable “The Animals and the Plague” by François Chauveau in La Fontaine’s “Fables.”

PD-US



An illustration of “The Oxen and the Axle-Trees” by Edward Julius Detmold from the 1909 edition of “The Fables of Aesop.”

Aesop’s Fables They’re Not Just for Children

A cornerstone of Western culture that continues to speak to us

Continued from Page 1

Even today in Western society, when so many either ignore or attack traditional culture and values, all of us—even the most vehement opponents—are indebted to thinkers and artists like Socrates, Pascal, Giotto, Michelangelo, Scarlatti, and Mozart.

One often overlooked architect of Western culture is a man shrouded in the mists of time, but whose influence has been enormous: the maker of fables, Aesop.

The Mystery Man

Scholars have long debated the identity of Aesop and, indeed, whether he ever existed. Even to the ancients, Aesop was a riddle. Some thought him a slave, others regarded him as an adviser to King Croesus, and still others considered him a Greek, a Thracian, an Ethiopian, or a riddle solver from the island of Samos



A bust of Aesop, a cast in the Pushkin Museum from the Hellenistic statue, Art Collection of Villa Albani, Rome. SHAKKO/CC BY-SA 3.0

who became an adviser to the king of Babylon.

While we may never know whether a man called Aesop walked the earth, composed or collected fables, and then passed them along to his contemporaries, we do know for certain that the moralistic tales gathered under his name have long influenced our culture and contributed to the education of our young people.

Even today, Aesop’s fables appear in children’s anthologies. In William Bennett’s “The Book of Virtues for Young People,” for example, we find “The Fox and the Crow,” “The Frogs and the Well,” “The Flies and the Honey Pot,” “The Bear and the Travelers,” “Hercules and the Wagoner,” and “The Farmer and His Sons,” all attributed to the ancient fabulist.

The Tortoise and the Hare

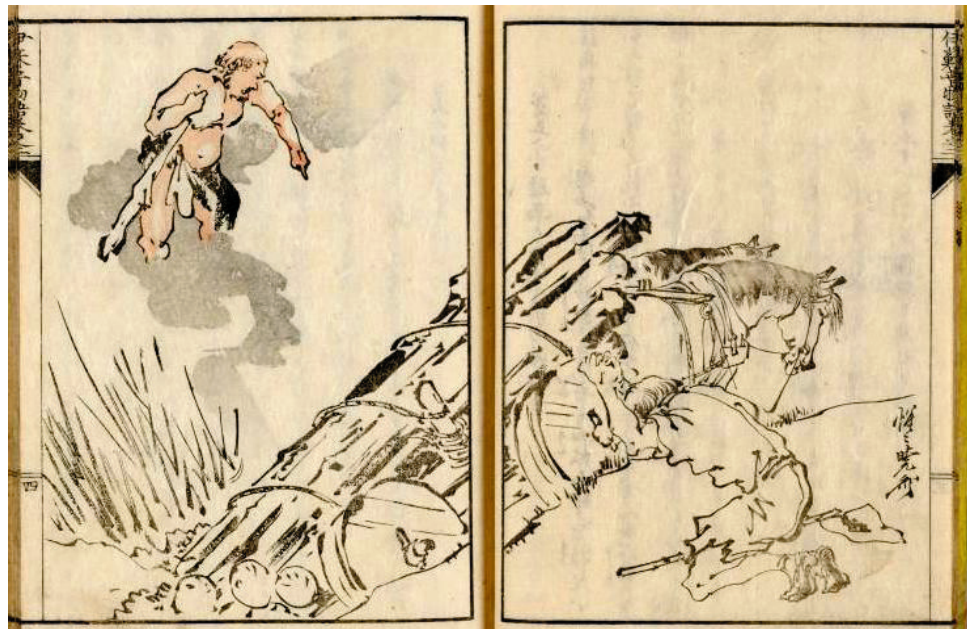
Here is perhaps the best known of Aesop’s fables. We find this story of a race

between a rabbit and a turtle in numerous collections of children’s literature as well as stand-alone storybooks. If we go to YouTube and check for “The Tortoise and the Hare,” multiple videos about this most famous of races also pop up. Indeed, as long ago as 1934, Walt Disney Studios produced a cartoon of this popular tale.

In case you need a reminder, here’s the fable in brief. A hare proclaims himself the swiftest creature in all the forest. Tired of the hare’s braggadocio, a tortoise accepts the challenge to a race. The hare agrees, and off they go. The hare so quickly outpaces the tortoise that he decides to take a break, lies down, and falls asleep on the sunlit grass. The plodding tortoise passes by the sleeping hare and crosses the finish line just as the hare awakens to find himself the loser.

The moral of the story: Slow and steady wins the race.

▲ The fable “The Wolf and the Lamb” is relevant for our times. The 1747 painting of Aesop’s tale by Jean-Baptiste Oudry, Palace of Versailles.



A Japanese woodblock illustration (“ehon”) of the fable “Hercules and the Wagoner” from an 1872 edition of Tsōzoku isho monogatari. Aesop’s fables have been cherished all over the world.

PUBLIC DOMAIN



“The Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing,” 1687, a woodcut by Francis Barlow.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

The first Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus, also known as Octavian, adopted as his personal motto “Festina lente,” which translates into English as “Make haste slowly.” In other words, keep on moving but do a thorough job. Had Aesop’s fable inspired Octavian in this regard? We can’t be certain, but he was surely familiar with the Greek and his stories as one of the emperor’s freemen, Phaedrus, put together a collection of these tales.

Whatever the case, most of us have heard any number of times “Slow and steady wins the race,” which is one more sign of Aesop’s ongoing influence on our culture.

More Gifts

Other popular fables accredited to Aesop include “The Fox and the Grapes,” “The Ant and the Grasshopper,” “The Lion and the Mouse,” and “The Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing.”

Just like “The Tortoise and the Hare,” each of these tales imparts a lesson. In “The Lion and the Mouse,” for instance, a mouse awakens a lion, who intends to eat his tiny intruder. The mouse begs for his life, promising the lion that someday he may be able to help the king of the jungle. Laughing at this absurdity, the lion releases the mouse. Later, when the lion becomes ensnared in a trap, the mouse hears his roaring, runs to assist him, chews through the ropes binding him, and saves the lion’s life.

The moral of the story: “A kindness is never wasted” and “Big or small, we can help each other.”

For the Grownups

But what of the fables less well-known to readers? In particular, what fables might fit our own era and our station in life?

Below are two of Aesop’s fables that seem aimed at today’s political turmoil and mess. Both are from a selection of Aesop’s tales from The Aesop for Children presented by the Library of Congress’s website. Despite that title, many of us of any age can find sound advice for living in these tales. In addition, some of the stories seem intended more for adults than for children. Here are two of them.

“The Animals & the Plague” tells of animals who, suffering from widespread sickness, gather together to discuss the situation. The lion proposes that they offer in sacrifice the guiltiest among them to propitiate the gods, and then

confesses his own “sins” of having eaten different animals and even a shepherd or two. Other carnivores such as the wolf relate similarly bloody attacks on their fellow animals. But when the ass admits to eating grass from a field not his own, the other animals blame him as the cause of the plague, turn on him, and devour him on the spot.

The moral of the story: The weak are made to suffer for the misdeeds of the powerful. It’s also a denunciation of scapegoating and laying false accusations of blame.

In “The Wolf & the Lamb,” we receive another lesson in tyranny. A wolf spies a lamb at the edge of a creek and says, “You deserve to be punished for stirring up all the mud in the creek.” The lamb denies this charge, but the wolf persists, taking a new direction of attack: “You told lies about me. Or it was your brother.” When the lamb denies the charge, claiming to have no brother, the wolf says “It was someone in your family, and I have no intention of being cheated out of my breakfast.” The wolf then “seized the poor lamb and carried her off to the forest.”

The moral of the story: The tyrant can always find an excuse for his tyranny.

Both these tales carry implications and warnings for our own time, and appear especially pertinent to our time of pandemic and mandates.

Two of Aesop’s fables seem aimed at today’s political turmoil and mess.

Crosscurrents

These fables also speak to our time because they cut across cultural boundaries. The scholarly speculation about Aesop’s ethnicity—was he Greek? Thracian? Ethiopian?—alone reveals the multicultural origins of these stories.

And unlike the writings of a Plato or a Descartes, attacked by some today who are bent on undermining Western civilization, Aesop’s fables, like the fables from West Africa or India or any other region, are carriers of truths that supersede race and creed. Their morals are universal in their appeal to common decency and our humanity.

The frequent use of anthropomorphism in so many of these fables adds to this universalism, creating characters removed from the tribalism of the human race. Talking bears and roosters enhances a neutrality that might be absent had the fabulist used human beings.

No matter what our race or political beliefs, the morals of these fables should resonate with us. “They complain most who suffer least” (“The Oxen and the Axle-Trees”), “Give assistance, not advice, in a crisis” (“The Boy Bathing”), and “Deeds, not words” (“The Boasting Traveler”): These three examples all express commonsense ideas which, particularly in an age of moral ambiguity such as ours, might serve as building blocks for virtue and character.

Keeping the Tree Alive

In his Preface to “Culture Counts,” Roger Scruton remarked: “Our civilization has been uprooted. But when a tree is uprooted it does not always die. Sap may find its way to the branches, which break into leaf each spring with the perennial hope of living things. Such is our condition, and it is for this reason that culture has become not just precious to us, but a genuine political cause, the primary way of conserving our moral heritage and of standing firm in the face of a clouded future.”

Among the ancient roots of that tree of culture and civilization are Aesop’s fables. When we share these stories and their precepts with our children, or when we ourselves visit these old, cogent guidelines for living, pondering their significance and taking them into our hearts, we water those roots and keep alive that tree.

The moral of the story: Read some Aesop and introduce his fables to your children.

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminars of homeschooling students in Asheville, N.C. He is the author of two novels, “Amanda Bell” and “Dust On Their Wings,” and two works of non-fiction, “Learning As I Go” and “Movies Make The Man.” Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See JeffMinick.com to follow his blog.

SACRED MUSIC

From Scribe to Choir to Being Repurposed Over Generations, Medieval Christian Chant Book Fragments Reveal Stories

ANNA DE BAKKER & JENNIFER BAIN

Medieval chant books and the parchment they were made of were designed to last a long time—so long, that pages of them can outlast the book itself. Across medieval Europe, monks and nuns and clergy in city cathedrals sang daily chants in communal forms of timed and sung prayer still practiced by some Christians today. Fragments of chant books travel across time and space, ending up in antique stores, tucked away in attics, or even made into book covers.

Our research collects images of these scattered and fragmented pages of chant and creates inventories of their contents, revealing their many and varied stories.

Why Chant? Medieval Christian communities wrote down the many chants needed for their worship in books called antiphoners (music only), breviaries (which also included texts to be read), and graduals (containing chants that were part of the Mass, the central act of worship in the Catholic Church).

Each chant was intended to be sung at a particular time or occasion, and rarely did two communities do things exactly alike. Medieval chant books followed similar patterns, but they could also be surprisingly different from one another.

One monastery might sing a certain chant in the morning, while the nearby cathedral might sing it in the afternoon with a slightly different melody or celebrate a saint of local importance on that day instead. Taken together, such decisions can often be a kind of fingerprint for a manuscript. They can make it possible to identify where a book might have been from.

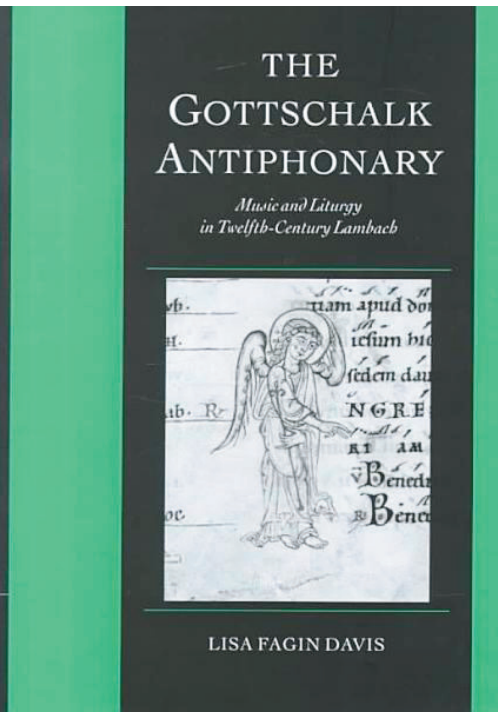
Reuniting Lost Books Many books didn't survive intact. Some were taken apart once their contents were no longer useful to their communities, or disassembled by booksellers hoping to make more money by selling the book page-by-page. One of the goals of our research is to make the contents of these individual pages easier to access so that they can be better understood.

Sometimes it is possible to reunite a book's pages again, especially if there is a clue about when and where the pages were last seen together.

For example, in the mid-20th century, American art history professor Otto Ege of



PANASPGS/SHUTTERSTOCK



A digital reconstruction of "The Gottschalk Antiphony."

they provide a window into a small piece of the past: the unique way that that community chose to celebrate.

Each page is a handmade object and reveals something about the people who made it. We have seen pages where an inattentive scribe forgot to include a letter or a note; another page is hand-stitched where someone carefully fixed a tear in the parchment.

Page references were added in or changed as the book was used. Some pages are plain, others purposefully illustrated, while others are whimsical. Among the hundreds of pages of an entire chant book, such details can go overlooked, but in isolation, they are a picture of a particular day in the working life of a scribe, illustrator, or musician.

Pages' Afterlives Just as often, the fragments are interesting not just for where they began but also for where they ended up, and how they got there.

Through our research, we've heard how one page, after arriving in Nova Scotia, was passed along through several people connected to the local symphony, tracing a story of friendships in a musical community.

Another fragment had been repurposed as the cover of a book, providing a glimpse into religious reforms. An early owner had written the titles of Lutheran hymns in between the older chants.

The individual personalities associated with each fragment sometimes come to the fore in delightful ways. One arrived with a letter describing how the letter-writer had fallen in love with the fragment while her family was temporarily installed in West Germany. The fragment was found in a shop adjacent to the many stalls selling "glühwein" (warm, spiced wine) and cuckoo clocks in a busy Christmas market.

Such stories are reminders that even in the absence of larger books, pages have individual journeys. From the time they were crafted to their paths into the 21st century, each is the product of individual choices set against the backdrop of historical changes and institutions—a page from a much bigger book.

Anna de Bakker is a post doctoral research associate in the department of music's Fountain School of Performing Arts at Dalhousie University, and Jennifer Bain is a professor of musicology and music theory at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia, Canada. This article was originally published on The Conversation.



BT PHOTOGRAPHY/SHUTTERSTOCK

A mulled wine stand in a Christmas market in Berlin. One page fragment was found in West Germany in a shop in a busy Christmas market.

WELL SAID

‘Blow Blow Thou Winter Wind’ by William Shakespeare

Traditionally, poetry offers us a deeply felt and articulate point of view on our world.

Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude;
Thy tooth is not so keen,
Because thou art not seen,
Although thy breath be rude.
Heigh-ho! sing, heigh-ho! unto the green holly:
Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly:
Then, heigh-ho, the holly!
This life is most jolly.
Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,
That dost not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot:
Though thou the waters warp,
Thy sting is not so sharp
As friend remembered not.
Heigh-ho! sing, heigh-ho! unto the green holly ...



DMITRY KOCHERGIN/SHUTTERSTOCK

Blow, blow, thou winter wind!



Mark Jackson grew up in Spring Valley, N.Y., where he attended a Waldorf school. At Williams College, his professors all suggested he write professionally. He acted professionally for 20 years instead. Now he writes professionally about acting. In the movies.

Babe Spies Save World From an Extremely Dangerous Cellphone

MARK JACKSON

"The 355" has exactly one thing going for it: the ridiculously talent-heavy cast of A-list lead actresses. It includes Jessica Chastain, Penélope Cruz, Lupita Nyong'o, Diane Kruger, and Bingbing Fan. They're all spies, in a spy caper, chasing a MacGuffin in the shape of a cellphone that, like the One Ring, can rule the world.

Who's Who Chastain plays Mace, a Krav Maga-and-guns wielding, married-to-the-CIA agent (she's played a few of these in her career). Lupita Nyong'o plays Khadijah, an MI-6 spy specializing in anything that's electrical and technical, who's got a boyfriend but gets sucked back into the life for that cliché one last mission.

Next up is Marie Schmidt (Kruger), a ruthless German agent with a penchant for going off the reservation. She's initially at odds with the rest of the women, trying to get her hands on the all-powerful cellphone MacGuffin.

Then comes Graciela (Cruz), a mom who's often on the phone with her kids. She's not a spy but a psychiatrist working for her country's (Colombia) spy agency.

Not trained in spy tradecraft, fighting, and weaponry, she also gets sucked into the on-going mêlée, and is in constant damsel-in-distress mode, which, since it's Penélope Cruz, is very fetching.

The film is basically what you channel surf late at night.

'The 355'

Director: Simon Kinberg
Starring: Jessica Chastain, Lupita Nyong'o, Penélope Cruz, Diane Kruger, Bingbing Fan, Sebastian Stan
Running Time: 2 hours, 2 minutes
MPAA Rating: PG-13
Release Date: Jan. 7, 2022

★★★★☆



UNIVERSAL PICTURES

The only reason to watch this movie is the beautiful cast of A-list actresses.

Finally, there's Lin Mi Sheng (Bingbing Fan), the Chinese beauty with staff weaponry skills who makes her appearance late in the film.

What Goes On There's lots and lots of chasing of the Jason Bourne type you know well: dashing through crowded marketplaces, throwing debris and people and motorcycles into the path of the pursuers, running down into subways, jumping trucks, fake-outs on trains, etc.

The ubiquitous double cross is easy to spot, the guy who was supposed to be dead is not dead ("Oh him again," eye-roll), and the one person you'd think wouldn't nail the bad guy with a well-placed .357 magnum blast is so obviously the obvious choice for that hoary twistaroonie, that you'd normally yawn.

And yet you don't yawn, even with the way-

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

Filmmaker Gary Ross's Love Letter to an American Underdog

MICHAEL CLARK

Although there are dozens of past champion thoroughbred horses with greater legacies and more wins, few have ever captured the hearts of more people (race fans and otherwise) than Seabiscuit (1933–1947). Writer and director Gary Ross's 2003 "Seabiscuit" is just one of 10 past Seabiscuit-centric productions, but it is arguably the most critically acclaimed, financially successful, thorough, heartwarming, and entertaining.

In his adaptation of Laura Hillenbrand's 1999 bestselling book "Seabiscuit: An American Legend," Ross includes as much of the book as a 140-minute feature can handle while walking a fine line between often intense drama and feel-good uplift. As with many fact-based sports films of this type ("Rudy," "Miracle," "A League of Their Own," "The Greatest Game Ever Played"), "Seabiscuit" is an underdog story where the titular or principal characters are vastly underappreciated or discounted and prove their worth through heart, relentless drive, sheer determination, and results.

Ross spends an unusually long stretch of time introducing and bringing together the four principal characters, most of whom come with considerable baggage.



"Red" Pollard (wearing red silks) riding Seabiscuit.

Not an Ideal Prospect

Originally from Georgia, Charles Howard (Jeff Bridges) moves to San Francisco in the early 1900s and opens a bicycle shop which soon tanks. But after getting filthy rich selling Buicks, he buys a ranch and eventually branches out into horse racing.

Although a foal of superior breeding, the smallish (just 14 hands high) Seabiscuit is lazy, ornery, eats too much, and was considered a lost cause by his previous trainer. These traits the new, soft-spoken trainer Tom Smith (Chris Cooper) feels he can fix.

The Canadian-born John "Red" Pollard (Tobey Maguire) grew up in an affluent family whose fortune eventually goes belly up. After a series of dead-end odd jobs, Red crosses paths with trainer Smith, who hires him as a jockey. Smith figures that the battered Pollard and the misfit Seabiscuit will complement each other, and he is right.

After this thorough chunk of exposition, Ross kicks off the second act by chronicling Seabiscuit's rise from lowly slacker and ne'er-do-well to the darling of the racing world. His rise is, perhaps, not so much due to his nine stakes race wins in less than two years, but with the unmistakable kinship and connection he's created with the American people.

The movie underscores the times: Desperate to find some respite amid relentless bad times, those who had never before seen a horse race (or even a horse) gravitated and clung to an inspirational creature that lifted their spirits and gave them some measure of hope. It also didn't hurt Seabiscuit's cause that famous Hollywood types (Clark Gable, Henry Fonda, Bing Crosby, and Mickey Rooney, among others) were huge fans.

So popular was the horse, he had more newspaper articles written about him in 1938 than Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Hitler. Some might be so bold as to consider Seabiscuit an American hero.

The Challenge Race

Howard and Smith feel that the best way to put Seabiscuit over the top would be a challenge race with War Admiral, at the time considered to be the greatest horse on the planet. After several of Howard's proposals for a "match race" are dismissed with blowhard, dismissive brushoffs, War Admiral's owner, Samuel Riddle (Eddie Jones)—under public pressure—has no choice but to acquiesce. Riddle's agreement comes with a list of demands that some feel might give War Admiral an unfair advantage, yet Howard nonetheless agrees to the terms, and the "race of



ALL PHOTOS BY DREAMWORKS PICTURES

(L-R) Tobey Maguire, Chris Cooper, and Jeff Bridges in "Seabiscuit."

the century" finally takes place at Pimlico in Baltimore, Maryland, on Nov. 1, 1938.

Over 40 million people listen to it on the radio.

Not brought up in the film but instead mentioned in the documentary that is included in most home video releases, Seabiscuit was the grandson of Man o War, whose son was War Admiral. The most famous challenge horse race in the world was between an uncle and his nephew.

Most filmmakers (and studios) would have ended the movie with the Pimlico race, but Ross rolled the dice by including two additional dramatic hurdles that, pardon the pun, raised the emotional stakes even higher. The bond between steed and rider is presented from a welcomed, nonracing perspective and, as before, the pair face seemingly insurmountable odds.

Narration by David McCullough

Having such an esteemed voice artist as David McCullough on board to provide narration always ups the prestige factor for any project, and Ross was wise not to overuse him. All too often, narration becomes the spackle to patch cracks in the screenplay, but that is not the case here. Still, Ross made the mistake of including information that really wasn't needed—and which actually detracts from the film as a whole.

Early on, the screenplay establishes that the story takes place during the Great Depression via visual cues and onscreen text, yet Ross felt the need to make sure no one missed the point by having McCullough describe people's pain and their collective plight. These six or so 30-second interludes—accompanied with montages of still photos—are mostly innocuous and play out like government-sponsored PSAs.

On two occasions, however, McCullough

too-long running time. Why? Well, there's surprisingly just enough tension and, unsurprisingly, there's such an abundance of female beauty that a certified hetero cisgender man such as myself, who's got the requisite degree of male toxicity that I enjoy the violence of American football and spies shooting guns, cannot help but be captivated enough to dismiss the boredom gathering like lint at the edges of my consciousness. These are hoary showbiz plays after all: Send in the clowns. Or the showgirls.

What Else?

Not much else. The women mostly claim to have various trust and daddy issues but after a bit of bonding they're immediately a sisterhood of babes, and you have the unfortunate feeling they could be back.

I'd wondered about whether, with this cast, there might be some kind of "women of the world unite to get rid of bad men" communism-inspired Hollywood subterfuge going on, but it doesn't really have that feel to it. It feels more like a bad Avengers movie where all the superheroes just happen to be beautiful women—beauty is sort of a superpower after all. This feeling probably stems from the fact that director Kinberg has made a few superhero movies.

The cast, aside from all being physical specimens, are all also world-class talented and can sell this foolishness. So "The 355" is a comic book and that's fine; it's all been done better and done worse—it's just a question of the degree of your need to waste your time with mindless entertainment thoroughly devoid of nutritional value.

It's not a movie to see in the theater; it's basically what you channel surf into late at night and keep half-watching while checking your Instagram while simultaneously reading a more interesting magazine article about rock-climbing, while also checking that eBay bidding war on the \$8,500 HD Softtail Slim with 4,560 miles, and then also Googling the occasional actress in "The 355" because you suddenly have a deep and abiding need to know what she looked like three years ago.

And really, it's this particular state of being that is the zombie-fying, soul-sucking culprit that some of us need to watch out for. If you watch this movie, you'll probably find yourself in this state. If you raise the quality of your leisure time, you'll never watch this movie.

describes the WPA (Works Progress Administration), a New Deal program instituted by the FDR administration to ease the suffering of Americans. On closer inspection, the working guts of the WPA was more political than humanitarian in nature and as such proved to be so controversial that it was halted in 1943, only eight years after it was implemented.

Even with this minor, ill-advised narrative inclusion, Ross, his team of technicians, and performers (including the 10 portraying the title character) made one of the greatest sports movies of all time, which will quite easily double for some as the light at the end of many tunnels.

Originally from Washington, D.C., Michael Clark has written for over 30 local and national film industry media outlets and is ranked in the top 10 of the Atlanta media marketplace. He co-founded the Atlanta Film Critics Circle in 2017 and is a regular contributor to the Shannon Burke Show on FloridaManRadio.com. Since 1995, Mr. Clark has written over 4,000 movie reviews and film-related articles.

'Seabiscuit'

Director: Gary Ross
Starring: Tobey Maguire, Jeff Bridges, Chris Cooper, Elizabeth Banks, Gary Stevens
Running Time: 2 hours, 20 minutes
MPAA Rating: PG-13
Release Date: July 25, 2003

★★★★★

PUBLIC DOMAIN



“The Creation of Light,” 1824, by John Martin. Illustration for “Paradise Lost” by John Milton.

REACHING WITHIN: WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

Wisdom and God’s Illuminated Truths: John Martin’s ‘The Creation of Light’

ERIC BESS

Sometimes things happen in life, and we just don’t know how to respond to them. Nowadays, there are many self-help guides that try to help people navigate their lives wisely. We want to behave wisely, but what is wisdom?

An illustration by the 19th-century artist John Martin, called “The Creation of Light” might give us insight into the nature of wisdom.

In 1824, Martin was commissioned by publisher Septimus Prowett to illustrate John Milton’s 17th-century book “Paradise Lost.” “Paradise Lost” is an epic poem about the Fall of mankind in which Adam and Eve were tempted by Satan to eat fruit from the Tree of Knowledge and were exiled from the Garden of Eden as a consequence.

Martin was to provide two illustrations for each of the 12 books of the poem. Possessing 24 illustrations in total, Prowett published the prints and the text as part of a 12-month subscription service. Later, in 1846, another publisher, Charles Whittingham, published all 24 illustrations with the text as a full edition of the poem.

The Creation of Light

One of Martin’s illustrations is called “The Creation of Light,” and it depicts part of the seventh book of “Paradise Lost.” The design shows a cavern of dark, swooping clouds separating to reveal the light of the sun on the upper left side of the composition and the moon and stars on the lower right side. Below is a vast and calm sea.

In the middle of the composition is God. It is common for Jesus to be represented throughout Western art history but very unusual for God to be represented. Here,

Martin depicts God as a translucent being who, with a gesture of his hands toward the sun and moon, separates the clouds to reveal light.

So, how exactly might Martin’s print suggest wisdom? We can presume that the scene was completely dark before God created light. In the image, God allows the light of the sun and moon to shine forth by separating the clouds that obscure it.

What does light do in our world? Light reveals the appearance of things and allows us to easily discern one thing from another. It also allows us to gather knowledge about those things that are illuminated. In other words, the light represents the truth. Our ability to discern according to our understanding of truth corresponds with our ability to be wise. Here, the light of the sun doesn’t represent just any truth. It represents divine truth, and this is why it is God who reveals this light. Divine truth—represented by the sun—also makes its effect known in the darkest times and areas by reflecting off of the moon and illuminating the night.

Insight Into Divine Truth

The representation of God himself may give us more insight into what is meant by divine truth. God is depicted almost like a translucent spirit, which suggests that God and the divine truth he sets out to reveal is beyond the world and is of a spiritual nature. Not only does God separate the clouds so that the light can be revealed, but in separating the clouds, he also reveals the order of the universe: that the sun is to the east and the moon and stars to the west, and that the sky is above and the sea below. Does this suggest that wisdom can be found in how the universe is ordered and harmonized?

Truth is discernible only by way of God.

For more arts and culture articles, visit TheEpochTimes.com

The revealed night sky and the sea are presented as deeply calm and mysterious. Might it be the case that the mysteries of divine truths are revealed when we achieve a state of deep calm? The sun, however, doesn’t seem calm at all. The sun’s rays almost seem to blast forth their luminance through the night sky as if momentarily splitting it open. Might these compositional elements represent the power of divine truth?

The clouds, however, represent that which obscures light and divine truth. Does this mean that the clouds prevent proper knowledge and discernment of the world, that the clouds obscure the calm and mysterious power of divine truth? In other words, the clouds—like Satan tempting Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in Milton’s “Paradise Lost”—obscure divine truth and prevent proper wisdom.

To me, all of this suggests that wisdom is the ability to discern truth, and truth is discernible only by way of God. How might we recognize the truths illuminated by God so that we may live our lives with wisdom?

Have you ever seen a work of art that you thought was beautiful but had no idea what it meant? In our series “Reaching Within: What Traditional Art Offers the Heart,” we interpret the classical visual arts in ways that may be morally insightful for us today. We try to approach each work of art to see how our historical creations might inspire within us our own innate goodness.

Eric Bess is a practicing representational artist and is a doctoral candidate at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts (IDSVA).



KRISTI BLOKHIN/SHUTTERSTOCK

Traditionally, poetry offers us a deeply felt and articulate point of view on our world.

The joy of unexpected beauty.

WELL SAID

‘A Winter Bluejay’ by Sara Teasdale

Crisply the bright snow whispered,
Crunching beneath our feet;
Behind us as we walked along the parkway,
Our shadows danced,
Fantastic shapes in vivid blue.
Across the lake the skaters
Flew to and fro,
With sharp turns weaving
A frail invisible net.

In ecstasy the earth
Drank the silver sunlight;
In ecstasy the skaters
Drank the wine of speed;
In ecstasy we laughed
Drinking the wine of love.
Had not the music of our joy
Sounded its highest note?
But no,
For suddenly, with lifted eyes you said,
“Oh look!”
There, on the black bough of a snow flecked maple,
Fearless and gay as our love,
A bluejay cocked his crest!
Oh who can tell the range of joy
Or set the bounds of beauty?

BOOK REVIEW

‘Britfield & The Rise of the Lion’

A smart, adventurous young adult series for the modern reader

DUSTIN BASS

In 2019, the Britfield adventure began in England with its first book, “Britfield & the Lost Crown.” “Britfield & The Rise of the Lion,” the second installment of a planned seven-book young adult series, was released in the summer of 2021. The series follows the harrowing escapes, of which there are many, of Tom and Sarah, two teenage orphans on the run. Exactly who they are running from is what they are trying to figure out.

The first book places the reader inside Weatherly Orphanage, located in Yorkshire, the county in Northern England from where Tom and his best friend Sarah escape to London. From trains to hot air balloons, the two hold on to minute clues, garner helpful new friends, and avoid the police, orphanage employees, and hitmen as they try to make it to the big city to live in freedom.

The first book was a fun adventure with memorable characters and moments impossible to forget. The second book does its best to live up to the debut, and it hardly falters. Yet the second installment, set in France, is quite darker than the first.

After reading the first, I had a hard time believing how well-written and engrossing it was. It felt almost too perfect, and I continued to anticipate an eventual letdown or at least a misstep. Thankfully, there wasn’t one. The author, C.R. Stewart, has obviously done his research into what engages young audiences, and I dare say older audiences as well.

The first book ends with clues into who Tom is, why some powerful people are trying to find him, and also why other powerful people are trying to protect him. In the second book, the powers that be come to light, or “to dark,” in many cases. There is more violence in the second one than the first—and, honestly, it is in abundance. The violence, however, is not grotesque or highly detailed, but it is there, and for good reason as the Britfield story begins to unravel the true nature of this good-versus-evil series.

Regarding true nature, Tom and Sarah do encounter providence quite often and, to an extent, more than is plausible with human nature, as some of these perfect strangers turn into perfect friends. It may be the author’s hint that there are people in the world, those we do not know, who are worthy of our complete trust, or it may simply be to move the story along—or both.

History Is in the Details

Aside from the storyline, Stewart proves to be an excellent writer who adheres to detail, but not to the point where the reader wishes to skip ahead. He introduces his young readers to the history of people (like kings, queens, and nobles) as well as places (like cities, castles, and museums). By his choice of settings, the author creates a modern world encapsulated by the world of the past.

The books also indulge in the finer things in life, like art, food, and architecture. They are undoubtedly smart books that will challenge the reader to understand that history and culture are entirely significant not only to the story but also to the world as we know it.

Regarding details, the author is an apparent fan of weaponry. He identifies the types of weapons used by heroes and villains alike, ranging from Berettas and Glockes to explosives and helicopters. The itemized details in the story invites readers to stop after reading, or even while reading, and pull up photos or websites online to learn about or at least view the subjects mentioned. In a way, the books are rather interactive for kids and adults alike.

Believable Dialogue

One issue that most readers, including myself, cannot overlook is dialogue. The Britfield series is dialogue-driven with an immense number of characters. The author understands the power of dialogue, not just in what is said but also in how it is said.

Stewart writes believable dialogue, which is a skill that many writers struggle to master. His ability to slide in sarcasm and wit even during hectic moments provides a nice, though brief, reprieve from the constant anxiety. It is this dialogue that brings the characters to life, makes you care about them, and gives the characters character.

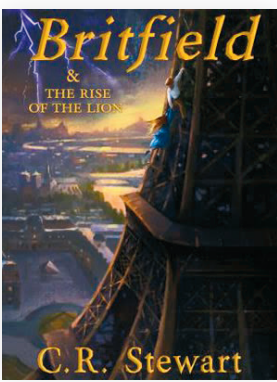
The author also uses dialogue to hide characters and their true intentions. As the reader is introduced to new characters, there is always a healthy suspicion of each one, until they prove themselves—and even after that, things are not always what they seem.

Stewart allows storylines to form outside of the primary plot, though those storylines always come back to the primary subject of protecting or eliminating Tom and Sarah.

A Young Adult Series for the Modern Era

For readers wishing for a quick description, the Britfield series is a combination of C.S.

The second in a series of young reader adventures, and it’s nearly perfect.



‘Britfield & The Rise of the Lion’ (Britfield Series)

Author
C.R. Stewart

Publisher
Devonfield Publishing,
July 4, 2021

Format
Hardcover, 488 pages

I had a hard time believing how well-written and engrossing it was.



Author C.R. Stewart has a gift for writing natural dialogue.

Lewis and Dan Brown.

Through the constant barrage of obstacles and struggles, Stewart infuses his heroic characters with courage, honor, and fortitude, and enables them to exemplify the necessary virtues that establish the foundation of friendship. In a world where these qualities are overlooked, if not belittled, the Britfield series brings these virtues to the forefront of the young reader’s mind.

Stewart writes from an interesting angle, which is why I think the Lewis-Brown reference is rather succinct. He gives us a story in which truth and honor are constantly hounded by the arms of power. It is impossible to conceive that Stewart purposely released his Britfield series to coincide with the world’s current crises, but it appears perfectly timed.

Britfield is a series great for young readers. Parents wishing to introduce their children to good, suspenseful writing, and a bit of history and culture should consider this young adult adventure series. It is a fun way to show them parts of the world they may never see and the rewards of friendship.

Dustin Bass is the co-host of The Sons of History podcast and an author.

BOOK REVIEW

Musing on Snow Leopards

ANITA L. SHERMAN

The title of this book popped up in one of those elegantly printed catalogs that appear unexpectedly in your mailbox and demand perusing. This one immediately caught my attention.

Snow leopards. Tibet. Being in the wilderness. Following vicariously in the footsteps of an adventurer. Being cold, actually being very cold, and finding joy.

While certainly not a prerequisite for discovering this intriguing read, the experience is enhanced if the weather is chilly outside and better yet if there is snow on the ground. Cold weather can set the mood to enjoy and learn from Sylvain Tesson’s beautifully written narrative about his trek to Tibet and the myriad of emotions and thoughts that run through his psyche.

He takes the waiting game to a new level, as persistence and patience are the calling cards for those desiring to see wild animals in their native habitat—not just any animals but those whose numbers are dwindling and their appearances less frequent, like the snow leopards.

Tesson is a poet and a philosopher. As such, his narrative is not filled with scientific data and statistics. Rather, it is filled with his daily observations and musings about life: how we see it, what we miss, and capturing the moment.

The chapters are short. They have a lyrical quality. While the small, intrepid group goes about their strategy for capturing the snow leopard on camera, Tesson ruminates about Chinese Taoism, about the relationship between humans and animals, about lost loves, and about the beauty and simplicity of harsh environments.



THORSTEN SPOERLEIN/SHUTTERSTOCK

The snow leopard blends deftly against the high rocks where it prefers to roam.

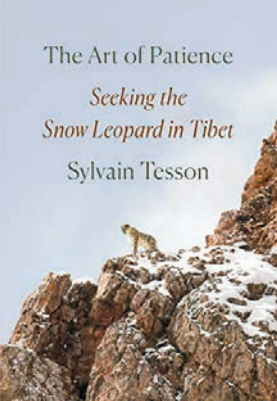
Not accustomed to being patient, Tesson discovers the serenity of surrendering to a design not of his own making.

The author offers readers more than an adventure-nature narrative. His perfect choice of words, his writing cadence, the sheer beauty of his descriptions, and his poetic power to pull you emotionally into each scene are alluring.

Describing one of the encounters with the snow leopard, Tesson writes:

“This was why it was called a snow leopard: it arrived as silently as the snow, and soundlessly crept away, melting into the rocks.”

An added bonus to Tesson’s recounting of this group’s gutsy trek into the wild is the introduction of French photographer Vincent Munier. I was unfamiliar with his work, but it is definitely worth your time to look him up. Exhibitions of his photographs have been featured in some 35 countries. Yaks, Arctic wolves, polar



‘The Art of Patience: Seeking the Snow Leopard in Tibet’

Author
Sylvain Tesson

Publisher
Penguin Press, July 13, 2021

Format
Hardcover, 224 pages

Anita L. Sherman is an award-winning journalist with 20 years’ experience as a writer/editor for several Virginia publications. A bibliophile, film noir fan and Blackwing pencils devotee, she loves the stuff of stories. Reach her at anitajustwrite@gmail.com

'The Man Who Came to Dinner': Oddball Characters Meet Acerbic Wit

Usually when I've watched romantic comedies, I've never gotten into them (at least the American ones). They seem either too schmaltzy or simply not funny. The few that are enjoyable have been older classics, such as 1941's "The Philadelphia Story" and 1945's "Christmas in Connecticut." Not only are these films well-crafted, but they also have a certain innocent charm and are bereft of any gratuitous indecencies.

When the film begins, highfalutin radio personality and lecturer Sheridan Whiteside (Monty Woolley) is dragging his secretary Maggie Cutler (Bette Davis) along on a speaking tour leading up to Christmas. One of their stops is in a small Midwestern town in Ohio. Although Sheridan considers Midwesterners beneath him (he considers them barbarians), the speaking engagement is part of a publicity push that will garner more radio listeners.

During their short stay, Sheridan and Maggie are scheduled to dine with Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Stanley (Grant Mitchell and Billie Burke), a prominent family from the town. From the moment Sheridan meets his hosts at the train station, his acerbic tongue casts forth barrages of snobby remarks and thinly veiled insults. But the Stanley family's Midwestern values, primarily those of Mrs. Stanley, downplay Sheridan's elitism as crude attempts at humor, and the couple try to remain congenial.

The incomparable Bette Davis stars in a secondary role here.



(L-R) Richard Travis, Monty Woolley, and Bette Davis star in "The Man Who Came to Dinner."

From there, a number of subplots develop, including a burgeoning romance between Maggie and local newspaperman and playwright Bert Jefferson (Richard Travis). As everything unfolds, visitors arrive to engage with the core group of characters. These interruptions typically consist of someone suddenly showing up at the Stanley home (mainly the living room, where most of the action takes place), delivering some taut bits of comedy, and exiting just as rapidly. The wit in this film is delivered in sudden bursts, so you have to be quick on your comedic toes in order to catch everything.

Kaufman and Hart's original stage play could have been mishandled here, as it can sometimes be tricky to adapt such fast-moving theater dialogue (along with some

The incomparable Bette Davis stars in a secondary role here, which was unusual for A-list actors in Hollywood's Golden Age—especially since she was at the height of her powers at the time. Nonetheless, she handles her role with more than ample aplomb.

Monty Woolley, whom I've seen only in a couple of similar roles, such as the snooty upper-crust ex-officer Col. William G. Smollett in "Since You Went Away," fully disappears into his role as a brainy big-city elitist. And it's no wonder, since he also starred in the original stage play of "The Man Who Came to Dinner," which ran from 1939 through 1941.

Simply put, those who appreciate quick-witted humor and an interestingly satirical clash of two different worlds—the sophisticated and the down home—should definitely check out this classic.

Ian Kane is an U.S. Army veteran, author, filmmaker, and actor. He is dedicated to the development and production of innovative, thought-provoking, character-driven films and books of the highest quality. To see more, visit DreamFlightEnt.com

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