



Raven's Ladder

Jeffrey Overstreet

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A DEADLY MENACE IS BREAKING THROUGH THE GROUND. THE PEOPLE OF ABASCAR MUST ABANDON THEIR STONE REFUGE AND FLEE INTO VULNERABILITY IN THE FOREST. BUT THEIR KING HAS HAD A VISION...

Following the beacon of Auralia's colors and the footsteps of a mysterious dream-creature, King Cal-raven has discovered a destination for his weary crowd of refugees. It's a city only imagined in legendary tales. And it gives him hope to establish New Abascar.

But when Cal-raven is waylaid by fortune hunters, his people become vulnerable to a danger more powerful than the prowling beastmen--House Bel Amica. In this oceanside kingdom of wealth, enchantment, and beauty, deceitful Seers are all too eager to ensnare House Abascar's wandering throng.

Even worse, the Bel Amicans have discovered Auralia's colors, and are twisting a language of faith into a lie of corruption and control.

If there is any hope for the people of Abascar, it lies in the courage of Cyndere, daughter of Bel Amica's queen; the strength of Jordam the beastman; and the fiery gifts of the ale boy, who is devising a rescue for prisoners of the savage Cent Regus beastmen.

As his faith suffers one devastating blow after another, Cal-raven's journey is a perilous climb from despair to a faint gleam of hope--the vision he sees in Auralia's colors.

Raven's Ladder Details

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Ranting Dragon says

<http://www.rantingdragon.com/ravens-l...>

Raven's Ladder is Jeffrey Overstreet's third installment in The Auralia Thread, a Christian fantasy series that started with Auralia's Colors and continued with Cyndere's Midnight. Raven's Ladder brings us back to familiar characters like King Cal-raven and his fabled mother, Jaralaine, while featuring a supporting cast of characters introduced in Cyndere's Midnight, including Cyndere, Jordam, Ryllion, and Emerienne. In Raven's Ladder, House Abascar is still in shambles and as Cal-raven struggles to find a new home for the survivors, he must also face the Bel Amican Seers' evil scheming, a vicious new underground enemy, and his own wobbling faith in the Keeper.

The best book in the series so far

Raven's Ladder is a vast improvement over Cyndere's Midnight and even surpasses Auralia's Colors. Overstreet has really come into his own: his writing is confident and the characters are completely believable. Cal-raven has always been my favourite character, and it was a real pleasure to read about his all-too-human flaws: arrogance, lack of faith, and impulsiveness, among others. In the previous two novels, the characters were fairly black-and-white compared to most of today's epic fantasies; in Raven's Ladder, however, the characters become much more complex and find themselves struggling not only against distinct enemies, but also against their own flawed natures.

In many ways, the chapters can be read as character studies; sometimes the most action happens in the characters' own heads, rather than at the end of a sword. Compared to the wooden characterizations in Cyndere's Midnight and even Auralia's Colors, the characters of Raven's Ladder are entirely and wonderfully human.

Grittier and deadlier

Although each book in The Auralia Thread has featured some violence, in the first two books the violence felt somewhat removed and unreal; it always happened to unimportant secondary characters and was always perpetrated by the bad guys. In Raven's Ladder, the violence is real and bloody and grim, and in one of the most poignant scenes of the novel, it's committed by someone whom we all know as one of the good guys (although, to be fair, Overstreet still shirks giving this character full responsibility of the consequences of his or her actions). An important character dies and another character faces despair because of it. Raven's Ladder feels more mature and intelligent than its predecessors, and Overstreet's world now feels less like an abstract fairy-tale and more like something recognizably inspired by real life, as fantastic as the window dressings are.

The violence is such that I'd no longer recommend this series for young people. Despite the moralistic undertones, this is a story for adults, not children.

More heavy-handed religion

Depending on your tastes, this may or may not be a bad thing, but the fact is that Raven's Ladder once again ratchets up the religious factor in The Auralia Thread. There are very obvious parallels to Christian beliefs, and these parallels are about as subtle as the ones in C. S. Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia (which is to say, not very subtle). Overstreet rarely descends into preaching, but the blatant Christian allegory that lies under the

fantasy plot will definitely irk those less religiously-inclined.

One flaw that does exist, regardless of your religious beliefs, is that Cal-raven's crisis of faith isn't very believable. Although otherwise an excellent character, Cal-raven's spiritual doubt lacks conviction, and the pages where Cal-raven weighs non-believer arguments against his faith are purely excruciating. Cal-raven's spiritual doubt feels like a convenient way for Overstreet to write a little more about his Christian message, instead of like a genuine character development.

Why should you read this book?

If you've enjoyed The Auralia Thread so far, you're bound to be impressed and blown away by Raven's Ladder. It exceeds its predecessors in every way. However, the religious message only gets stronger as the series continues, and if you are at all wary of mixing your fiction with religion, you are better off spending your time elsewhere.

Margaret Metz says

This book kept me on the edge of my seat because I kept waiting for certain things to happen. Good points were made in subtle ways, but I was again let down by the amount of threads left undone - and one entire house was left without much more than a passing mention. I can only guess that there is a third book and the author delights in stringing us along from one book to the next without anything being accomplished. It's like a marketing ploy - then we have to buy the next book.

The message of redemption being possible for the worst possible and corruption of the best was clearly made. I think the author was creative and has good things to say. I think he would frustrate less readers if he would tie up more threads in each book and carry over just the subplots to the next - and if he would do a little bit of a brief overview in the beginning of each subsequent book so new readers could start wherever they pick up in the series without having to go back unless he wins them over. Had I not bought all three at once, I wouldn't have gone back for book 1.

Still I loved the characters he created and thought the story had a lot of potential.

Amanda Makepeace says

I haven't been able to get enough of this series since I first discovered it in 2008. It's phenomenal. Here are a few of my thoughts on Raven's Ladder:

Faith and acceptance have played huge roles in this series and continue to in Raven's Ladder. But another aspect also comes to the front, awakening. I feel each character comes to an awakening, a comprehension of the truth around them. The story/journey isn't over yet for Cal Raven, Jordam, the people of Abascar and Bel Amica, but the blinders have been lifted.

The lure. . .

Descriptions that flow like paint across a canvas:

Just as in Auralia's Colors and Cyndere's Midnight, Raven's Ladder is a rich tapestry of people and places, some in darkness and some in light. Overstreet's writing is magical. His words breathe life into a world that cannot be duplicated. It's a poetry that tickles the senses and feeds the soul. I often found my self re-reading certain paragraphs just to experience the magic all over again.

Characters so real you can hear the beating of their hearts:

Okay, so maybe that's my own heart beating, but you get the point. Overstreet's characters are continually evolving, and even those that make you cringe change and begin to touch your heart. These aren't your everyday characters. They are those built on archetypes we carry in our cultural history. Not every author can take those icons and mold them into something new and extraordinary.

I can't wait to read the final book in what has been one of the best Fantasy stories I've read since Tolkien's Lord of the Rings. It not only captures the imagination, but also takes hold of the heart.

Eskana says

I am so done with this series. I really am. I'm tired of the plots that are so delicately woven that if you move too fast, you break 'em. It's just... too pointless. I read the first two books and was somewhat satisfied, somewhat interested, but for me, these books have lost what little appeal they had.

The first book was alright, an interesting, even exciting read. There was Auralia, the mysterious girl who could do magical things with colors, Cal-RAven, the prince who wanted to break away from his parents' legacy, Ark-Robin and his daughter who had ambitions, and the Ale-Boy, who sought his own history, and who seemed to be the most sincere, loving Auralia and her colors (of course, everyone just loves Auralia, and her enemies hate themselves for loving her, it seems.) And the conclusion was satisfying.

The next book wandered, choosing Cyndere of Bel Amica and Jordam of Cent Regus as its main characters, with several chapters for the Ale-boy and Cal-Raven. It was okay, spending most of its time rushing around the same forest, and it seemed to promise a conclusion in the next book.

But this book... wandered so much. And very little was accomplished. And given the fact that not much really has happened since book 1, (really, just people "discovering" things, not really serving as catalysts much), I'm really done with it. I never liked Auralia, she was too perfect, and now Cal-Raven has gone AWOL, abandoning everything he cared about for the last two books. The only worthwhile people are still Jordam and Cyndere, but I don't like them enough to continue.

If you've been loving this series, then you'll probably enjoy this one and read the next one. But if this sounds like how you've been feeling, just skip it. It's not worth your time.

jD says

Okay, I lied about one star. It was the only way to get revenge on Jeffery Overstreet. I plan to change the number of stars to five as soon as the next book comes out.

Bottom line -- I want to scream at Jeffrey Overstreet. I assumed the book was a trilogy or maybe four books

to wrap BUT NO. I knew I was going to be screwed out of a conclusion when I was about 25 pages from the end. There was no way it was getting anywhere near the conclusion of the underlying story. So I take back any comparisons to the Lord of the Rings trilogy (not counting The Hobbit). So why five stars...I could not put it down. If you have the patience to read a story with no shortage of characters, difficult to visualize animals, and a world filled with characters that make bad choices -- go for it. Had I known this would end with more cliffhangers than should be allowed, I would not have read it (YET). I would have just waited 3-4 years for him to crank out the next book. I am just starting to read Harry Potter because I did not want to risk the writer dying without knowing how it would wrap. I do not have the patience or the faith. It is my worst nightmare. I rant...bottomline, Jeffery Overstreet (genius though he is) does not strike me, based on his blogs, to give a crap if we all survive his slow pace. He says he spent a year writing it and that makes sense but he needs to warn people that this is some kind of never ending soap opera. Seriously, the book needs a warning. I was okay after Cyndere's Midnight because I was not emotionally invested in Cal Raven's survival.

So I am going to give this series my own ending...Cal Raven ends up with Auralia/Milora, Cyndere ends up with the Beast Man, ale boy dies (probably already dead), Wynn survives (don't really care either way), Queen Jaraline dies (please), Lesyl ends up with the Prince and dies, the Prince dies, the two thieves live, Emeriene dies (don't care), the next book will have 15 new characters (at least), the next book will introduce us to the 4th house, and MOST IMPORTANTLY, IT WILL NOT END THE SERIES.

Amy says

Alright. I've read Overstreet's other books, and I am absolutely in love with this one. I loved the first two, don't get me wrong, but this one began to tie things together a little more. Well, any good author would do that... Well, that just means congratulations to Mr. Overstreet on another FANTASTIC book!

In this book, we find out what's fueling Ryllion's mad schemes, the wickedness of the seers, Jordam's AMAZINGNESS, whether or not the Keeper is out there, and a whole lot more.

It's official: the Mawrnash scares me a bit. To think that people can see whatever is going on around those particles of dust is a little scary. (As I was thinking about that right now, I realized it's like the internet: thankfully, it's not controlled by the seers, but if it was, oh man would all of Seattle be ensnared. You will find electronics in just about every single house, and many people could track us with them).

Well, I won't talk about conspiracy theories. Instead, I'll talk about the reason why I've hidden this review due to spoilers:

Is Auralia alive?

Milora seems about Auralia's age, and she apparently made the huge glass window that's in Obrey's playroom. Milora can't remember much, but we find out she's not related by blood to Obrey or Fritz, and, strangely reminiscent of when Auralia was found by Krawg and Warney, she was by the bank of a river (I think) and she wasn't clothed. As well, she couldn't remember her name or anything about her.

And yet, she can create brilliant colors and weave threads of light in every which direction.

I have this feeling that she might be Auralia, but I'm not sure. I was under the impression that Northchildren had the job of unknitting people and bringing them into the next life (aka taking care of the dying and

leading them on). If somehow Auralia is alive, I'm afraid I never understood the Northchildren.

OH! And Jordam!

My goodness! I love that beastman! I really hope he can overcome the Essence that Mordafey put into him (I'd call Mordafey a bad word except that I avoid swearing). Mordafey is a merciless jerk. Ugh. I'm glad he's dead.

As a final note, I'm utterly confused about the Keeper, now. Are there 14 Keepers? Can they die, or do they just molt? I'm confused. Either way, though, I hope that the fourteenth beast stays free from Xa the Seer. Come on, Cal-Raven! Save the day!

Oh, and Tabor Jan: In as much of a non-fangirl type way as I can, I love you.

Alright, I take it back. I wanted to mention the potions of the seers.

The potions are poisons. They give you the beauty, sleep, love, whatever you want, but the problem is, it's all fake. Just like the little things of this world that we all consider so important (as I'm in high school, this is especially evident), it doesn't matter, and the pursuit of self ends in despair because we are not enough to satisfy the desires built into our hearts. The seers are a bit like Satan, tempting us to get things we don't need but might feel better for having, and the potions are temptations. Question is, can we resist? And, if we do, can we live without the precious little sins that we are so addicted to?

Great book, Mr. Overstreet. I'm going to get The Ale Boy's Feast as soon as I can.

Sandra Stiles says

Publisher: Multnomah, 2009

Source: This book was provided for review by the WaterBrook Multnomah Publishing Group. to learn more about this book or purchase it at RandomHouse.com click on the following link: <http://www.randomhouse.com/catalog/di...>

This was difficult for me to get my head around at first because this is the third book in the Aurelia books. I have ordered the first two and plan to read them this next week. However we know that after the fall of House Abascar, Cal-raven the king and his people are hiding out in a series of caves. He sets out to find them a new place to live. He has been pointed toward the north. While he is away it becomes too dangerous to stay in the caves and the people move to House Bel Amica where they are enticed by the luxuries and beauty there. They start to believe the twisted lies of the people of Bel Amica. Why not, the very people deceiving them are the ones who have deceived the queen for so long. They have discovered Aurelia's colors and are using them to twist their lies into something the people of Abascar will fall for. Cyndere, the daughter of the queen and a young ale boy help the refugees when they feel they have been abandoned. All this time their king Cal-raven is doing his best to keep hold of his own faith as he encounters one problem after another. He too has felt abandoned. The message that permeates this story is one of holding tight to faith when things get difficult and we lose our way. I can't wait to receive the other books so I can read all three starting with book one. I know that this third book will make more sense to me then

Desarae says

Of the three books in this The Auralia Thread series, I think this is my least favorite so far. However, before I go into those reasons, I will say that this book had the most discernible allegories. Krawg's story is actually a beautiful, masterfully told allegory within the story itself and was the highlight of the book for me. I would read it just for the impact of that allegory. As for the overall story, it has taken this long for the bigger scope of Overstreet's allegories to come together and begin to make sense, this book having a few of those clarifying details and events that helped put the puzzle pieces together. But on the whole, I've been a little frustrated with his story telling because he has left me holding way too many puzzle pieces suspended in mid air for far too long; what's worse, he does not clearly give the reader queues as to when that piece has been revealed to fit with another. There isn't enough resolution and reveal where you go 'aha!'.

As with the other books, I find myself having to muscle through the middle part of the story and languishing in the flowery words searching for actual things to happen. To me, there just wasn't enough happening in this book, and some of what DID happen seemed contrived. There was a lot of back and forth within the characters' struggles, especially Cal-raven, that just came across as being wishy-washy. He was too easily distracted and went gallivanting across the country on errands that didn't make sense to me, taking risks that seemed wholly unnecessary and unrealistic for a man in his position. I had a hard time liking him as the main character we follow through this book. Not to mention there was an entire sequence (at the mines) on which Cal-raven goes on a quest specifically to see something that is supposed to make things clear for the future of Abascar, but for me reading through the events, it was entirely UNCLEAR what he saw and what the significance of it was! Too abstract. For a book that spends so much time in the thoughts and feelings of its characters, there aren't enough inner revelations and reveals that we see clearly. There isn't enough explanation, and I'm left feeling confused and lost.

I'm reading this series to the end because I want to know what happens, because I'm not a quitter, but most of the time I'm reading, things are still so unclear and I'm just stumbling my way through, groping for understanding and hoping it makes sense at some point. Too vague, too mysterious, too abstract and not enough solid fact that you can build on. I'm really hoping that the final book ties it together for me.

After all that ranting, I will say that the premise of the books are very interesting and the world that Overstreet has created is an imaginative one that I enjoy seeing. I just wish the story telling was clearer and that more actually happened within the stories.

Katy Wilmotte says

This book is a difficult one for me to review. I have loved the Auralia Thread immensely and came in prepared to give *Raven's Ladder* a full five stars as well as to have my heart ripped out at having to say goodbye to all these characters I've come to know and love.

But then about a third of the way in, I discovered that there is a 4th book in the series. Feeling freer now to analyze, I realized that though the cover is amazing, something in *Raven's Ladder* jarred at me.

Something to do with Bel Amica, the decadent house by the sea, a house that would ensnare the survivors of Abascar and cause King Cal-Raven to lose sight of his vision.

Many chapters are devoted to this snaring, to Cal-Raven's struggle between the Keeper's promise and the

present realities, and in them I found something that did not sit right, something that felt wrong. As the characters in the book go back and forth about how to think about their deceptive hosts, I realized that this section of the book is really a place where Overstreet seems to be working out about how *he* feels about Bel Amica. A struggle is taking place within the very words of the story: Is the house good but corrupted (as evidenced by Partayn and Cyndere) or is it rotten from the roots up (shown by every other encounter of Abascar with Bel Amican society)? It's a difficult thing to know and the struggles of the characters to understand their new temporary home is not a fault.

The fault, in my opinion, is that Overstreet does not *like* Bel Amica. I think he wants to, but at some deep level, something about Bel Amica feels fundamentally wrong for him. It is too decadent, it is too wealthy. The treasures are temptations, the pleasures snares. Flee while you still can. And that is sad, as it is his house. His discomfort in a world of his own making made me uncomfortable, hence the three stars. That is not to say the book was bad, but it was hard to read, hard to feel comfortable in.

As a writer myself, I have just recently come to a place where I love all the kingdoms I have created, all the people within them. Dark things may happen there, and people may be wicked but the place, the faces in them, are not fundamentally evil. I like them. I want the best for them.

And the only reason I have come here is that I have been changed. The kingdoms I create no longer bring out the fears and insecurities that once harbored there. I feel free in them. My guess is that when writing *Raven's Ladder* Overstreet was not quite free. Something troubled him, held him back. I hope that whatever it is has gone now.

In sum, if you are reading the Auralia Thread, definitely read *Raven's Ladder*. Laugh, cry, and cheer. And then race (as I have done) to the Ale-Boy's Feast.

I suspect that this last course will have been worth the wait.

Bob Hayton says

The best fiction transports the reader into the setting of the book. The adventure written becomes an adventure experienced. Characters aren't just described by the author, they are befriended by the reader. This is when reading becomes an engrossing, consuming experience, and books become a work of art rather than a mere production. Jeffrey Overstreet wields this kind of book magic in his "Auralia Thread" series.

Raven's Ladder (book #3) was my first encounter with the series, and as the story developed I felt like I had stepped into a well-developed, alternate world. The members of a fallen House are struggling to survive in a wilderness, and a mysterious danger lurks below ground. A young king believes in childish myths about The Keeper and risks everything to follow his mystical guides. A group of devious seer-types control an economic stronghold where the people worship moon spirits and follow their own pursuits and pleasures wholeheartedly. And a malady which turns men to beasts has destroyed another House and threatens all the land.

The tale is so different it takes a while to feel comfortable in the story. And when you begin to sense the grandeur of the tale, glimpses of connections to Christianity make the tale all the more alluring. Auralia's vivid colors mesmerize all who remember them, and visions of beauty stand out all the more starkly against a pervasive and widespread ugliness. Whispers of The Keeper and the mystery of a long forgotten past make figuring out this world much less easy than it seems.

As the tale progresses, high and low points ebb and flow. The conclusion will leave you begging for more, and wondering what is in store for young King Cal-raven and the other heroes of the book. And after finishing this book, you may feel the urge to read the first two books to enjoy the world Jeffrey Overstreet

has created to its fullest extent.

Becky says

Overstreet continues the Auralia series with perhaps the best story yet. His writing is so rich that it reminds me greatly of Tolkien's poetic prose. For example:

"The midday sun was hot, but the light was drained of health or hue. Each step he took scared ghosts of ash from some slow, invisible burning into anxious southward flight. How could he be sure of a direction north and west? The world around him was disintegrating; he saw nothing he might have recognized." p366

He even breaks the narrative with long (and sometimes drawn out) stories such as those told by Krawg in the Bel Amican camp. I find some passages reminiscent of the songs and poems included in *The Lord of the Rings*.

The most difficult part of this book for me was remembering everything that came before. I did not have time to reread the first two books before delving into this one and it took me awhile to catch up with things. One thing is for certain, I will read the entire series again once the fourth and final book is released.

Overstreet walks the fine line of Christian alegory perfectly. His story is strong in its own merits without the clunky burden of having to make everything tie in to a spiritual truth. The characters continue to be engaging, the plot exciting, and the imagery and richness of the writing is among the best I've ever read.

Overstreet's writing is intelligent; sometimes to the point of being confusing. One cannot rush the reading for there is too much to lose in doing so. The themes are not obvious or cliché, one must search for them (and ideally, discuss them with others).

The book ends with just enough of a cliff hanger to keep us wanting more. The ending does not feel contrived or unplanned; a cheap way to sell the final book of the series. Rather, one gets a sense of tale heading for its natural and inevitable conclusion...whatever that may turn out to be.

The overarching theme of the series is one of color; many different threads weaving together in unexpected ways to tell a single story. This is indeed how it appears to be playing out.

I eagerly await the next release.

Jennifer Defoy says

This one took me a little while to get into it. In the beginning of the story I was lost as to who the characters were and what exactly was going on. (Little did I know when I started this that it was the third in a series, I think I should have read the other two first.) There is a "glossary" of characters in the back, and through the first few chapters I referred to that quite a bit.

The story began to get pretty interesting around chapter 9. Before that there were a few good moments, but I think the meat of the story began around that chapter.

The writing was pretty good. The imagination of Overstreet is great. The descriptions of some of the creatures is good enough to give you a image of them even though they are imaginary.

The story deals greatly with faith, and a struggle between two different faiths. I think the subject of faith is difficult to write about as a story of mystical fiction, I've read a few books of the same type that were way off the mark, but Overstreet did a pretty good job with it.

I didn't love the book, but it was intriguing enough (after the first few chapters) to keep me reading. I would liked to have read the first two in the series before hand, maybe I wouldn't have been so lost in the beginning, but I think that even without the previous books there was still something to be gained from this one.

Rachel Thomson says

Raven's Ladder is the third book in the four-book Auralia Thread, a startlingly poetic, deeply spiritual fantasy series that begins with *Auralia's Colors* and *Cyndere's Midnight*.

The story dawns on a displaced people: The people of House Abascar, led by the young king Cal-Raven and his faithful guardsman Tabor Jan, have moved into a network of caves after the collapse of their house in a cataclysmic earthquake. Cal-Raven dreams of building New Abascar according to his childlike dreams, filling it with the beauty glimpsed in Auralia's colors and following the footsteps of the Keeper, a strange forest creature he has come to revere almost as deity—but which remains mysterious and out of reach.

An unexpected encounter with the Keeper charges Cal-Raven's faith and sends him on a journey to find the perfect settling place for his people. But even as he travels into the north, a menace from the ground threatens the caves, and Tabor Jan is forced to lead the people out. The refugees are discovered by Bel Amica's beastman-hunting Captain Ryllion, and they have no choice but to accept the hospitality of House Bel Amica—a wealthy and exotic house which, under the influence of the follow-your-heart moon-spirit religion, has become a sort of Vanity Fair.

The Bel Amican heiress Cyndere and her faithful attendant Emeriene do what they can to care for the refugees, even as Tabor Jan and Cal-Raven fight to keep Abascar from losing its identity in Bel Amica's seductive pleasures and the religion of the Seers. But theirs are not the only endeavours in the Expanse. The Seers are slowly spreading their power, and in the wastelands to the east, cursed Cent Regus beastmen are rising to new power.

There, in the ruins of House Cent Regus, Cal-Raven's faith will sustain its greatest blow.

Raven's Ladder is rich, powerful, and thought-provoking. Its prose is beautiful; its plot is riveting. This is not a stereotypical fantasy, wherein the good king and his beautiful followers battle the bad king and his beastly ones. In the world of the Expanse, beauty and beastliness mix, and it's anyone's guess which will rise to the top. Cal-Raven's journey is one of faith that any believer will relate to, from the first flush of infatuation into discouragement as he is challenged to hold onto hope despite all odds. In the confusing tangle of emotions, exhaustion, and half-truths that is life, the beauty of art and the power of storytelling point the way back

home.

I can still feel the atmosphere of this book weeks after reading it. House Bel Amica is stunningly rendered, exotic and exciting, with its hanging mirrors, ocean air, and rich food. It's a beautifully seductive place. But the religion underlying it, a message of following your heart, is also seductive, and we watch as this frighteningly familiar mantra (seen any Disney movies lately?) leaves the best of men wide open to deception and turns heroes into monsters.

The characters are extraordinarily human, from the fiery idealist Cyndere, who rebels against the excesses of her house in her desire to help the lost and accursed, to the awakening beastman Jordam, who thinks in metaphors and is beginning to lose his fur, to Prince Cal-Raven, who combines youthful arrogance with burdened leadership and passionate hope. Tabor Jan and Emeriene, who both function as the loyal friends of difficult visionaries, remain two of my favourite characters.

I have loved this series from the start, and it continues to get better. I reread *Auralia's Colors* and *Cyndere's Midnight* before opening *Raven's Ladder*, and I will probably read all three again next year when the final installment comes out. I look forward to the fourth book even as I dread it, because this is a complex story with characters I'm coming to love, and I want to see all their stories treated fully. Bother the demands of the publishing industry that a book be relatively short.

It's been several weeks since I read my advance copy of *Raven's Ladder*, and the story is still lingering with me. This is some of the best fantasy being written today.

A Note to Parents and Young Readers: Overstreet's books are very moral, but not simplistically so, and some scenes are gory. These are books for discerning readers.

Mark says

I'm never quite sure what to expect from fiction by an author of Christian faith... for every wonderful reading experience (like Stephen Lawhead's *Celtic Crusades* or C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*), there are numerous slogs through preachy & clichéd schlock. (Insert obligatory reference to the *Left Behind* books here.) It's a little like Tim Burton films - you never know when an "Edward Scissorhands" is going to bloom amongst a field of weeds like "Batman Returns" and "Planet of the Apes."

It helps, of course, when you trust the author as someone who appreciates story & subtlety, which is certainly true of Jeffery Overstreet. As a long-time reader of his articles & reviews at ChristianityTodayMovies.com and his blog, LookingCloser.org, I was excited to find his first book, *Through A Screen Darkly*, which is a series of essays on movie-going & faith.

So when Mr. Overstreet released the first book in The Auralia Thread series, *Auralia's Colors*, I... checked it out from the library & felt really guilty about not reading it. Yeah, I know, that wasn't the story I wanted to tell either, but it's the truth. I'm not sure what kept me from digging into the first novel - some of the reviews I'd read made it sound "artsy" and I never managed to pick it up and get into it before I had to return it.

Fast forward a couple of years to the early part of 2010 when I agreed to blog/review *Raven's Ladder*, the third book in the series. I quickly realized that I didn't want to read book 3 before I read the first two books. So, for the past couple of weeks, I've carted around The Auralia Thread books and read them whenever I

could... waiting for my boys at the park, taking a break at work, even squinting at them by the light of a bedside lamp.

Yes, the books are that good.

It's my assignment to review Raven's Ladder... a task which I'm finding daunting. I want to try & paint a picture of the book (and the series that leads up to it) without spoiling the joy of discovery that comes from reading a fantasy series set in a new world. I hope to get you to pick up Auralia's Colors and find yourself swept up by Jeffery Overstreet's beautifully crafted descriptions & plotting... leading inexorably to you buying all three books.

As I've thought about how to do this, I realized that The Auralia Thread reminds me of the TV series, "Lost." No, there's not an airline crash or a smoke monster or even a four-toed statue... but Mr. Overstreet uses the same kind of cinematic style of storytelling to move his plot forward. We get to see important moments from the viewpoints of different characters. Hints are dropped & questions are raised at odd moments that pay off chapters (or sometimes even books) later. The author, much like the writers on "Lost," isn't afraid to kill off characters or radically alter their lives rather than simply pander to our desires for things to be tied up in a simplistic package.

And while the story has definite philosophical & spiritual themes (esp. the relationship of art & faith), those themes don't seem to drive the plot. Instead, they flow out of the natural development of the characters and their lives.

Importantly for me, this is NOT a Christian allegory. Playing the "who's the Christ figure?" game with Christian-penned fantasy novels quickly grows tiresome and takes me out of the book and into "theology debate" mode. Jeffery Overstreet deftly avoids this while still dealing with questions about blind faith, the relationship of art & theology, legalism & freedom, desire as the arbiter of truth, and a plethora of other important themes.

I realize that writing about "serious themes" is likely to turn off some readers. I wonder if my initial hesitation to read Auralia's Colors has to do with other reviewers writing similar things. Pleased, give the story a chance... let the wonder & mystery of this fascinating fantasy world pull you in.

Some specific notes about Raven's Ladder:

- * The prologue tells a story that I was sure would be the first half of the book (based on what had gone before). In other words, Jeffery Overstreet managed to both fulfill my expectations and take the story in some wild new directions in just a few pages.

- * The book covers even more of The Expanse in vivid detail.

- * There's a story (told by Krawg) that absolutely blew me away near the middle of the book... and the implications of what happens to that story speaks volumes about the way we deal with truth & art in our culture.

- * Some key story lines are resolved here, while others are advanced and left hanging... thankfully, there is at least one more book coming!

It's probably no surprise that I recommend this book (well, the whole series) heartily!

Note: A review copy was provided by the publisher.

Phyllis Wheeler says

Raven's Ladder by Jeffrey Overstreet, a Review

Published by Waterbrook Press, 2009, 380 pages

Genre: Christian fantasy, suitable for teens and adults

I read the first book in this series, Auralia's Colors, but didn't have time to read the acclaimed second one, Cyndere's Midnight. This is the third in the series of four called The Auralia Thread. As I read Raven's Ladder, I missed out on various references to previous happenings. I do recommend you read these in order!

Raven is Cal-Raven, the young king of the refugee community of House Abascar. In the first book, Abascar's King Cal-Marcus made some terrible decisions that resulted in the loss of the community's lovely dwelling, most of their people, and the death of Cal-Marcus.

Now Cal-Raven is trying to lead his refugee people through a dangerous land to a new home as revealed to him by the Keeper, an Aslan figure. Problem is, they mostly don't trust his vision for a new home, or for a new order for them where previous class lines are erased and former nobles are expected to rub shoulders with former criminals. They remind me of the reluctant Israelites following Moses in the desert.

After a year of hiding out in a large cave, they take a sojourn in Egypt, so to speak: another of the four houses of the Expanse, Bel Amica, draws them in. In Bel Amica they find plenty of food and material wealth and are given jobs to earn their keep. However, it's a Godless place, where everyone is out for himself. Wicked seers are in charge in all but name. Treason is afoot. Will House Abascar be able to leave?

Another thread in the story involves more refugees from House Abascar who are prisoners of the beastmen of House Cent Regus. House Cent Regus at some point in the past was accursed, and its people became hideous beastmen, addicted to the elixir that binds them to beastliness, mindless in their aggressions.

The Keeper has sent a boy named Rescue to save them, but he needs Cal-Raven's help. Will these prisoners be set free?

What do I think?

This book is very lyrical, full of wonderful and original uses of words. It's also a great page-turner of a story, impossible to predict and full of illusions where things are not as they seem at first.

I was struck by the portrayal of godless House Bel Amica, where everyone is out for himself, people worship moon spirits, and occult seers are in charge in all but name. The materialism described sounds familiar. Could it be a version of America? What does this vision have to tell us about ourselves? Interesting thing to ponder.

Men who become beasts, with their exterior imitating their dark interior, is a theme as old as the folktale. Like other stories, this story includes a beast who is redeemed. Also good to ponder: where is the beast in me?

In short, this book engaged me on mental and emotional levels, and tickled my beauty appreciation sense. I suspect other lovers of fantasy will want to feast on this book too. —Phyllis Wheeler

