

**Coming December 15, 2020  
from Bold Strokes Books:**



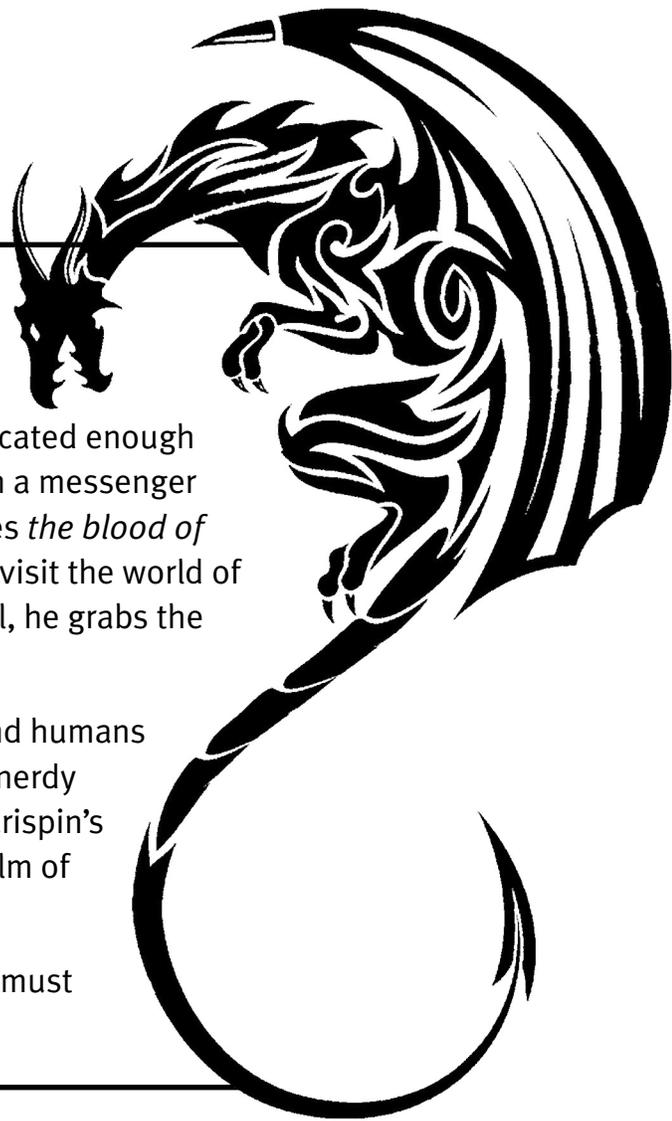
**The Dubious Gift of Dragon Blood is an exciting fantasy adventure, a coming of age tale, and a romance between two very different, but equally strong-willed young men.**

## *The Dubious Gift of Dragon Blood*

High schooler Crispin Haugen already has a complicated enough identity: a gay, Asian/Scandinavian Canadian. Then a messenger from another world arrives to tell him he also carries *the blood of dragons in his veins!* At first, Crispin is reluctant to visit the world of his dragon heritage, but when he is outed at school, he grabs the opportunity to run away and escape his problems.

Transported to the Realm of Fire, where dragons and humans live in harmony, Crispin falls for Davix, a brooding, nerdy scholar. But dark mysteries threaten the peace of Crispin's new world. Without warning, dragons from the Realm of Air unleash a bloody war and take him hostage.

With everything he cares about on the line, Crispin must find the courage to fight... for justice and for love.



### **Themes of the Novel**

#### **Not the Chosen One**

Crispin is a young man of many identities, cultural and ethnic. Plus, he is one of twenty people on Earth in whom the Dragons of Fire have hidden dragon DNA. I wanted to get away from the Science Fiction / Fantasy trope of the main character being the “chosen one” on whom the fate of the world hinges. Who Crispin is—as a queer youth, as a person of mixed ethnicity, as a carrier of dragon blood—has brought him to this juncture in his life, but the decisions he makes are about who he is as an individual.

Naming your varied identities can be powerful and healing. It contributes to self-esteem and finding community. But in the end, we have to decide what kind of life we will build upon these foundations of identity.

Readers of SFF might identify with “a chosen one” in a book. It can make them feel that they too may one day be discovered as someone significant and essential. But Crispin is not Neo, not Aragorn, not Paul Atreides. He is a normal young man with normal fears and a set of values to create and act upon. Perhaps this kind of character is an even better role model.

## Sexuality and Relationships

Many young adult novels I've read, especially with queer main characters, skirt around issues of sex and what it feels like to occupy a body that has desire. I believe that this deletion communicates that sexuality, especially queer sexuality, is something to be ashamed of. This is a dangerous message to send to queer youth. If they don't realize that their own desire is normal, and that they can make safe choices, we are setting them up to make dangerous choices instead.

One of my goals in writing this book was to talk openly about sexual agency and consent.

At the beginning of the novel, Crispin is in a secret relationship with a school jock who just uses him for sex but doesn't show him any love. Crispin, isolated at his high school, doesn't believe he will find anything better or maybe doesn't even deserve better. In the Realm of Fire, he starts a relationship with Davix who, though he is the same age, has more experience and less fear. He shows Crispin that he is allowed to feel what he feels, to ask for what he desires, and to set his own limits.

## The Dilettante Dragons of Farad'hil

The Realm of Fire is ruled by five dragons who live in the wondrous mountain kingdom of Farad'hil. They are not brute beasts, nor hoarders of gold — they are scientists, artists, and historians. Sur, the youngest of the dragons at 172, always speaks in poetry:

*“THE DRAGON GROOM IS HERE / TESTED BEYOND WHAT HE DESERVES / BRING HIM FRESH PASTRY / AND YOUR BERRY PRESERVES.”*

Renrit is the editor of the DragonLaw, a living bible that is updated daily, chronicling the history of the Realm and its people. A consummate and precise scholar, he annotates his own speech with references:

*“REFRAIN FROM BREAKING THE DRAGON GROOM, YOUNG SUR <ref. inertia; ref. human anatomy & trauma; cross-catalogue: 1. history of dragon grooms (5). list of humans who have visited Farad'hil (9)>”*

The dragon Inby is a genetic engineer who created the mixed beings, creatures part human, part dragon who act as the dragons' agents.

Inby's role is an example of how I tend to write fantasy like a science fiction writer. That's my sweet spot, and I'm glad that the previously separate genres of fantasy and SFF have merged more and more. N.K. Jemesin won three Hugo awards for The Broken Earth Trilogy which is undoubtedly science fiction, though one of the fundamental forces in her universe is named as “magic.” When we do less gatekeeping of what is considered acceptable in any genre, we free authors and readers to experience a wider range of narrative.

## Reconstructing Your Beliefs

While all the people of the Realm of Fire venerate their dragon lords and their bible, the DragonLaw, Davix is the most devoted of his peers. He understands his whole life through the lens of the DragonLaw. But Crispin's arrival sets in motion events which make him question these foundational beliefs and lose his unwavering faith in his elders. Davix is forced to reconstruct his

understanding of the world and his place in it. It is a process of both reduction and enlargement. He is reduced, because what was once sacred and sure is no longer; but he is enlarged, because he must see his world and his life in a bigger context. He must learn to judge for himself what is right and wrong.

Davix's disillusionment reflects that of many young adults who come to question the spirituality, the politics, the moral frameworks they have inherited from their parents and community. The world they are growing into will be the one they and their peers will create themselves. Davix's journey shows readers how to rebuild in the wake of disillusionment without falling into despair.

## The Series

The Dubious Gift of Dragon Blood stands alone as a complete adventure; however, it is also the first part of a planned trilogy which chronicles the reunion of the Elemental Realms. When Fire, Air, and Water return to join with our world, Earth, who will rule? Will humans become slaves to the dragons? Will humans have to destroy the great beasts? Or is there another way? What part do Crispin and Davix play in this outcome? Find out in future volumes of the series:

*BOOK TWO: THE ONLY DRAGON IN THE LONELY SEA*

and

*BOOK THREE: A ROUGH AGENDA FOR THE END OF THE WORLD*



## Biography

J. Marshall Freeman is a writer of fiction and poetry, a musician, and graphic designer. He is a two-time winner of the Saints+Sinners fiction contest (2017 and 2019). In 2019, he published "Arthropoda," a chapbook of poetry. Upcoming work includes the young adult adventure novel, Barnabas Bopwright Saves the City, and the climate change science fiction novel, Cicada Rises from the Earth. He lives in Toronto, Canada with his husband and dog.

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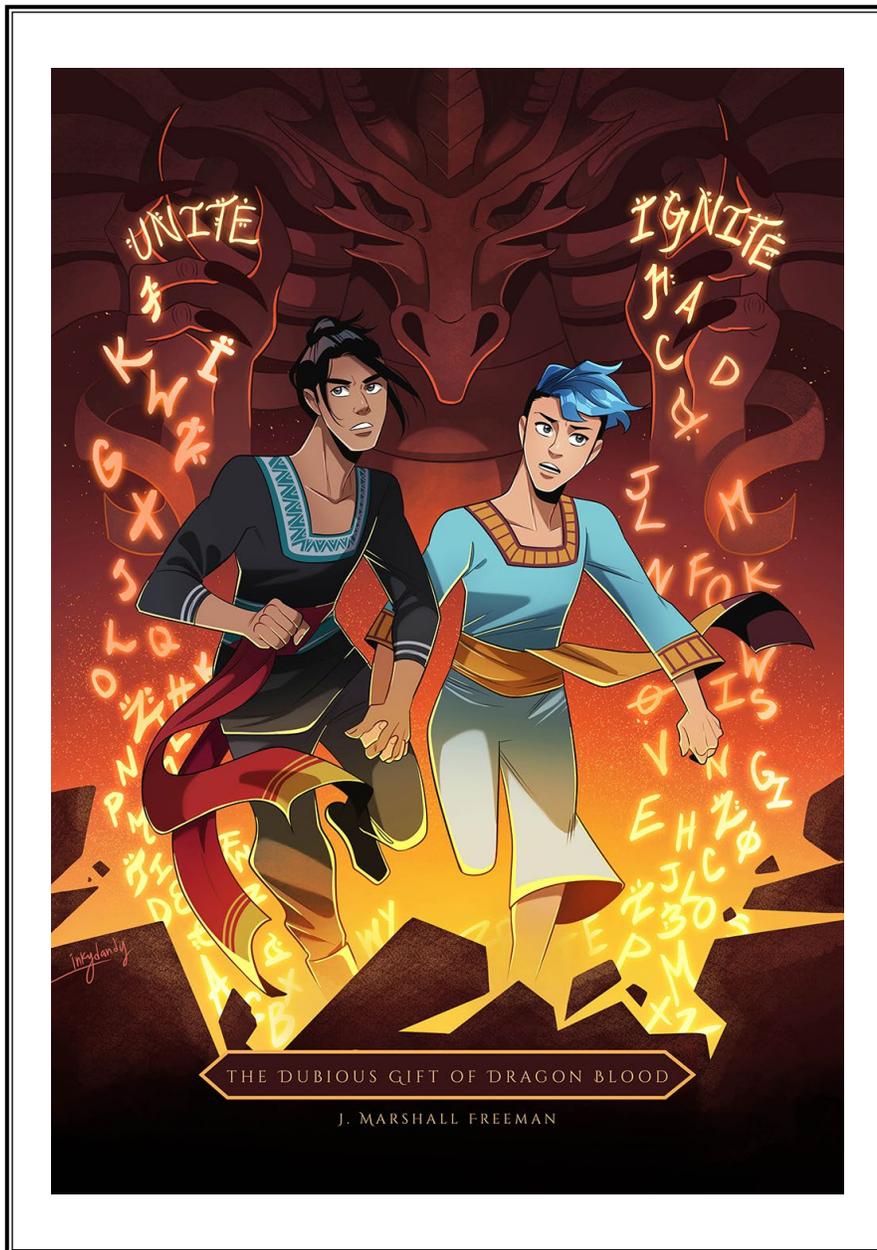


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