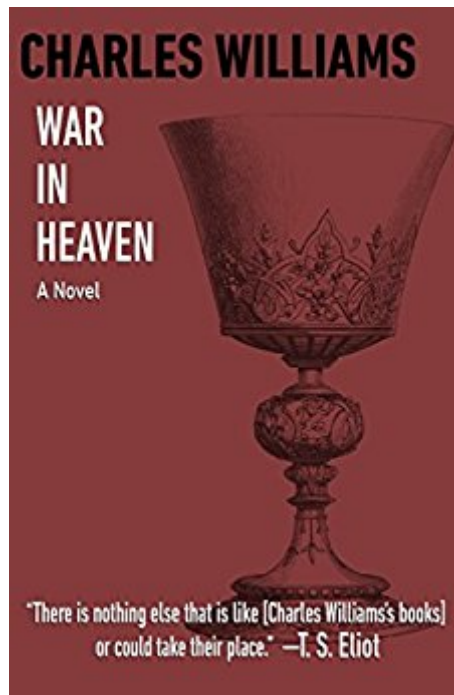




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War In Heaven: A Novel



Synopsis

The discovery of an ancient holy relic in an English country church ignites the ultimate battle of good and evil in this deeply thoughtful metaphysical thriller. An unidentified body lies lifeless in the offices of a British publishing house. Soon after it is discovered, an urgent request from an author arrives by post, pleading for the deletion of an important paragraph from an upcoming publication. These unlikely incidents mark the beginning of a secret war waged in the English countryside but threatening to engulf all of humankind. On the side of the godly, an archdeacon, an eccentric duke, a book editor, and a young boy must confront the dark magic of relentless satanic forces. Behind the facade of a common pharmacy, sinister plans are being laid for the negation of everything. The most horrible of conspiracies, its success hangs on the acquisition of an object of enormous supernatural power recently discovered in a small parish church: the Holy Grail. Preceding *The Da Vinci Code* and the *Left Behind* novels by half a century, *War in Heaven* is the first novel written by Charles Williams, an esteemed member of the famed Oxford literary society known as the Inklings, which included such notables as C. S. Lewis, Owen Barfield, and J. R. R. Tolkien. This is a provocative, page-turning tale of faith, morality, and magic—an amalgam of thriller, fantasy, metaphysics, and theology that engages and entertains. This ebook includes a new introduction by Jonathan Ryan.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As an Episcopal Church book group, we are really enjoying this classic. The strong mystery plot, the good and evil characters, the rural England setting, and the action are all engaging. Most of all, the way Charles Williams demonstrates his theology of co-inherence, how we relate to God and the world, is building our understanding of our faith.

War in Heaven was recommended to me as the book to try if you've not read a Charles Williams novel, as I hadn't. I'm thankful for the recommendation and enthusiastically pass it along. The novel initially has the feel of a 1920s era British cozy murder mystery. Its first line: "The telephone bell was ringing wildly, but without result, since there was no-one in the room but the corpse." The quirky characters include Anglican vicars, publishing house employees, Roman Catholic nobility, poets, and, of course, police. Though the feel of a cozy often reasserts itself throughout the story, the novel quickly becomes a supernatural thriller, with two trios battling on natural and supernatural levels for a chalice that may be the Holy Grail. Though each character has a different motivation, one trio wants the Grail for evil; the other trio represents the good. And though the struggle for the Grail - and men's souls - is the center of the plot, in the background remains the corpse. The reader (though not the police or most characters) soon learns who the killer is, but how and why the killing occurred remain clouded until near the end of the book. Early in his life, Williams dabbled in the occult. He learned how evil - and good - works and that knowledge suffuses his writing. His portrayal of evil and the diabolical is palpable and remarkable. Though offset somewhat by his portrayals of a saintly vicar and the spiritual protector of the Grail, it is unsettling. The conclusion of the novel's battle between the good and the evil is very well-written and thought provoking, even evoking John of the Cross's Dark Night of the Soul. The conclusion of the novel is itself perfect and beautifully presented.

"The telephone bell was ringing wildly, but without result, since there was no-one in the room but the corpse." So opens this intensely English novel that is at once both thrilling and significant. This novel

was my first introduction to Charles Williams, a member of the Inklings; may there be many more encounters with his work in future! To describe this as the publisher does - "[a] contemporary religious novel [filled with suspense, mystery, and supernatural conflict]" - is accurate, but make no mistake; this work could never be sold in supermarket racks. For one thing, its "contemporary" nature makes it firmly "period" today, which is perfectly fine for many readers, but not for some. For another, it is unabashedly mystical and intellectual, with entire paragraphs that an editor seeking bestsellers would gag over and frequent strings of untranslated Latin. Finally, it deals in sections of society that the mass public has no time for (the Anglican church, the world of publishing, aristocracy, gentleman-collectors). These are not in any sense flaws, only characteristics. If you adore the educated prose and staunch moral world of M. R. James, you will similarly delight in Williams; Williams is very much James's successor in the fantastic genre of "Christian supernatural fiction". This book excels most in the difficult matter of creating an atmosphere that is suspenseful and unsettling without crossing over into the gratuitous, crudely crafted, or just plain silly (unpleasant literary territories that modern supernatural fiction seems largely unable to avoid). The main antagonists Gregory, Manasseh, and Dmitri are chilling portrayals of occultist evil, and their counterparts on the side of righteousness the Archdeacon, Kenneth, and the Duke are valiant, though each flawed in their own way. The enigmatic figure of Prester John is handled deftly as well. A host of supporting characters round out the drama and provide comic relief and side plots in the cosmic struggle surrounding a dented old cup in the obscure parish of Castra Parvulorum (Fardles). William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, which prints many works of specialist taste, has done well with their edition. The design is spare but appropriate, the back material is well composed, and the front cover succeeds in its aims. This book comes without introduction, textual notes, or other secondary material, but it does not require them. Despite qualifying as a "novel of suspense", War in Heaven is not light reading, and, like the Eucharist that is continually referenced in William's novel, will not be appreciated by all who come to it. Nonetheless, it is offered for all, and its savour is rich and rewarding.

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