

And a Child Shall Lead Them

Halos & Horns Book 2: And a Child Shall Lead Them

By Keith B. Darrell

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And a Child Shall Lead Them / Keith B. Darrell

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Interlude:

The Kitsune & the Hypnalis

TOO EXCITED TO SLEEP, KAYA sat up on her futon. “Mother, you promised to tell me a bedtime story.” Amaya fluffed her daughter’s makura and placed it under her head. “Once upon a time,” the Japanese woman began, “there lived a potter and his wife. The potter kept his workshop behind their small farmhouse, at the edge of the forest. It was filled with all sorts of pottery they were able to sell in the village on the other side of the forest. Once each week, the potter’s wife would collect an assortment of his wares and load them into a wheelbarrow to cart to town. She would wake at the crack of dawn so she could have the full day to hawk their goods and still return home before darkness fell on the forest.”

“Why did she have to get home before *tosogare*?” Kaya asked. “Because the darkness brought with it the *kyuketsuki* — the dead who feed on the blood of the living. The forest was a place

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of serenity and tranquility by day, but by night it was transposed into a hunting ground for the undead, feeding on wild boars, monkeys, deer, serows, and bears... and any humans foolish enough to be in the forest at night.”

Kaya grinned. “Why didn’t the kyuketsuki attack the potter and his wife in their farmhouse?”

“In those days, the kyuketsuki chose to hide from humans. Centuries earlier, samurai had hunted down and destroyed many kyuketsuki, so they would sleep in the caves in the day, and while they spent their evenings in the village, they dared not feed on humans there, lest they be seen and destroyed. That way, they could mingle with humans and never be suspected of being kyuketsuki. But the villagers knew kyuketsuki existed, and shunned the forest at night. One day, the potter’s wife was late returning home —”

“I know!” the enthusiastic child interrupted. “She was walking through the forest and it got dark and a kyuketsuki swept out from the trees and bit the potter’s wife and sucked out all her blood, right?”

Amaya smiled. “No, dear. There are no kyuketsuki in this tale. The potter’s wife was halfway through the forest when she came across a fox sprawled on the ground before her. She could tell the creature was in pain. She looked up and realized the fox had fallen from a branch, now cracked and dangling from a beech tree. The potter’s wife felt sorry for the small fox. With great tenderness, she picked it up and placed it in her empty wheelbarrow. She covered it with her shawl to keep the injured animal warm and wheeled it back to the farmhouse.

“The potter was annoyed. ‘Why have you brought that filthy animal into my house?’ he asked. His wife explained the fox had been injured and needed care, but the potter forbade her from keeping it in their home. But he had said nothing about their barn, so his wife hid the fox with the hens —”

“But wouldn’t the potter discover the fox in the henhouse?” Kaya asked.

The Kitsune & the Hypnalis

“No,” Amaya answered. “The potter rarely set foot in the barn. Those duties fell to his wife, so he could have time to create his pottery.”

“But what about the hens?” Kaya asked. “Everyone knows foxes eat hens.”

“This fox had a broken leg and could not stand, let alone run after the hens. The potter’s wife bandaged its leg, and brought it food and water several times each day. When the summer came, the fox had recovered. The potter’s wife unwrapped the bandage for the final time and stroked the fox’s fur. She told it now that it had healed, it was time for it to return to the forest. She bundled the fox in a blanket and, making sure her husband did not see her, took the fox deep into the forest. There, she released the fox and blessed it with a prayer. To her surprise, the fox transformed into a beautiful woman. The fox explained it was a kitsune and told the potter’s wife how grateful she was for the weeks of food, shelter, and care she had provided. The kitsune said she was in the potter’s wife’s debt, and promised her a life of good fortune and that she would one day repay the debt. Then, the kitsune returned to her fox form and dashed off into the forest.”

“Did the potter’s wife have good fortune? Did she and the potter live happily ever after?”

Amaya pinched Kaya’s cheek. “They had very good fortune. Demand for the potter’s wares increased and they became wealthy. But their greatest fortune came when the potter’s wife discovered she was going to have a baby. The potter decided he had enough money to relocate to the village once his child was born. His pregnant wife loaded the wheelbarrow and made one last trip into town to sell their pottery. When she had sold everything she had brought, she returned to the forest. She knew she had to get home while it was still light and midway through the forest —”

“That’s when the kyuketsuki appeared!” Kaya exclaimed.

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“I told you there are no kyuketsuki in this story. The potter’s wife was in such a hurry to get home she did not look where she was going. Had she been watching the path, she would have seen the snake before it bit her. Instead, she dropped to the ground and felt her ankle burn in pain, as the snake’s venom entered her blood. Soon, she found herself unable to move. The snake slithered to where she had fallen and shimmered, transforming into a woman with glistening skin. When the snake woman came closer, the potter’s wife saw her smooth skin was covered with tiny scales not noticeable unless the sunlight struck them in a certain way. She glanced at her own ankle and saw the skin around the snake bite had turned scabrous.”

“What’s scabrous?”

“That means it was covered with scales.” Amaya smiled. “The potter’s wife asked the snake woman if she was now going to become a snake as well. The snake woman laughed and replied she would devour her long before that could happen. She changed again, becoming a human-sized snake. Her jaws opened wide and she wrapped them around the top of the potter’s wife’s head, preparing to swallow her whole. She paused when she heard a rustling in the bushes. A fox leaped out and arched its tail. A lightning bolt shot from its tail, striking the serpent. The snake pulled away from the potter’s wife, its skin singed where it had been struck, and the serpent’s head changed back to the snake woman’s face. The kitsune threatened the snake woman: ‘This human and her family are under my protection. I could destroy you in the flames of my foxfire, but I have chosen to let you live so you may tell others of your kind. Now depart, before I change my mind.’ The snake woman changed into a small snake and slithered off.

“Was it the same kitsune the potter’s wife had nursed back to health?” Kaya asked, already sure of the answer.

“Yes, daughter. The kitsune had repaid her debt. When the venom’s effect had worn off, she helped the potter’s wife stand

The Kitsune & the Hypnalis

and observed she was unsteady on her feet. The kitsune examined the potter's wife's ankle and saw the snake bite.

'I am sorry I did not arrive in time to prevent the hypnalis from biting you,' the kitsune said.

'Will I die?' the potter's wife asked.

'One day,' the kitsune answered, 'but not from this.'

"A smoke-filled globe hovered above the kitsune. 'Now that I am near my hoshi no tama, I can use its magic to ensure you do not become a hypnalis.' The globe shone and bathed the potter's wife in its light. Then, the kitsune pulled back, startled. 'You are with child!'

"The potter's wife nodded and smiled. 'You have brought me good fortune, as you promised.'

"The kitsune appeared sad. 'I'm sorry,' she said. Then, she trotted off into the woods."

"Did the potter's wife ever see the kitsune again?" Kaya asked. Amaya shook her head.

"Did the potter and his wife move to the town?"

Amaya shook her head again. "No, they remained in the farmhouse for the rest of their days."

"Why?"

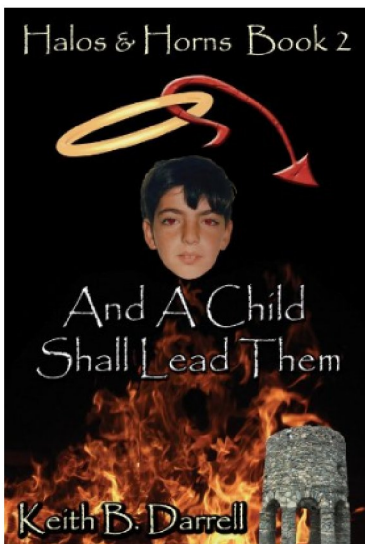
"There were... reasons. But after the potter's wife gave birth, they all lived happily ever after. The end."

"That was a good story, Mother."

"Now it's time to sleep," Amaya said.

"Can you tell me a bedtime story about kyuketsuki tomorrow night?"

"We'll see. Close your eyes and go to sleep now." Amaya kissed Kaya on the forehead and pulled the blanket over her, pausing only to stroke the tiny scales on her daughter's smooth, glistening skin.



And A Child Shall Lead Them (Halos & Horns, Book 2)

by Keith B. Darrell

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

KEITH B. DARRELL is a cross-genre author of short stories, novels, epics, and nonfiction. His work is available in softcover and hardcover from Barnes & Noble and Amazon.com; in e-book format from Amazon.com and Payhip.com; in audiobook format from Audible.com, as a digital download from VitalSource, and on his blog at KeithBDarrell.com.

Darrell studied journalism at Broward Community College, during which time he was awarded First Place for Best In-depth Reporting from the 28-school Florida Community College Press Association. He wrote numerous hard news stories for the BCC newspaper *The Phoenix*, and articles for *Silver Sands*, the BCC feature news magazine. He was later selected as editor of *Silver Sands* and the BCC *Orientations* magazine which afforded him experience in magazine layout. He earned his Bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Florida with a concentration in News-Editorial (news writing, editing, and photojournalism). He had newspaper internships with the *Gainesville Sun*, *High Springs Herald*, and *Alachua Herald*. He was also a freelance writer and photographer for the *Gainesville Sun*, and a writer for the *Emory Law Times* and the Georgia State University *Signal*. He has interviewed dozens of celebrities and politicians.

By age 24, Darrell had earned his A.A. from Broward Community College, his B.S. in Journalism from the University of Florida, his M.B.A. from Emory University, and his J.D. from the Emory University School of Law. He went on to become a member of the State Bar of Georgia and the Florida Bar. Darrell has held many positions as a reporter, advertising representative, entrepreneur, retail business owner, insurance agent, stockbroker, real estate

Author Biography

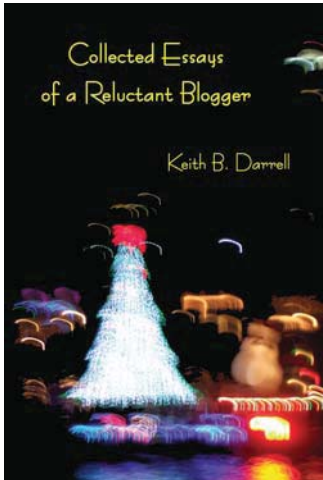
agent, Web designer, attorney, and author. In 2005, Darrell founded Amber Book Company and wrote its flagship title, *Issues in Internet Law: Society, Technology, and the Law*, which is now in its 10th edition and has been adapted as a textbook by colleges and universities worldwide. Darrell's legal articles have been published in **Securities Regulation Law Journal** and **JD/MBA Journal**.

Darrell's nonfiction books include: *Collected Essays of a Reluctant Blogger* (a collection of humorous anecdotes, philosophical musings, and insightful commentary on today's societal concerns derived from his blog at KeithBDarrell.com); *More Essays of a Reluctant Blogger*; *Putting Your Business on the Internet*; and *The Web Designer's Client Handbook*.

He has also written more than 70 short stories contained in four collections, *Randoms* (NIE Awards Finalist, 2009), *Careywood*, *Shards* (NIE Awards Finalist, 2013), and *Shards: The Omnibus Edition*; the *Halos & Horns* fantasy saga: *Paved with Good Intentions* (Book 1), *And a Child Shall Lead Them* (Book 2), *To Hell in a Handbasket* (Book 3), and *The Witches' Cauldron* (Book 4); and *The Halos & Horns Omnibus Edition* (a 904-page book consisting of the four-book series with 61 color illustrations, commentary, and the novelette, *The Pandora Chronicles*); the *Fangs & Fur* fantasy series (the spin-off series from *Halos & Horns* for vampire and werewolf fans) consisting of *Flashbacks* (Book 1), *Nightstalkers* (Book 2), and *Nosferatu, Inc.* (Book 3); *Cops and Robbers*; and the Young Adult science fiction trilogy, *The Adventures of Mackenzie Mortimer: The 25th Hour* (Book 1), *The Tomorrow Paradox* (Book 2), and *All the Time in the World* (Book 3).

Darrell's interests include his pets, photography, genealogy, art, literature, theater, old comic books, travel, and learning about different cultures and languages.

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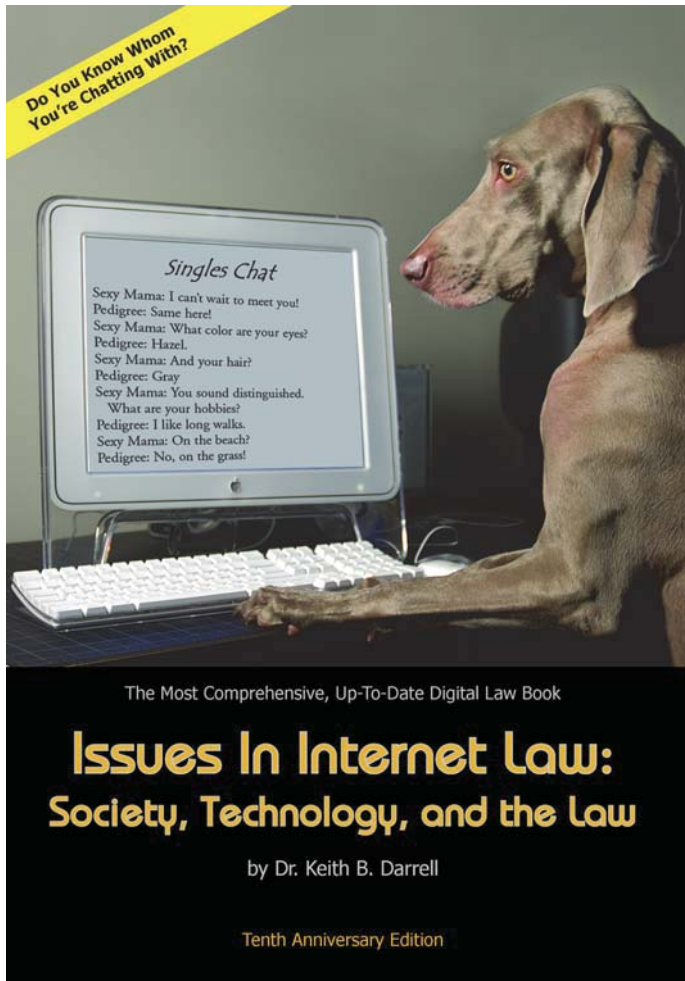
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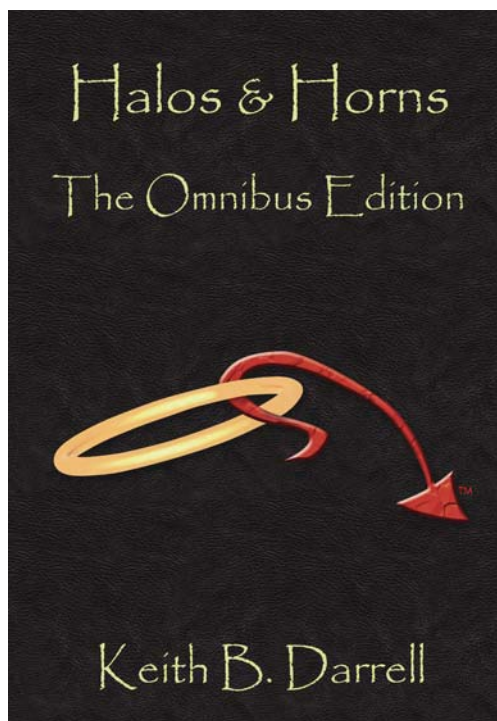
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THE HALOS & HORNS FANTASY SAGA



The Halos & Horns Omnibus Edition, a deluxe coffee table book replete with 61 new color illustrations, contains all four volumes in the *Halos & Horns* fantasy saga; the author's previously unpublished essays on the mythos; the comprehensive *Guide to the Halos & Horns Multiverse*; and the novelette, *The Pandora Chronicles* — a preview of the forthcoming *Fangs & Fur* series, the spin-off from *Halos & Horns* for vampire and werewolf fans.

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The Halos & Horns Fantasy Saga

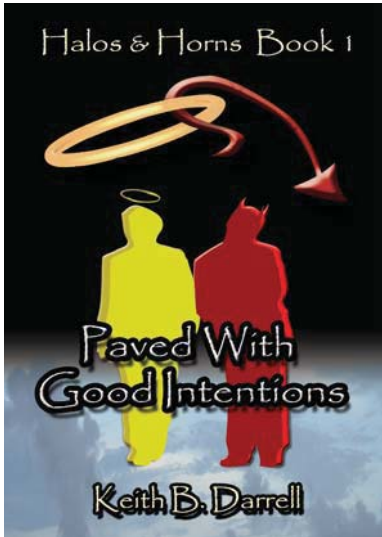
Exiled on Earth, naive angel Gabriel and amoral demon Lucifer, in the human guise of “Gabe Horn” and “Lou Cypher”, form an unlikely partnership as private investigators in Las Vegas. Their adventures take them across the seven heavenly realms, into the nine levels of Hell, through the dream realm of the Dreamscape, and even through time to Camelot. They encounter an assortment of the most imaginative characters in contemporary fantasy: dreamwalkers, golems, shapeshifters, vampires, werewolves, witches, and other supernatural creatures. Some of the vampires include Sharon — she’s Jewish, crosses don’t bother her; Pandora — trouble follows her like a shadow; Claude — he’s too claustrophobic to use a coffin; and Artemus — a 10-year-old boy who’s been a vampire for nearly 457 years; the corporate vampires of Nosferatu, Inc.; and the Skid Row “trampires”.

In Book 2, Gabe and Lou face the Dark Gods in their bid for domination of the multiverse. Ditzzy vampire Pandora is dating a werewolf, while speculation abounds over whether Lou or the warlock Mordred is the father of resident witch Samantha's baby. But now that the ancient, child-devouring succubus Lilith walks the Earth once more, how long can Samantha's infant or the other supernatural children — Emma the Cockney witchling; Siofra, the Irish changeling; Asabi, the African emere; Kaya, the Japanese hypnalis; and Artemus, the boy vampire — survive?

In Book 3, the angel Gabe Horn and demon Lou Cypher question their roles, as each embarks on a personal journey to discover his humanity, leading Gabriel to search for answers in the most unlikely of places. As Samantha ponders his proposal, Lucifer finds himself a reluctant ruler. Irish changeling Siofra adjusts to life hiding from Alaric in Japan with the ingénue Kaya, unaware of the girl's deadly secret. A familiar figure rises from obscurity to seize the reins of power at Nosferatu, Inc., while Morgana le Fay seeks vengeance for the fate of her son, Mordred.

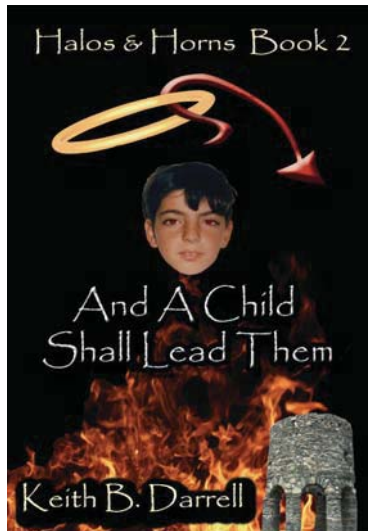
In Book 4, the angel Gabriel and the demon Asmodeus fight for their lives against usurper Baphomet and his demonic horde in his bid to take dominion of Hell; Lucifer faces judgment before the Eternals for murder; and Samantha Twitch joins forces with her sisters, witches Drusilla and Calliope, against the sorceress supreme Morgana le Fay and her Dark Fae minions. An attack on Nosferatu, Inc.'s Japanese headquarters by the Empusae, ancient vampiric demons, not only threatens Lady Chiyoko's territory, but will change the young hypnalis Kaya's life forever. Meanwhile, one character must journey back in time to 17th century Salem in search of the secret to defeating Morgana le Fay. But what other secrets does the Salem coven hold? No one is safe. As the *Halos & Horns* saga draws to its conclusion, who will survive?

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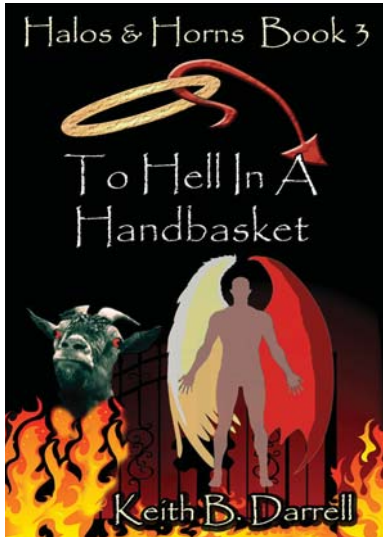
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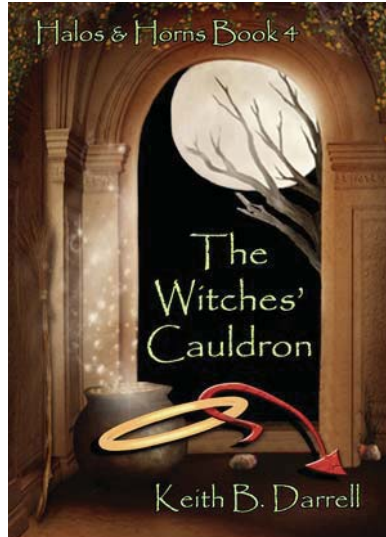
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THE HALOS & HORNS FANTASY SAGA



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THE FANGS & FUR FANTASY SAGA



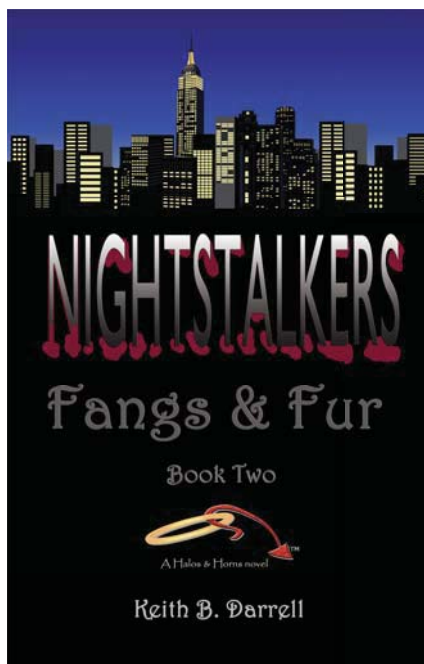
Pandora's a carefree party girl who just happens to be a vampire. With her best friend Sharon Mordecai, a hybrid vampire; her boyfriend Cody Fenris, a werewolf; and Cody's sister Lupe, who transforms into a wolf, they run Nightstalkers, Inc., a private detective agency. Pandora and Sharon also belong to Nosferatu, Inc., a worldwide corporation set up to provide relocation services for vampires, who cannot remain

in one place indefinitely, lest the "breathers" question why they never age. Other Nosferatu members include 10-year-old Artemus, the boy vampire; ex-KGB operative Valentina Petrovna; the maladroit, claustrophobic vampire Claude Gauthier; the vagrant "trampire" Seamus Callaghan; and the corporation's international board of directors: Lady Chiyoko in Japan, Callum in Australia, Isra in Dubai, Amadi in Africa, Magda in Hungary, and its CEO, the mysterious human known only as Remick.

First introduced in the *Halos & Horns* fantasy saga, these vampires and lycanthropes have their own stories to tell. These tales in *Flashbacks* shed light on their dark pasts while sowing the seeds for the next two books in the *Fangs & Fur* trilogy. They can be enjoyed as individual vampire and werewolf stories, or read by *Halos & Horns* fans to learn more about the characters populating that saga, or viewed as the prologue to the story about to unfold in the *Fangs & Fur* trilogy.

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THE FANGS & FUR FANTASY SAGA



When a Grigori unwittingly entrusts trouble-prone vampire Pandora with an ancient leather-bound box containing primordial evil, what could possibly go wrong? At least Pandora doesn't know her best friend slept with her boyfriend. Or that her werewolf beau has been targeted for revenge by one of his victims. Her BFF Sharon — the hybrid vampire infused with an angelic life force — has enough to worry

about now that a deranged scientist/occultist is creating his own Frankenstein monster and requires an angelic life force to animate it. He's resurrected the spirit of Jack the Ripper to supply the body parts he needs from Las Vegas prostitutes. Should Kennedy be worried to walk the city streets?

After a Valkyrie whisks the Nightstalkers, Inc. team of private eyes — vampires Sharon and Pandora, and lycanthrope siblings Cody and Lupe Fenris — off to the Otherworld dimension of the Fae to recover Thor's golden gauntlets from the Dark Fae's leader, the Morrigan, the team will be forever changed. And how does that tie in with their new landlord Kitty Bast, an Egyptian cat goddess?

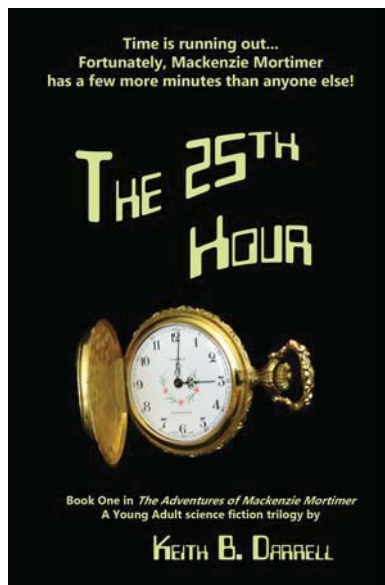
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THE ADVENTURES OF MACKENZIE MORTIMER

BOOK ONE

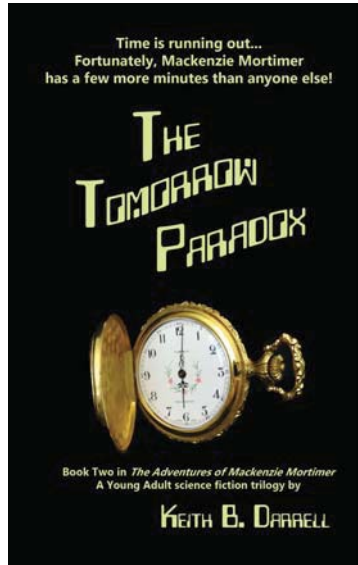


Mackenzie Mortimer is a typical junior high geek: shy, awkward, late with his homework, and always late for class. He's never got enough time to do everything he needs; after all, there are only 24 hours in a day. But when Mac finds his grandfather's pocket watch, he discovers his days have an extra hour. The eccentric inventor's journal reveals the watch can add up to 60 minutes to a single day by freezing time around whomever controls it. Marlene Prentice is Mac's best friend, but he's clueless the tomboy has a crush on him. Mac only has eyes for foxy Vanessa Carlyle, daughter of the town's richest man. When a crisis looms for Mac and his friends, time is running out... but fortunately, Mackenzie Mortimer has a few more minutes than anyone else.

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THE ADVENTURES OF MACKENZIE MORTIMER
Book Two



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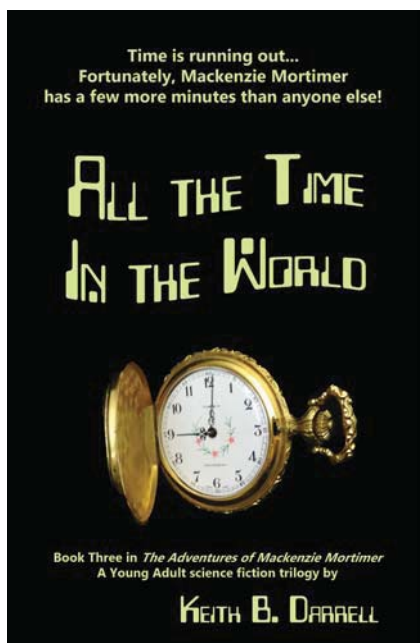
Mackenzie Mortimer's troubles are just beginning! With his pocket watch destroyed, Mackenzie finds himself a stranger in a strange land, surrounded by familiar people he doesn't really know, with only Gemma, a 15-year-old clone, to guide him through the labyrinth of the future. Will the mysterious black, iron key unlock the secrets to returning him home, or is it a harbinger of his impending doom?

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THE ADVENTURES OF MACKENZIE MORTIMER

BOOK THREE



Mac has left Gramps' diary behind in the future and Victoria Carmichael's ex-husband, Jeremy Bentaine, has stolen it along with Gramps' journals. Now, Bentaine Industries seeks to be the sole possessor of time travel technology... and that means eliminating Mackenzie Mortimer before he discovers the pocket watch! But Mac has followed Gramps' trail to WWII Nazi-occupied Belgium, where he must use his future technology to stay alive, locate Gramps, and unite a pair of star-crossed lovers. The horrors of WWII that Mac encounters will change him forever, but if the Bentaine family has its way, forever will be a very short time for Mackenzie Mortimer!

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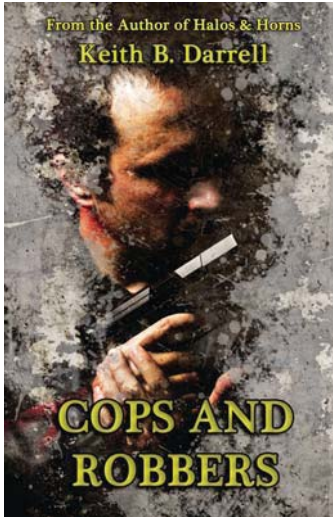
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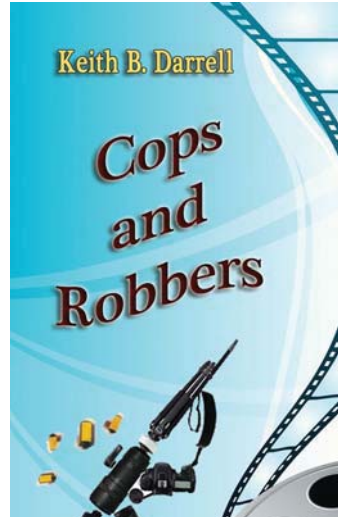
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COPS AND ROBBERS



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A pair of FBI agents set up a bogus movie production as part of an unlikely sting operation to snare a mob kingpin. They buy the worst script in Hollywood and hire a failed movie producer whose career is on the skids; a third-rate aging actress whose claim to fame is having performed Shakespeare... on a cruise ship; an amphetamine-enhanced screenwriter; a hooker; a Yiddish-speaking accountant; a black, flaming gay actor; and a Native American actor who insists on dressing like an Old West dime store Indian.

However, throughout the course of the film, the mobsters and one of the FBI agents become so enamored by the glitter and glamour of Hollywood that they actually end up working together to try to make the movie a success. Our hero is a hitman in search of the redemption he doesn't believe he deserves. He realizes the fake film was never meant to be produced and develops a conscience believing it's wrong to allow the innocent actors and film crew to spend months of their lives working on a movie no one will ever see, despite the delusions of everyone else involved. Knowing their hopes and dreams will be dashed, our hero sets about trying to do the right thing.