



The Believer

Stephanie Black

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There is a place where the threat of foreign terrorism is nonexistent, where there are no arguments about religion, and no battles over politics. Welcome to New America—a place where reading the wrong book can cost you your life!

Ian Roshek finally believes in something. The young history professor has studied a contraband copy of the Book of Mormon—and he knows what it says is true. But now his newfound convictions will be put to the test as he struggles to listen to the still, small voice, while society screams in his ear.

Ian's sister Jill and her influential boyfriend only see Ian as a man with religious delusions--a man who needs help. And though her facade of brutality hides it, police interrogator Alisa Kent feels a trace of compassion toward this flawed, but courageous man who stays true to his faith--despite the fact that it's contrary to both logic and public opinion. If only for selfish reasons, she wants to know more. But soon Ian's choices will ignite a chain of events that he, and those around him, cannot escape.

The Believer Details

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From Reader Review The Believer for online ebook

Mormonhermitmom says

I've been missing the Cold War. It was such a great era for exciting movies, books, etc. Don't get me wrong; I don't care for the thought of Mutually Assured Destruction brought on by tense diplomatic relations. However, the stories of the oppression coming from behind the Iron Curtain made for great reading, a la 1984.

This book doesn't showcase an exact Orwellian society, but it does depict a world carved out of America in which religion is not only marginalized but criminalized. How does a government that does not hold itself accountable to any higher power, or even the people it governs, operate. Ms. Black's speculative work provides food for thought on such a question.

Ian Roshek is a history professor in a New England town which is part of New America. A sort-of civil war, a conflict where the citizens of the United States decided to let a few states break off in an effort to avoid bloodshed, gives birth to a government of a supreme council that encourages law enforcement through Neighborhood Watch committees that have the power to blacklist nonconforming citizens. Healthcare is not only rationed, but if the cost of a patient outweighs that patient's usefulness to society, the Euthanasia Center stands ready to relieve society of the burden of continued care.

Roshek is subject to an academic committee that must approve the material in his lectures. He cannot explain or lecture on any of the prior history of the United States of America because the ideas in the old constitution might give people ideas that they shouldn't have. Religious books have been destroyed and are contraband that bring the reader/possessor a criminal deserving of death.

Ian has such a book. A Book of Mormon. He believes in the book but tries to continue to live under the radar. He doesn't even let his sister know about it.

One day when Ian is walking home, campus watchers are searching all the people on campus for contraband. When a student protests that a certain pamphlet found in her backpack is not hers, the surrounding student body metamorphose into a mob and begin beating her. Knowing he shouldn't do anything to stop the abuse, Ian's conscience prods him into trying to deflect the anger of the mob. He is arrested along with the now bleeding young woman. After a mentally grueling interrogation session, Ian is released with a healthy sense of paranoia that the police have only released him in order to watch him.

The story that follows describes Ian getting deeper into trouble until only escape to the United States is his only option for survival. I won't give away the ending here.

This story makes you think about government and how much, or how little, it should really be involved in the lives of its citizens. What price would one pay for "peace and security" and can there be either in the absence of religion or some moral code?

What is morality if there is no religion to quantify it?

I feel this would make an excellent book to discuss with teenagers. Despite the Book of Mormon angle, the plot doesn't come off like the typical LDS novel. The Bible could have easily been substituted for the Book of Mormon and the story would still have worked. The violence that's portrayed isn't graphically detailed, I don't remember any profanity but if there was it wasn't the f-bomb, and there is no sex depicted or even

implied.

Liz says

Okay, this book held promise. Dystopian, future society story which I love. LDS twist to it was kind of fun. A lot of mystery. However, the main character was sometimes hard to understand. Was he brave or not? Convicted to his feelings or not? I didn't always relate to him. Then they bring in the girl character who I didn't really like. You're supposed to forgive her by the end, but they didn't tell me enough about her feelings to help me want to forgive her. She seemed mostly motivated by guilt. Then, BOOM!! The story is over. No winding down this story, just everyone is safe so the author just quit writing. HATED the ending. I felt Black did the same thing in the other book of hers I read, so I don't know that I can recommend her as an author.

Suze Price says

A dystopian future with an LDS twist. It was good enough that I want to read the series!

Dianna Wheelwright says

Confusing at first

When I first started reading I was confused as to what was going on, as I got into the story, I found this to be a compelling story. I hoped for peace for Alicia Kent, and freedom for Ian and Jill. This was a good story and if you look at things today in the government, it is leading us down to this kind of life. Bravo for insight Stephanie Black. Well done on this story!

Anna says

I've read all of Stephanie's books, and even though this was her first it was just as good as the others. When did she learn and hone her craft? It seems Stephanie just exploded onto the LDS literary scene fully developed and with as much talent as many writers who have spent years improving book-by-book.

The Believer is set in a dystopian society, "New America", set up three generations ago by revered men of high ideals and great ambition. Those who have to live in the society they created strive to be "patriotic" even if this means shunning anyone who has fallen even slightly below the required standard, not making a fuss when your mother is euthanised because the state doesn't have the resources to treat her illness, or even turning over your family for torture, imprisonment and execution for the crime of believing in God.

Stephanie creates a very effective and disturbing atmosphere, partly by having the protagonist, Ian Roshek, someone very ordinary and easy to identify with, and partly through little clues in the text. Whilst it isn't stated outright, it seems everyone lives in strictly-monitored tiny apartments. I found it telling that all the towns and landmarks are named after the man who founded New America, his family and closest associates, but you have to be paying fairly close attention to notice. Little clues like this really help build a picture of

New America and what life there might be like.

I suspect there is a political warning message in there somewhere too, but being British it was completely lost on me. Not that that stopped me enjoying the book.

I liked the fact that it is completely unpredictable too. Four pages from the end I still had no idea what would happen. All the way through I expected a romance which never happened (although in my head it does after the book ends) and I was delighted that the book ended on a cliffhanger. All too often it seems that editors and publishers want everything tidied up nicely at the end (I speak from bitter experience, having recently had to rewrite the ending of one of my books), but life isn't like that. Good for Stephanie for leaving the reader to reach their own conclusion about what happens next. I am not going to clamour for a sequel just in case the happy ending (complete with romance) in my head isn't what Stephanie chooses to write.

Alex says

I feel like I should have liked this book more than I do. I really wanted to give it 4 stars, but it was lacking for some reason. But I think that was because of the abridgment of the book more than the writing.

Well. That ended... abruptly.

So the audiobook is abridged...

So I'm thinking to myself... and to whoever is reading this... maybe everything everybody else disliked was taken out :)

I'm not hating it, but I can see that I'm missing parts of the story. Parts that would smooth out the edges a bit. Bothersome, but out of my control... unless I picked up the paperback.

Marlow says

This book takes place in the near future in a place where people are controlled more tightly than they realize. Contraband literature (IE scriptures) are smuggled into the country and people meet in secret to discuss it. Those that are caught with it are tortured until death or until they denounce what they have learned and declare who gave it to them.

A professor reads a copy and begins to believe. Once he believes he gets others to believe as well.

The book has a very interesting premise in a world that is getting a little too much like home.

Bobbi says

This book leaves you wondering: Could this really happen? Yes, it could happen. It's not that far fetched for a government to control its people like this. We take our freedom for granted and are in a contented ignorance most of the time. This is dangerous. Power hungry leaders that don't feel that they have to answer

to a higher power (God) don't have a conscience to restrain them and will stop at nothing.

I enjoyed this book for it's entertainment value. The middle was a bit slow, but it held together pretty well. Overall, I liked it.

Kathy says

Intense. Interesting. A fast and involving read. Brings up some interesting questions. Tight and intricate plot. Believable and likeable characters. For its genre, it's fabulous. Probably my all time favorite LDS fiction book. My older kids loved it too. The religious part was central, not just added to appeal to a LDS audience, and not in any way sappy. The main character was, technically, not even LDS. Loved the family relationship between the main character and his sister. It was sweet, but genuine. My LDS fiction experience is limited I will admit, but this is way different than Charlie! Bravo, Stephanie.

Darla says

(Genre:LDS science fiction) Set in the future, this novel explores a splinter group/country breaking away from the USA. This society is very government-centric. Religion is banned to avoid the problem of religious extremists and people are used to being watched and having their words and actions carefully monitored and controlled. A professor of history (Ian) has stumbled upon a contra-ban Book of Mormon and after careful study of the book, he becomes a believer. But when he comes under the scrutiny of the police and some powerful government authorities, his private beliefs threaten not only his own safety, but the safety of others, including his non-believer sister (Jill).

Although I felt that the ending was a little abrupt, I did enjoy the initial premise of the story and found it to be an engaging read (I actually listened to it on CD).

Dlora says

With this novel, Stephanie Black has entered the dystopian subgenre of science fiction novels. She's created a world where a group of citizens have seceded from the United States to form New America, a country that blames religion as the catalyst for terrorism and hatred that plagues the U.S. Believing in God is grounds for treason and Mormonism in particular is considered especially pernicious. Living in a virtual police state, Ian Roschek, an historian specializing in the early years of their republic, argues that in order for a society to exist in peace there must be limits on behavior. Those limits can come from within us, as we adhere to moral principles or limits can come from outside of us, through force set by the government. Having gotten a contraband copy of the book of Mormon and becoming converted, Ian is struggling with what God would have him do in hiding his beliefs versus helping others or even more aggressively sharing his beliefs in God, for instance with his sister who is mourning their parents. Their Mom was euthanized when she got cancer because it was deemed a waste of communal money to try to extend her life. In New America, the state is more important than single individuals. The ideas kept me riled up and wondering where the truth lay and the plot moved quickly with tension and despair. A lot of angst and heroism but not much humor or happiness.

Lucinda says

I'm going to brag about having a signed first edition of this book, that's how much I love it.

I purchased the paperback when it came out in 2005. I usually read romance, but something in the blurb caught my attention, and I had to get it.

I remember how impressed I was with it when I finished reading, and I even read it a few more times after that. Last year, I gave it to my 15 y.o. son to read, since he's an avid reader of sci-fi and dystopians, and he loved it too.

It's been a few years since I read it, so I recently got the Kindle version and read it again, in anticipation of the sequel. Since it had been a while, I was able to read with almost fresh eyes, and it was an exciting read.

The plot and story are brilliant, that's the only word I can use. Even though it takes place in an alternative setting in a not-so distant future, the realism of it is, at times, frightening, and most definitely disturbing, because religious persecution **has** happened in the past and still goes on in some parts of the world. I couldn't help but draw parallels, and think how easy it would be for something like this to happen.

Ian Roshek is a compelling protagonist, one with whom I could only empathize. He wants to do what is right, and he's trying to find the courage to do it. As the story develops, Ian finds more and more of that courage, as he learns to follow the promptings of the Spirit. I saw him grow from an insecure, unsure character who didn't want to assert himself, to one who is willing to lose everything to save those he loves, and to protect the truth.

Jill (Ian's sister), Daniel (her boyfriend), and Alisa (the police interrogator) are secondary characters who also grow through the story, and who win my respect by the end of it.

Like I mentioned, it is a dystopian novel, but it's also Christian fiction, and a futuristic thriller full of suspense and action. It even has a touch of romance for those die-hard romance readers like me.

I wholeheartedly recommend it. It's unlike anything else I've read in the LDS fiction market, and totally worth the time investment.

And can I just say how excited I am for the upcoming sequel, *The Witnesses*. So looking forward to it.

(original review at <http://lucindawhitney.com/2013/09/boo...>)

Orlando says

I didn't really care for this book... I REALLY had to work to keep reading to the end... I read Stephanie's 3 books backwards.. Meaning the 3rd, 2nd, then this one... If I had read this one first I would not have read anymore of her books because it dragged tooo much for the first 3/4 of the book... I think she needed to explain the background, that it is "mimicking" the story in 3 Nephi... Too much focus on the anarchist itself and not on the story line... Then you finally start to get into the book and she ends it with loose ends...

Melissa says

Really enjoyed this dystopian novel. The story is set in New America (a portion of the U.S. that has been sectioned off to prevent civil war). In New America, religion has been banned and anyone caught with religious materials is subject to police interrogation and potentially death. When Ian Roshek, a young history professor begins to study the history of the United States and gets ahold of a Book of Mormon, he begins to question the validity of New America and the propaganda he is forced to teach. When he stops the beating of a young woman caught with subversive materials, he is soon placed in a position where he has to decide what he believes and what he is willing to do about his beliefs.

This book laid out great themes of the individual versus the collective, and can a moral society exist without the underpinnings of religion. There was plenty of action and twists and turns, though more psychological than violent. While this is geared to an LDS audience, the themes and persecutions experienced could pertain to any religion. Really like this author and can't wait to read the sequel *The Witnesses*.

Mindy says

Words can not describe what a crazy-good author Stephanie Black is. Her books take you to another place, a place that you are reluctant to return from. Well, in the case of *The Believer*, that world was a pretty tough place to be, but you know what I mean. When we first meet Ian Roshek, he is coming to the aid of a student being wrongly accused of having contraband. He is taken into custody and tortured (don't worry, it's not graphic) by police interrogator Alisa Kent. After the agonizing time spent in custody, Kent lets him go. It takes time for Ian to feel safe again. The only problem is, Ian really was guilty. He is a believer, and he can't figure why Kent lets him go. What happens next sets off a chain of events that will send your mind spinning and keep you reading this awesome book until you turn the last page.

Stephanie is a gifted author. Her books are so well-written you feel as though you watching a movie instead of reading. These characters go through a lot. And by the end, you aren't sure who to trust. There is so much going on, and not just for Ian, all the characters. All their decisions affect each other in some way. The character I found most intriguing was Daniel. Without giving much away, he has a VERY tough choice to make, and on top of that is given life-changing news that will/can affect so many. Including, his chance to make himself happy. Alisa Kent was fascinating too. Every character was so well-written. The last sentence of this book brought tears to my eyes.

5 out of 5 stars. This book made me grateful for freedom of religion. The sequel to *The Believer*, *The Witnesses*, was just released last month. I will be reviewing *The Witnesses* next week!

Stephanie is the author of many fast-paced thrillers. She won the Whitney Award for her books *Rearview Mirror*, *Cold as Ice*, *Methods of Madness*, and *Fool me Twice*. I told you she was amazing!
