

Emperor asks a number of questions about life & faith

By C.S. Morrissey
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C.S. Morrissey recently interviewed author John McNichol about his new book in his original "The Young Chesterton Chronicles" series.

CSM: Tell me about your new, 472-page novel, *The Emperor of North America*.

JM: In Book 1, *The Tripods Attack!* the young Gilbert Chesterton and his trusty friend H.G. Wells fought off a Martian invasion. Now, in *The Emperor of North America*, Gil and Herb take very different paths based on the choices they make.

Gil has to return to America, travelling through 1800s New York and a floating city in the clouds. He finds himself up against steam-powered cowboys, nefarious eugenicists, a flamboyant, would-be dictator of the Americas, and a series of other colourful characters based on fictional and real-life historical figures of the period.

CSM: Does the story have a serious and spiritual side?

JM: Most important, Gilbert finds himself questioning a number of aspects of his life and faith in the face of his personal challenges and difficulties. Friends and enemies shift and change, but he gets a number of answers in the end ... along with a few new questions!

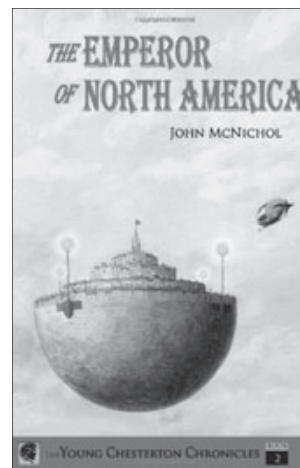
CSM: How did you discover Chesterton?

JM: As a teenager, I read a few Father Brown stories after seeing them dramatized on PBS Mystery. I later read *The Everlasting Man* and *Orthodoxy*, which did for my sense of history what C.S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity* and *Surprised by Joy* did for my faith.

Both authors took common, verifiable human experiences and used them as incontrovertible evidence for the truths of Christianity.

CSM: What are your favourite Chesterton books?

JM: Of his fiction, *The Ball*



C.S. Morrissey chats with author John McNichol about his original series, "The Young Chesterton Chronicles" and the real G.K. Chesterton.

and the Cross, The Flying Inn, The Man Who Was Thursday and The Napoleon of Notting Hill, in addition to the Father Brown mysteries.

CSM: Who did you write your own books for? G.K. Chesterton fans?

JM: I wrote for myself, from a desire to share the stories in my head. As a teenager, the lack of male-friendly Catholic fiction and media sent me

this message: to be a "good" Catholic, one had to be either a girl or a feminized male.

The kinds of images and stories that boys liked: giant robots, evil aliens, and explosions, were a collective "no-no" in Catholic fiction.

I wrote for my sons, so that they could have something exciting to read that would build up their faith and values, rather than tear it down. There

already existed a number of excellent authors and titles in the Catholic vein for girls, but still next to nothing for boys.

CSM: So you wanted to shake things up, and write cool fiction that real men would like.

JM: I also wrote for my students. When I started teaching middle school years ago, I was saddened at the popular religious faith as ignorant, cruel, and nasty, while depicting secularists as noble, thoughtful, and wise.

If anything, experience has taught me the opposite is true, and I wanted to write stories that reflected this, and I wanted to inspire my kids and students to investigate the real G.K. Chesterton's life and writings.

CSM: Why should people read your books? Isn't there enough by Chesterton himself to read?

JM: There certainly is quite a bit! The real-life Gilbert Keith Chesterton wrote over 100 novels and published over 1,000 poems and essays.

However, the sad truth is it's hard for a young person to stumble onto his writings. Chesterton's been unfairly scoured from the school curriculum. Even well-meaning teachers are largely ignorant of him.

When I wanted to make him the subject of my thesis for my masters in literature, for example, I was told none of the literature professors could help me. And this was at

a Catholic (Jesuit) University!

CSM: So if people haven't heard of Chesterton, or are reluctant to read him, you aim to provide a nice introduction? Very sneaky! I always tell people to start with *Orthodoxy*.

JM: A good fiction story would, I think, be a better introduction to Chesterton than *The Everlasting Man* or *Orthodoxy*. Today's young people would often prefer to read an adventure story instead of a cerebral treatise on history or the human condition.

As for Chesterton's fiction, the Father Brown mysteries by GKC are great to read, but most young people I've encountered would rather read a story starring someone their own age and with their perspective on life. My first goal here is to tell a great story about just such a person.

CSM: Do you plan to write more Young Chesterton books?

JM: Right now I am about 80 per cent of the way through writing the third volume in the series: *Where the Red Sands Fly*. It's about Gilbert's adventures on Mars.

As with the novels already published, my goal is to tell a great story about a person who wins because they are open to and apply the timeless values of the Catholic faith.

The *Emperor of North America*, published by Bezael Books, and *The Tripods Attack!* from Sophia Institute Press, are both available at [the morec.com/GKC website](http://themorec.com/GKC). C.S. Morrissey teaches at Redeemer Pacific College. □