

# AUTHOR INTERVIEW

SEPTEMBER 2024

## GEANNA CULBERTSON: THE “FORWARD MOTION” OF STRONG FEMALE CHARACTERS



Image 1: Geanna Culbertson stands in front of her stall in the Los Angeles Times Festival of Books. Photo: Geanna Culbertson

### GEANNA CULBERTSON

”

**My origin is realising what I had inside of me, and deciding to embrace it.**

Today, you can finally embark on the much-anticipated journey of being a female lead. Two pairs of footwear appear before your eyes— should you pick the glass slippers, or the combat boots?

These are the shoes the eponymous protagonist in *The Crisanta Knight Series* has to put herself into. The nine-book epic begins with Cinderella’s daughter, affectionately known as Crisa, struggling to conform to the archetype of a traditional princess. Thus, she fights back— while wearing combat boots.

“When I was little, there weren’t many strong female characters that I could love and relate to,” Geanna Culbertson, the fantasy series’s author, recalled. As she wrote Crisa’s action-packed journey of confronting the realm’s prophet “Author” for the right to write her own story in *Protagonist Bound*, she realised that her favourite stories growing up tended to be dominated by male characters because of their focus on personal growth over romantic elements, which female-driven stories often reversed.



# GEANNA CULBERTSON: THE “FORWARD MOTION” OF STRONG FEMALE CHARACTERS

## The CRISANTA KNIGHT Series



**Image 2: The nine book covers in chronological order from The Crisanta Knight Series by Geanna Culbertson. Photo: Geanna Culbertson**

By encompassing determination, intelligence, self-acceptance, and other strengths in her female protagonists, the author hopes that the women in her series would be a statement for equal recognition for all characters: Crisa could roundhouse-kick a villain, knock off a monster with a spear, as well as waltz in show-stopping gowns across the dance floor of Lady Agnue’s School for Princesses & Other Female Protagonists’ monthly balls.

Crisa’s fairytale best friends, Snow White Junior (SJ), daughter of Snow White, and Little Red Riding Hood’s younger sister Blue, also hold their heads high as “hero-princesses”, as Culbertson calls them, for emerging into an inventor-cum-entrepreneur and extraordinaire combattant among other roles.

***“My characters aren’t defined by stereotypes. They are people, not some romantic, or other kind of trope. Every person needs to be treated for their character, their actions, their choices.”***

## DEFYING THE NOAH’S ARK PRINCIPLE

Culbertson had no intention of writing off her characters solely as love interests. She equates her focus on self-realisation over romance with her quirkily named “Noah’s Ark Principle”, noting that most protagonists are coupled off in YA fiction— unrealistically paired two by two, like on Noah’s Ark. In The Crisanta Knight Series, the strong independent individuals fill their story arcs with adventures, personal growth, and fights against injustice, proving that no character is fated to be an archetypal representation.

Culbertson elucidated her girl-boy story dynamic with an Avengers example. “You can be Iron Man, and I will be Spider-Man, and we will fight our own missions, and have our own franchises, but also sometimes we unite and make a great team.”

## CH-CH-CH-CH-CHANGE– CHARACTER GROWTH THROUGH MORAL DILEMMA

“From the beginning I wanted my series to emphasise change and moving forward,” Culbertson explained. What Crisa illustrates with her defiance of expectations is that readers can “put all of themselves into fighting for what they believe in, and fighting for themselves”— propelling society and their character forward.

Moreover, when Crisa and her friends are met with surges of antagonists, Culbertson encourages the readers to “ask the big questions” of justice and morality. For example, in Book Five, Crisanta Knight: To Death & Back, Crisa is torn between mercy and direct elimination of villainy, questioning the world as an “abstract scale of good and evil” while her team helps legendary King Arthur take back Camelot.

As Crisa makes her best choices through reason and experience, readers are free to adopt various perspectives instead of blindly following. “It is a coming-of-age story, coming of age means coming into all the information you need to grow up and be a mature person,” the author remarked.

With difficult moral decisions also comes the matter of self-acceptance. Through the journey of self-discovery, Crisa recognises her position in the middle of the archetypal princess versus hero balance as life-altering quests nudge her closer to the best version of herself. “Self-acceptance gives you that kind of freedom, it allows you to be yourself. And that freedom becomes the key that is integral to the story, your story,” Culbertson noted.

# GEANNA CULBERTSON: THE “FORWARD MOTION” OF STRONG FEMALE CHARACTERS

## THE MIND OF A POSITIVE PANDORA’S BOX

This wholesome fantasy began with Culbertson simply creating a map of the world and the first book’s prologue while at university. After that, for months Culbertson kept pondering the possibilities of the story. She compared her brain with a “positive Pandora’s box” — “When I opened the lid just a little to write that prologue, it wouldn’t stop opening. So much imagination started shooting out of it; the story and characters kept growing and I had to see where they led.

“My origin story isn’t ‘I’m going to be this person; I’m going to write a novel.’ My origin is realising what I had inside of me, and deciding to embrace it.” The author’s first chapter of Protagonist Bound ended up getting started in a doctor’s office the following summer and she “never looked back”.

But seeing her books in brick-and-mortar stores was never the only thing on her plate— Culbertson has to fit her book world around her full-time job as a marketing manager. Having started the series in her college years, she was grateful that writing in school became the “perfect training ground”, priming her for a balance between different roles.

Another hurdle for publishing the series was the rejection. Culbertson, who only received six responses among seventy submissions to publishers, forged her author path amidst countless rejections and ghosting. The resilient author referenced the Cheshire Cat cameo in Book Eight, Crisanta Knight: Midnight Law, who notes “People get their hearts broken all the time and find a way to go on. That is the maddest thing of all, and it is also the most wonderful”. Surmising that bouncing back in the face of adversity has been the springboard for the ultimate publishing of her series and its success.

*“I know my books don’t hurt me. My books bring me the best moments of my life. They have given me the chance to give others good things and joy too, and that is a magical gift.”*



**Image 3: Geanna Culbertson speaks to a visitor at Chapman University Dream Career Event. Photo: Geanna Culbertson**

## EXPANDING THE LITERARY UNIVERSE

The author envisions more dynamic characters with heroic ideals for her future books under her newly established publishing company, Culbertson Kingdom, starting with the sequel to Book One of her Guardian Angel series Heaven’t You Heard?. Infused with magic and positivity, Halo My Name Is... will be the first title released by Culbertson Kingdom. The new novel coming out on 15th October, 2024, will inspire readers to dream, dare, and grow through exciting celestial adventures and three-dimensional characters.



**Image 4: Book covers of Heaven’t You Heard? and Halo My Name Is... in Geanna Culbertson’s Guardian Angel series. Photo: Geanna Culbertson**

The author envisions more dynamic characters with heroic ideals for her future books under her newly established publishing company, Culbertson Kingdom, starting with the sequel to Book One of her Guardian Angel series Heaven’t You Heard?. Infused with magic and positivity, Halo My Name Is... will be the first title released by Culbertson Kingdom. The new novel coming out on 15th October, 2024, will inspire readers to dream, dare, and grow through exciting celestial adventures and three-dimensional characters.

Geanna Culbertson supports young writers penning their imaginary realms with the same passion as hers. She reflected that the genuine pride in yourself and your work is “the core” of storytelling. “If it matters to you, it’s worth it. You have to give it all you’ve got and believe in yourself no matter the odds or obstacles.” The author underlined this with her favourite quote from Kung Fu Panda: “There is no secret ingredient, it’s just you.”

Visit one of Culbertson Kingdom’s websites to learn more!  
[www.CulbertsonKingdom.com](http://www.CulbertsonKingdom.com)  
[www.CrisantaKnight.com](http://www.CrisantaKnight.com)

**REPORTED BY 6E GRACE IP**