

COURSES OF THE CURSED: The Curtis Jefferson Series Book 2

By Vince Bailey

<https://VinceBaileyAuthor.com>

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Rating: 5/5; Highly Recommended!



Imprisoned in a boys' institution for a crime he did not commit, Curtis Jefferson must again face his nemesis, Harvey Huish. In *Courses of the Cursed*, the second installment of Vince Bailey's paranormal Curtis Jefferson series, the fight comes with much higher stakes.

Estranged from his constant companion, Randy, Curtis continues his training alone, bewildered as to why Randy believes Harvey to be more than a vicious bully. But as Curtis's strange visions and dreams increase, he needs Randy more than ever. He begins to question whether Randy has been preparing him for an encounter beyond the violence between boys.

Unbeknownst to Curtis, he isn't the only one being tortured by the evil of Fort Grant. A local artist, Ray Cienfuegos, has his own date with destiny. As the last male descendant of his family, Ray's fate is tied to the massacre that occurred near the fort almost one hundred years ago.

Two young men, one a savior and one a sacrifice, will be tested by the wicked power of the sacred land. But who will survive the encounter?

This complex work twists its way through a maze of interconnected storylines and characters who each, in their own way, embody the age-old battle between good and evil.

Ezra, an old Apache shaman, embodies something horrible and ancient. Whether he is Satan or some malicious pagan entity, he facilitates the cruelty done to the characters in the novel. However, upon closer examination, Ezra's "evil" becomes much more complicated. While he tortures Ray and sometimes takes the form of an enormous would-be rapist were-coyote, he is also the voice of a long-dead, long-forgotten people, innocents slaughtered in a sick game of commerce.

Ezra does unforgivable harm, but he does so in the name of justice, begging the question of whether justice can be achieved through bloody vengeance.

The idea of justice defines many characters, including Lieutenant Roy, the cavalry commander who refused to serve out the original retribution for which Ezra fights. In opposition to Ezra's malignancy stands Isabel Cienfuegos, Ray's aunt. She serves as foil to all that Ezra represents and becomes an avenging angel, toting a 12-gauge instead of a fiery sword.

Numerous other characters strive to do good in the world around them.

Vince, the narrator, admits that his faith is the very reason he must tell the story. Leon and Georgy, fellow inmates of Curtis, drag him to church to pray for guidance and courage for what lay ahead, leading the reader to question if Curtis's actions are divine justice, or if he is merely a pawn in Ezra's plan.

The symbology of fire frames this story.

If Ezra is – or is in league with – the devil, the use of fire is a pointed reference to the retribution forced upon those who have done wrong in life. However, when Ray receives his blood money from Ezra, Isabel throws it into a fire to rid them of the thing that led to Ray's abduction and torture. The fort's original inhabitants were complacent in the massacre of the tribe, so when it partially burns down, the flames cleanse part of that history. Ray uses fire as a healer, to help him rehabilitate after his disfigurement at Ezra's hands.

But fire takes its most questionable form when a beloved character, a "knight" in search of justice, is set ablaze by Ezra. Fire here is only a punishment, wrought on someone who has done nothing to deserve it. The role of fire, just like that of good and evil, is a complicated one with a multitude of interpretations.

Courses of the Cursed asks what sort of justice can come from vengeance, and what really will bring peace to the past. A thrilling paranormal adventure that we highly recommend!

The Curtis Jefferson Series won Grand Prize in the 2022 CIBA Series Awards for Fiction Series.

