



Interview: Adam Porkolab

This month's author talks religious law, Hungarian authors, and inviting death to kindly stop for tea.

JON JAMES AND ADAM PORKOLAB

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As a thank you to our paid subscribers, we post interviews with each of our authors to go along with their story. This week we chat with Adam Porkolab, author of [They Who Stand, Repent](#).



How do you view religion in your own life and how does that influence religion in the worlds you create?

I'm a practicing Catholic, born into a family from the Palóc region of northern Hungary, so for me faith isn't an abstract philosophy, but it's part of the daily rhythm. That said, I'm a linguist by training, and I can't just *believe* without picking the words apart. I'm always trying to figure out what's underneath the sentence.

In my stories, religion isn't really about gods or miracles. It's about the rules. What I find interesting is how we build systems around faith, and what happens when those systems start running on their own, like a piece of software nobody can shut down anymore. *They Who Stand, Repent* is basically that question: what if religious law turns into hard technology? It's unsettling, and in its own strange way, oddly moving.

Who are the best artists in your faith tradition (irrespective of genre and medium), and how does their approach influence yours?

The biggest influence on me has been **Pilinszky János**, a Hungarian Catholic poet who could write about suffering and silence without ever sliding into kitsch. The other is **Sík Sándor**, a Piarist priest, teacher, and poet who lived his vocation as honestly as he wrote it. He showed me that faith doesn't constrain a writer; it gives the writer a frame to work in.

Then there are **Ady** and **Babits**. In Hungary, the culture and the language are so soaked through with Christianity that you can't really avoid it, even if you're rebelling against it. That's the air I grew up in. Home turf.

Who are your influences outside of your genre? Who do you consider a master of the craft?

I started out as a literature teacher, so the Hungarian classics are my anchor: **Mikszáth's** Palóc satire, **Móricz's** unflinching realism.

From science fiction, it was the grand old names that got to me first: **Philip K. Dick** for the uncertainty, **Stanisław Lem** for the logic, and **Ursula K. Le Guin**, who could build societies like nobody else.

What aspect of your writing do you most wish you could improve?

I'd like to be clearer. Sometimes I forget that what's basic to me, a Latin phrase or a theological turn of phrase, is Greek to the reader. I need to get better at building the bridge between my own small internal world and the person on the other side of the page.

And I write in two languages, so I'm still wrestling with how to make my English sound like English, not like Hungarian wearing English clothes.

What themes and stylistic tells clue in a reader that they are reading your work?

I like systems that look perfect on paper but are unlivable in practice. In my work, death isn't some dark villain. It's the kind of guest you'd invite in for tea.

I like to mix bureaucratic and ecclesiastical registers in the same paragraph, and my stories rarely end in clear victory; it's more like a quiet acceptance, or a kind of survival. If a story reads like both a prayer and an instruction manual, it's probably mine.

Adam Porkolab is a Hungarian author of speculative fiction interested in the friction between system and freedom, the dissolving boundary between body and machine, and the weight of memory, faith, and protocol. His recent work has appeared in *Aurealis*, *Marrow Magazine* (where "Matriphagy" took first place in the 2026 Labor Pains Contest), *Cosmic Horror Monthly*, and *Third Flatiron*. He received an Honorable Mention from Writers of the Future in Q1 2026 (Vol. 43) and holds a PhD in linguistics. adamporkolab.com.



A guest post by

Adam Porkolab

Adam Porkolab writes liturgical Central European SF from Tar, a Palóc village in Hungary. Fiction in *Aurealis*, *Cosmic Horror Monthly*, *Farthest Star Publishing*; *WotF* honorable mention. Even Death gets coffee, and is called beautiful.
adamporkolab.com

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