



The Last Con

Zachary Bartels

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THE KNIGHTS OF MALTA WERE THERE WHEN JERUSALEM FELL, THEY WERE THERE WHEN THE TEMPLARS DISINTEGRATED, AND THEY'RE THERE NOW . . . WAITING IN DETROIT FOR A BORN-AGAIN CON MAN TRYING TO SAVE HIS FAMILY.

Former con man Fletcher Doyle is finally home after six years in the pen. He's working a menial job, regaining his bearings in the world, and trying to revive his relationships with his wife and twelve-year-old daughter. No easy feat.

But when Fletcher and his family go on a mission trip to Detroit—in the company of the condescending church leader who also happens to be his landlord—Fletcher finds his old life waiting for him. Within hours of arriving in the city, he's been blackmailed into doing a job for a mysterious criminal who calls himself The Alchemist.

A series of relics hidden by the Knights of Malta, as ancient as they are priceless, are in the sights of The Alchemist. What he needs is a gifted grifter with a background in ecclesiastical history . . . what he needs is Fletcher Doyle.

Between hiding his reawakened criminal life from his wife and trying to hide *her* from their relentless landlord, Fletcher is ready to give up. But when his family is drawn into the dangerous world he can't shake, Fletcher is forced to rely on his years in the game to save the only people who mean more to him than the biggest con in history.

The Last Con Details

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Author : Zachary Bartels

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From Reader Review The Last Con for online ebook

Morgan says

Slow to fully grab my attention, but I finished the last 100 pages or so in one (very late) night. Not the kind of book I'd normally choose to read, but not bad all the same. I particularly enjoyed how the author (a Pastor here in Michigan) weaved the message of the Gospel throughout the story, but in an understated & not-at-all-cheesy way.

Kelly Bridgewater says

I read Zachery Bartels first book, *Playing Saint* and loved it. When I heard that Bartels had written a second book, I couldn't wait to get my hands on a copy. *The Last Con* reminded me a lot of James Rollins, Dan Brown, and the Indiana Jones movies. There is a hunt for a Biblical artifact, filled with a bunch of twists and turns throwing me for a wild ride.

The writing was tight, powerful, and helped keep me glued to the page. I didn't have to worry about losing my attention because of misplaced grammatical errors and glaring misspelled words, which is nice for a grammar Nazi like me. There is a nice balance between the spoken dialogues between each character. There are not a lot of internal monologues because majority of the prose moved the action forward. Most of the dilemma is spoken aloud by the various characters.

Fletcher, the main character, is a recently converted Christian who has just been released from prison for stealing a Biblical artifact from a church. I enjoyed watching Fletcher struggle to reconnect with his wife and young daughter, Ivy, which rang true for me. The really only romantic tension is between Fletcher and his wife, and how he wants to earn his wife's trust again. Fletcher wanted to prove himself by changing, but overall, I didn't know if I really liked him or not. The minor characters in Andrew, his ex-partner, and other grifters rounded out Fletcher's support team. They grounded Fletcher and helped him along the way. A word of warning: One paragraph I was in Fletcher's point of view, then it jumped into Andrew's, but only for one paragraph. There was a line break, but sometimes, I had to go back and remember whose point of view I was currently in.

The pace started off kind of slow in the beginning. However, the plot picked up and moved along faster as the hunt for the artifact became more important to the climax. The story features two different timelines: one in the present and one in the late eighteenth century. For a while, I had no idea what the significance of the historical timeline had to do with the present story, but at fifty-five percent in, it came obvious what the connection was. I just wish it was sooner. *The Last Con* was plot-driven, not character driven, so the characters felt stiff for my taste. One of my major problems with the story was the ending; for me, it did not satisfy the huge buildup. It had a quick ending, and then flipped to the historical timeline and everyone walked off the page. I wanted to throw the book across the room.

A strength of the story is Bartels research into the historical significance of Cagliostro and the Freemasons. The information wasn't dumped on the page, instead Bartel uses the dual timelines to show me the historical significance of Cagliostro and why the Alchemist wants the historical piece. The spiritual thread was more subdued-less preachy for this time of book, but it was mentioned and came across naturally.

Fans of Rollins and Brown should already be used to the grittier side of treasure hunters, but Bartel really doesn't show a lot of the visual questionable content for the CBA audience. A number of chapters provide a

pretty rare glimpse into the seedy underworld of grifters. As for violence that is common in these type of books, it has about the same about as the movie National Treasure starring Nicholas Cage. Nothing too dramatic for younger audiences.

In short, Zachery Bartels, *The Last Con*, is a thrill-ride, action-packed ride on the hunt for Free Mason treasure in his latest thriller. With another impressive blend of strong characters, high stakes, and heroism, *The Last Con* is a book for fans of James Rollins and Dan Brown stories, set against the backdrop of Michigan. I honestly could not read the last forty percent of the book fast enough. I couldn't wait to figure out who the Alchemist was, which I solved way before he mentioned who it was in the book.

I received a complimentary copy of *The Last Con* from Netgalley and the opinions stated are all my own.

Susie Finkbeiner says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book! So much intrigue and humor and just plain good storytelling. Bartels is one to watch.

Allison says

Bartels has done it again with another novel that masterfully weaves the Christian faith and worldview into real life situations. I recommend his novels to anyone who likes clean, suspenseful, and true to life fiction- to anyone who is tired of reading cliché Christian fiction.

Noah Filipiak says

The perfect blend of humor, suspense, action, theology, and page-turning reading. I really mean it, Zachary Bartels is my favorite Christian fiction author.

Sally says

Last year, Pastor Zachary Bartels came out with his debut novel *Playing Saint*, in which the main character was a smooth talking celebrity pastor promising good things to his followers. Bartels' second book focuses on another smooth talker, but this one doesn't stay within the law. During the hunt for a religious artefact, Fletcher is arrested and does time. The last thing he wants after release is to meet up with his former associates, but they manage to find him all too easily on a rare visit to his old stomping grounds. Is the former con man now the target of someone else's con?

The majority of the plot of *The Last Con* concerns the planning and carrying out of two heists. If this isn't your cup of tea then you might want to give this book a miss. After all, theft is one of the do nots of the Ten Commandments. But what do you do when you're being blackmailed, your family is in danger, and your church leader is constantly reminding you of your past? Fletcher seeks counsel from various religious sources as he starts to doubt his salvation. Is it possible that he faked his conversion; doing it so well that he

fooled himself as well as everyone else? This leads to the question of who is the real Fletcher? Is he the only one wearing a mask and pretending to be someone he isn't? The remainder of the tale takes place in late 18th century France and a scam involving Marie Antoinette. The Affair of the Diamond Necklace was masterminded by Cagliostro, who is widely regarded as one of the biggest scam artists in history.

I enjoyed *The Last Con* and found it to be a page turner full of suspense and intrigue. I didn't think of it as a Christian novel, but neither did I see it as particularly non-Christian. This was the story of a man trying to start a new life, but who was hindered by elements of his past. The company we keep influences our lives, but I definitely didn't blame Fletcher for not wanting to spend time with Brad, the church leader who was so obnoxious to him, when his former associates were more welcoming and accepting. The biggest mystery for Fletcher is the identity of The Alchemist, the person pulling the strings behind the scenes. I figured out that one part way through, but thought I couldn't possibly be right. I was wrong.

Thank you to BookLookBloggers for my complimentary copy of The Last Con, which I received in exchange for my honest review.

Nadine Keels says

The Last Con, a suspense novel by author Zachary Bartels, deals with some pretty dark themes, but the book manages not to feel overly dark, particularly where bits of humor are mixed in. Fletcher Doyle, a Christian and a former con man now on parole, needs all the skill he once wielded in the game to handle a new con job he's been blackmailed into, especially when the safety of his wife and daughter are put at stake.

Speaking of the daughter, Ivy, she turned out to be my favorite character. It's easy to make a child or preteen no more than a cute and crying victim when she's put in a dangerous situation. Still, though Ivy isn't invincible, she has spunk and uses her brain. Andrew, Happy, and Dante are more interesting characters in this spinning web where the reader is likely to be just as unsure as the characters are about who to trust. Some of the characters' personal faith journeys are weaved in well, though in the end, I was more convinced about one character's potential life changes than I was about Fletcher's. The last fifty pages or so had me the most captivated.

Fletcher and Dante's introduction to each other confused me somewhat. The narrator indicates that "Fletcher had never come across" Dante before once meeting him praying alone in church, but the two did indeed come across and speak to each other at a women's shelter before that. I eventually took that to mean Fletcher didn't recognize Dante when he saw him the second time. While I found the historical thread of the novel intriguing, I did get bogged down in some of the historical details filling the present-day characters' conversations.

Also, there's a bit of a "bad guy explains it all to them" technique used, which can be an easy way to tie up the loose ends of a mystery when the other characters couldn't or didn't otherwise figure the mystery out for themselves. However, while the villain does fill the others in on important details, I'm glad it didn't turn into an all-out monologue.

Bartels is a new-to-me author I'd certainly read again.

BookLook Bloggers provided me with a complimentary copy of this book from the publisher for an honest review.

Staci says

Zachary Bartel's sophomore novel is as unique as his debut. While they are both unique, the novels are very different. The Last Con has a strong historical element which was an integral part of the story.

This novel started out very strong and then my engagement fell off some and I re-engaged at the end. My main struggle was with the main character, Fletcher. While I could see realism in his choices, I wanted to shake some sense into him. Ivy and Dante were both strong characters in the novel.

Overall, I enjoyed this novel and look forward to what Author Bartels has to offer next. I recommend Playing Saint and The Last Con for mystery lovers that enjoy a unique presentation and story line.

Lisa Johnson says

Title: The Last Con

Author: Zachary Bartels

Pages: 400

Year: 2015

Publisher: Thomas Nelson

My rating is 5 stars out of 5.

Last year I read the author's novel, Playing Saint, which quite exceptional and its tale unique. Now readers are given a different type of story to read that is rooted in historical fact involving the Knights of Malta. I don't know about you, but what the author shares about history after the ending of the story was new to me and quite fascinating.

It is hard to tell if some characters are protagonists or antagonists, which is part of the mystery surrounding the attempt to learn the identity of the Alchemist. One male lead is a man named Fletcher who, after serving time in prison, is seeking to reconcile with his wife and daughter. Fletcher is also trying to understand himself as to whether he is a true follower of Christ or just playing a game.

Another aspect of the novel is the relics that belong to...well, that is what the story is leading readers to discover. The twists and turns of the plot keep the attention of the audience especially as readers travel back and forth between 17th century and current day events. There are background characters that are willing to take whatever steps necessary to protect the identity of a secret organization as well as recover property they believe belongs to them from ages past.

If you have read Playing Saint, don't plan on encountering a similar tale in The Last Con as they are vastly different. If you love mysteries, history along with action, adventure and some surprises in the story, then this novel is definitely one to sit back and enjoy. It took me a couple of chapters to understand where the author was going, but that was mainly due to expecting it to be like the author's other novel Playing Saint. I loved the historical aspects and facts woven into book and I hope that you will as well, especially because the history included is factual and not made up. I really enjoyed the plot, characters and timeframes and hope to see the author write another intriguing novel soon. So grab a copy and go back in time to a different land and people who were committed to keeping their past a closely guarded secret.

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received one or more of the products or services mentioned above for free in the hope that I would mention it on my blog. Regardless, I only recommend products or services I use personally and believe will be good for my readers. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255. "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

Danielle says

This mystery and suspense novel has a unique setting and engaging cast of characters. From Malta in the late 1700's to current-day Detroit, the moral dilemmas in *The Last Con* will get you questioning how you'd respond if forced into these situations.

Bartels didn't dumb the reader down by over-explaining unfamiliar settings and situations. He did an amazing job of including these in the storyline while teaching the reader at the same time.

The historical line to the plot is well-explained and the basis for the mystery in the first place. The mystery, suspense and action is well-written throughout the book; it really made me think and allowed me to follow along and solve a bit here and there. There were several exciting scenes with some mild and some rather intense following action.

There is a great variety of characters in *The Last Con*: obvious bad guys, likeable criminals and many (at first) ambiguous players. I'm not sure there was even one truly innocent soul due to the circumstances they're drawn in to. I had my opinion of who I liked, and by the end of the book, I had a firm category for each person as either a good guy or bad.

This story definitely made you wonder who you can trust in the world and reaffirmed some of the characters' beliefs in themselves and their friends and family. The characters dealt with giving and earning second chances, as well as forgiveness. There were great conversations with God and pastors by those who were finding their faith, questioning it and/or leaning on it.

I would definitely love to see another book with these characters and can't wait to read more by Zachary Bartels!

I received an ARC copy of *The Last Con* as a part of Zachary Bartels' street team. This is my honest opinion.

Raelee Carpenter says

I have ADHD and an overactive BS meter, so getting through a suspense novel (or even a few chapters of a suspense novel) without either skimming chunks of prose or rolling my eyes... Honestly I don't remember the last time it happened. But *The Last Con* conned me. ;) I loved it. It held my interest through over 350 pages (no small feat in itself), but it also surprised me many times and completely suspended my disbelief. Match that with an incredible depth of character, good humor, and solid research. This is the kind of book where you get annoyed at all the life that interferes with the reading of it. Highly recommend, whether you're a genre fan or not.

Victor Gentile says

Zachary Bartels in his new book "*The Last Con*" published by Thomas Nelson introduces us to Fletcher

Doyle.

From the back cover: THE KNIGHTS OF MALTA WERE THERE WHEN JERUSALEM FELL, THEY WERE THERE WHEN THE TEMPLARS DISINTEGRATED, AND THEY'RE THERE NOW . . . WAITING IN DETROIT FOR A BORN-AGAIN CON MAN TRYING TO SAVE HIS FAMILY.

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If you like the Television show, "Mission: Impossible" or enjoyed the movie, "The Sting" then you are certainly going to enjoy this book. Mr. Bartels has given us one super exciting story. Fletcher, after six years, is just out of prison and all he wants to do is settle down and reunite with his family. However this is not to be. Fletcher is a wonderful character and his development in the story is great fun to watch. Mr. Bartels has given us bad guys, good guys and guys we are not sure are bad or good. There are moments when we are in on the con and moments when we feel we are being conned. Tension, suspense and mystery are all within these pages. This is a fast-paced read that will keep you guessing as to what is really going on. The themes are giving, earning second chances and forgiveness Don't start this book late at night because you will not want to put the book down until you finish. I am so looking forward to more from this talented author.

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Lizzy Bueckert says

An awesome fun book! Very well done. Can't wait for his next one!

Susan B says

Some books just surprise you and this was one of them!! It grabbed you from the beginning and kept you till the end; in fact when i finished the last page I was looking for more. Fletcher Doyle was recently released

from prison for grifting and was trying to get his family back in order. He found Jesus while serving time and with permission from his parole officer goes on a mission to Detroit, his old stamping grounds. Just the right amount of historical background to give context to what they are stealing. not to give away the story he happens to meet his old gang and is pulled back into the con. Highly recommend

Sarah says

3.5 stars

I liked the Detroit angle. It was cool to be set in my home state (the author is from Michigan too!) and he even tied in our Tigers! :) But the storyline, while interesting, failed to grip me. It wasn't hard to put down and until Happy said, "I know who the Alchemist is", there wasn't really any point where I was grabbed. (I didn't guess who it was at all!")

So it was just okay.
