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FALLEN KINGDOMS

ANNA'S CALL

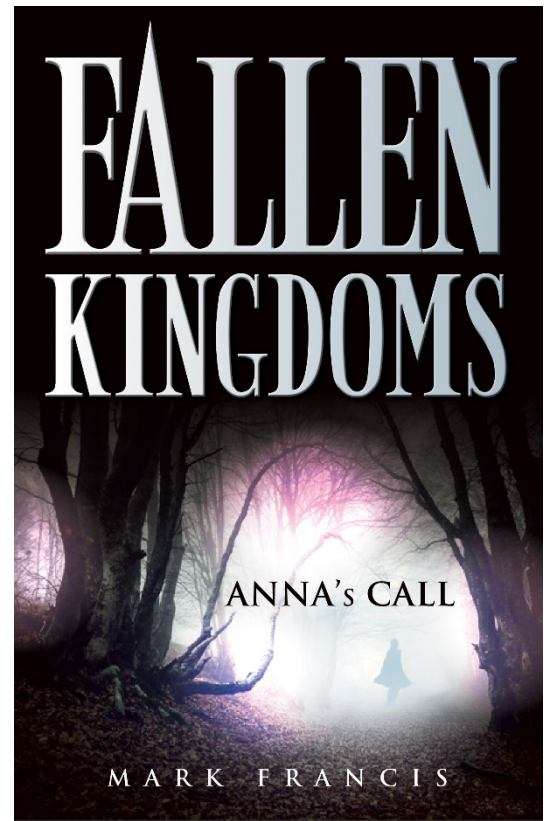
MARK FRANCIS

All her life, Anna's mother and Old Marta have groomed her to join the ranks of the Vizudar: a diplomatic corps of women who work to preserve the unity of the four kingdoms that arose from the rubble of a once-perfect world. But is ability destiny? When her call to formal training finally comes, Anna is torn between a simpler and safer future or the uncertainty and danger of serving her Dovarsha, the female ruler of her kingdom.

As Anna struggles through her own dilemma, an ominous threat surfaces in the distance. Historically, the unique characteristics of the four kingdoms both benefitted and balanced each other, enabling a long, though-sometimes-fragile peace to exist among them. But when a dramatic innovation in the Kishtar Kingdom tips the balance ever so slightly, Anna's father unintentionally breathes new life into an ancient evil.

As the power of the evil grows, Anna and her fellow trainees find themselves caught in situations much more complex than they've ever faced. Though many can see Anna's ability, she doubts whether she is up to the task. Now, trained but untested, Anna realizes she must face this oldest of adversaries alone.

Prepare to enter an entirely new and unique world of kingdoms in conflict, royal advisors with extraordinary abilities, an ancient yet unrelenting evil, and the young woman who finds herself in the midst of it all. In a vivid world that evokes Middle Earth or Narnia, this powerful allegory teaches the value of courage heritage, generosity, and innovation, while countering the prevailing messages in Young Adult fiction that glorify evil, victimhood, and rebellion.



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About the Author

MARK FRANCIS



Mark Francis's first experience as a storyteller was as a young child trying to get out of trouble. Little did he know that forty years later, this skill would come in handy again as he crafted bedtime stories for his newly adopted three-year-old daughter, and eventually lead him into his calling as a writer.

Mark Francis lives with his wife and two of his three children in Middle Tennessee. Over the years, his children have given him extensive practice in storytelling—a skill he now puts to use in his debut novel, *Anna's Call*. He also writes non-fiction works on biblical topics. His four-year-old daughter recently followed the example set by her older sister, and started demanding new stories. This forced Mark to sharpen his storytelling skills anew and leave the farm animals to defend themselves.

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Suggested Interview Questions

For Mark Francis, author of

Fallen Kingdoms

Anna's Call

Q: How is it that a man would create a fictional world ruled by women?

A: The book started off as bedtime stories I made up for my oldest daughter. She didn't want me to read her books, and I wanted her to learn the character traits of strength in the face of adversity, remembering where you come from, the importance sharing what you have with others and openness to new ideas. So I made up a world with kingdoms that reflect those virtues, and put women in charge so she would learn that these traits can be hers.

Q: How did you come up with all the names in your book?

A: They came from two sources. I picked a language which I think is obscure here in America and my wife, who has a natural talent for language, took some of the words and 'roughed them up' a bit. We had some fun with this process. For example, the Marutu kingdom, which embodies the virtue of sharing, actually means empty in the original language.

The other source is an organic growth. For example, I made up the name Vizudar as a blend of vision and the -dar ending which came from the Dovarsha, the title for Princess.

Q: Are some of the kingdoms evil and some good?

A: No, they are just different. In many ways the book is about tribalism which I think is undergoing a resurgence these days. Tribalism has its usefulness as well as its limitations, but one of the most pernicious effects is that members of another tribe can be automatically branded "evil". You can see some elements of this

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attitude in the book, but I hope you see that being different, being part of a different tribe, sometimes means that you bring a different set of skills to the table.

Q: Did you model the Vizudar after the Bene Gesserit from *Dune*?

A: No. I did read the *Dune* trilogy as a kid, so there may have been some stuff floating around in my head when I came up with Vizudar, but they are really very different. The Vizudar don't get their powers from a drug for one thing, and don't have a secret agenda to take over the world for another. The Vizudar are skilled at discerning motives, which is similar to the Bene Gesserit Truthsayers, but all the Vizudar can do this instead of a select group. I believe that the Vizudar are really modeled on the strong women I watched working over the years to preserve ties within my extended family. I know for a fact that the Vizudar powers of perception are rooted in a respectful comment made by a financial advisor long ago that "successful entrepreneurs are as good as women" at detecting lies.

Q: Why don't we know exactly how old Anna is supposed to be in this story?

A: Because Anna doesn't know this herself. On the other hand, do you know what phase the moon is in right now? Anna would. If you asked Anna her age, you would get a confused look and the answer that she was born during the Kishtar Moon. Time in Anna's world is circular, not lineal, and is marked in its passing by the moon. There is change and progress over the course of these cycles, such as the founding of the kingdoms, the creation of the Fish Bowl and, as will be seen, the effort to forge Springstel. People are also aware of the passage of time in the growth of children to adulthood--a stage Anna knows well, and even the fading of ability that comes with old age--as is the case with Marta. However, the concept of numbering the cycles that mark these changes as we would count years is unknown, lost by those who fled the Cold, a symptom of Anna's fallen world.

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Q: Why do Anna and her love interest Nicco split apart so early in the book?

A: That's real life, isn't it? People go off to college or military service and leave someone they love behind. They grow from those experiences and then come back. Like Nicco says, "Will they love each other when we have grown into who we will become?" I wanted to portray Nicco as a strong young man so I gave him this understanding which many young people, and in my experience most young women, do not have. I wanted to clearly convey the idea that a young woman does not need a relationship with a man in order to grow, so I split them up, while hopefully showing the depth of emotion they have for each other. I think this is really a love story.

Q: Is the context for your book a dystopia like in *Hunger Games*, or is it better understood another way?

A: Yes, it certainly is a fallen world, although not ruled by an evil government. At least not at the start of the book anyway. I think this question comes up because there are those in Anna's world who do not accept that they live in a fallen world. They've gotten accustomed to how things are and think that it has always been that way. Sort of like here and now. The question of how we got here is critically important, both for the individual and for society as a whole, I think.

Q: Why do you have the Crossings, which you say is not claimed by any of the four kingdoms, smack dab in the center of this world's geography?

A: Because it's at the intersection, at the edges where things get interesting, and the Crossings is where the four kingdoms touch each other. This helps show that the blending of virtues is as important as the virtues themselves. In a larger and more important sense I wanted to demonstrate the importance of caring for those who are on the margins, and the dangers of ignoring what is going on there.

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Q: Why does Anna tell people she is “of the sea”, instead of identifying herself by her kingdom like everyone else in her training class?

A: Anna says that because that’s how she sees herself. Her world is very small at the start of the book, just like we all have a very small world at the start of our stories. I wanted to bring this point into the spotlight so I gave Anna a very small perspective on herself as a member of what she will learn is a much bigger world.

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