

16-Year-Old Debut Author A.J. Culberson Unleashes The Painted Smile, a Dark Fantasy Rebellion Set in the City of Shadows

ENGLEWOOD, TN, UNITED STATES, July 17, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [The Painted Smile](#), the haunting debut novel from 16-year-old author [A.J. Culberson](#), delivers an immersive tale of dark fantasy and rebellion set in the decaying city of Thornmere. Blending lyrical prose with grim worldbuilding, this breakout novel explores silence, survival, and the radical power of reclaiming identity.

The novel opens in Thornmere, a city constructed atop ruins and sustained by secrets. Liora, born into poverty and abuse, dies young—only to awaken in the Crimson Market, an underworld where memories, pain, and identity are traded. Reborn as Daze, a masked vigilante, she emerges not just to survive but to upend the blood-soaked regime controlling her world.



What follows is a theatrical rebellion. Daze forms the Harlequins, a group of broken yet fierce outcasts who weaponize performance, symbolism, and subversion. Together, they strike at Thornmere's elite, exposing hypocrisy and injustice through cryptic assassinations and poetic resistance.

The Painted Smile isn't just a fantasy—it's a meditation on trauma, silence, and transformation. Culberson crafts her world with precision and emotion, weaving a layered narrative where masks reveal deeper truths and power is not granted, but seized.

About the Author

A.J. Culberson is a 16-year-old debut author whose voice is as fearless as it is unforgettable. She

writes like a masked performer stepping onto a myth-soaked stage—charismatic, haunted, and sharp-edged. With *The Painted Smile*, she introduces readers to a world born from dreams and sharpened by rebellion. A.J. is known for breaking molds, rejecting clichés, and finding liberation in the eerie, the strange, and the unapologetically bold. This is her first novel.

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