

# Of Swords and Spears

*How a cheesy science fiction TV show changed my life*

A short autobiographical story by Norbert Lakatos

This is the story of a teenage boy living in a small town in Southern Hungary in the early 1990s. Not a very small town really. Actually the fourth largest in Hungary, about 160 thousand people at the time. A university town full of young people. The times were very exciting as communism was just booted out as the only form of government for over forty years. There was all of a sudden a future full of possibilities; one that people had been hoping for since the revolution of '56 which the tanks of the Soviet Red Army crushed. Nevertheless, this story isn't about political change or about the coming of age of the boy. It is really the story of a master story teller and how he changed the life of the boy. I was that boy and this is my story about how my life was changed. And it all started with a low budget science fiction TV show.

The only advantage of living in a communist country, if there is such a thing, is that one does not have to be a rebel without a cause. The cause is very simple, democracy, or just about anything other than communism. While I never had to live under the hard line communism that most of the Eastern Block was under, I still had plenty to rebel against; namely anything that had anything to do with communism, or its little cousin, socialism. Thanks to the revolution of '56, Hungary in the late '70s and early '80s was almost a bearable country to live in, ice cream was cheap and people didn't have to fear the secret police any more. After '56 Moscow instituted a new, somewhat more open and progressive government. Nonetheless, free thinking was not encouraged, and as long as one wasn't too vocal about his opposition of the defunct ideas and ideals of Karl Marx and Lenin, one could live a fairly peaceful, if not prosperous life. Very strong support and membership of The Party – that would be the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party, there was only one party, so it was just referred to as “The Party” – was a prerequisite for anyone who wanted to amount to anything. Communism achieved equality amongst people by making everyone equally poor, except for those within the inner circle of The Party, who were usually filthy rich. Just like free thinking or free speech, the freedom of religion was also an unknown concept. While religion was not openly persecuted, it was not encouraged either. No respectable party member was ever seen anywhere near a church. Those who professed any religious affiliation, mostly Catholic, were not welcome in The Party, and therefore did not have access to all the economic and political advantages that party

members enjoyed. The only religion favored by communism was atheism. Simply denying the existence of God is the easiest way of ensuring the supremacy of Marx, Lenin and whoever happened to be in charge of The Party at the moment. After the revolution of '56, religious persecution for the most part ceased along with the activities of the secret police, and religious people were simply ignored or ridiculed as superstitious old folks. No self-respecting young person would be involved with their grandparents' superstitious religious foolishness. I was no exception to that rule myself. While I loved my maternal grandma dearly, I had no intention of ever going anywhere near her church where she attended mass every Sunday morning.

It was no wonder that growing up in such environment I turned out to be a well-established atheist by my early teens. Communism fell in Hungary in 1989 when I was fourteen. This event opened up the country to all sorts of nonsense from both the West and the Far-East, and anything half-baked from all four corners of the world. All of a sudden everything that was forbidden under communism became accessible, and it was a formidable task to keep up with the latest fad. I honestly did my best to try out just about anything that was supposed to make one's life better. Being a vegetarian for years did not seem to make any difference, yoga was another worthless waste of my time, and I don't even want to go into how miserably I failed at Transcendental Meditation. Thanks to all the literature pouring into Hungary about UFOs and other "supernatural" phenomenon I became an avid reader of anything "out of this world" or "alien". Through my father's influence I also became a lifelong fan of science-fiction and spent endless hours reading sci-fi books or watching sci-fi movies. One of my favorite sci-fi TV shows during my junior high years was Captain Power and the Soldiers of the Future. Let's just say this was a low budget, made-for-TV series that was passionately discussed with some of my best friends in school. We'd never miss an episode, and detailed discussions of all the latest happenings on the show were commonplace. The show was fairly standard sci-fi fare about a bleak future where machines ruled the world and a handful of freedom fighters were the only thing keeping the human race from total obliteration. In one particular episode Captain Power and his posse of soldiers traveled to a safe haven where a small group of humans were hiding from the machines. In this safe haven there was a plaque on the wall

with the following inscription: “And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. And nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more.” After reading this sign one of the characters pointed out that this quote was from the Bible, than the show went on without anyone giving it a second thought. At the time I didn’t give it a second thought either. Until some time later, it was months or even more than a year later, I do not know, but I remember the exact day this quote from the Bible, from a B rated sci-fi movie changed my life.

I was walking home from a New Year’s Eve party on January 1, 1992. It was around six in the morning. It had been a small party with some friends from school and their friends. I had a great time even though I didn’t know everyone at the party, so I was wondering how I could have such fun everyday. After all it is great to have lots of fun once a year, but at sixteen you want to have fun every day. I knew drugs and alcohol had nothing to do with fun: one of the kids at the party made too much of a friend with the bottle, he went into the bathroom around 10 pm to toss his cookies and didn’t come out until about 2 am, than spent the rest of the time sleeping on the couch - what a way to welcome the new year. As I was walking home in the early light of dawn I took a mental inventory of all the things I’d tried so far.

Atheism sucked, it was a communist thing, so it had to suck. Being a vegetarian didn’t make any difference except that I didn’t get to enjoy lots of yummy foods. Yoga didn’t do me any good; I just got headaches from trying to look at the pretty girls in the class while contorting my body in insane positions. All the other Eastern religious and philosophical humbugs I looked into were a bust as well. I loved my computer and building and fixing computers at the store where I worked during the summer school breaks, but that was just a job, there had to be something more to life than enjoying work. The mysteries of UFOs, the Loch-Ness Monster, the Bermuda Triangle and other paranormal phenomenon was interesting to read about but had absolutely nothing to do with everyday life. Going to clubs on the weekends, dancing and trying to pick up girls didn’t produce any real results other than sweaty clothes and often awkward encounters with some beautiful specimens of the opposite sex. It felt like I was definitely missing

something, but couldn't quite put my finger on what it was. Then it hit me, DUH! I had been raised an atheist and embraced it fully, but it sure didn't make my life any better. So I had been entertaining the possibility for a couple of months that what if, as strange and impossible as it might be, that there might just be some sort of a supreme being. Call it god if you wish, definitely something more than human minds can comprehend and the answer had to be something other than 42. (If you are not familiar with 42, which is the answer to the question 'Life, Universe and Everything', than refer to the Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy, one of the most fundamental works in late 20<sup>th</sup> century science fiction literature and an excellent movie too). All of a sudden I thought of the quote from that episode of Captain Power and the Soldiers of the Future, "And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. And nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more." I thought if the Bible has such intelligent things to say about wars than it might have other intelligent things to say about other things as well.

For the first time in my life I was actually considering the Bible as a possible source of useful information rather than just a bunch of religious hocus-pocus, superstitions, myths, legends, ancient history and endless lists of rules. So I decided that the next thing I am going to try in my youthful quest for lifelong bliss and happiness is to read the Bible. If nothing else at least try to find that passage about the swords and the spears. After all I had nothing to lose, I was in high school so I had all the time in the world and virtually no responsibilities or obligations. The next thing was to find a Bible to read, which turned out to be easier than it could have been, considering I was living in a communist country which frowned upon Bibles. My aunt had been a member of a Seventh Day Adventist church for a year or so. It didn't seem like anything I would want to be involved in, a whole bunch of dos and don'ts, mostly don'ts actually, something about not doing anything on Saturdays, and not eating certain types of foods. But she did give my mom a Bible a few months earlier, which I found on a bookshelf as soon as I got home that morning. I dusted it off and promptly went to bed to rest up from being up all night and gather energy for reading later that day.

That evening I snuggled up with my pillows, told my mom to turn down the TV and instead of watching the latest episode of Dallas, I started to read the Bible. To this day I still don't know who shot J.R., and honestly I don't give a rip either. I think such behavior worried my mom, since Dallas was the latest fad in Hungary at the time. It had just made its way into Hungary, obviously decades later than it was originally released and everyone, I mean pretty much literally everyone in Hungary, was watching it. Now, I didn't know anything about the Bible, never read it before, had no clue that it is actually a collection of 66 different books and letters and other written works. I would have loved to just go to the part about the swords and the spears and find out what it was all about, but I had no clue where to find it; so I decided that I am just going to read it as a novel. I opened it on the first page and started reading it, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the Earth". At that moment the most remarkable thing had happened. Something I was not expecting, but it immediately convinced me that I was not reading a normal book. The moment I read that first sentence in the Bible I was convinced that there is a God and that He did indeed created the whole entire universe. In that instant I was no longer an atheist. The idea of an intelligent being creating the universe and everything in it just made a heck of a lot more sense to my 'engineer in training' mind than anything else I had ever been taught or heard of, from the big bang to evolution to UFOs seeding the planet. It just made sense.

I spent the next month reading through the first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis. It fundamentally changed my perception of God. I always thought that religion was all about doing things for God. Whoever or whatever the object of ones devotion is, the whole spiritual and religious experience was all about what one has to do for appeasing the chosen deity, the dos and the don'ts, the rituals and the ceremonies. But to my utter amazement the whole entire book of Genesis, the first fifty chapters of the Bible were all about what God was doing for people, what He was doing in their lives and not about what these people were doing to try to earn the acceptance of God. It was mind-blowingly fascinating, an incredibly different idea with amazing potential. Here was something beyond anything I expected. With everything I tried before it was 'do this and you will reap the following benefits', but nothing delivered as promised. Now, here was this

incredible concept that I don't actually have to do anything, just let God do whatever He wants and it's going to be amazing. Whatever happens doesn't depend on my own abilities and efforts, it's all according to God's plan. That is what I wanted; it was the thing I was searching for on my way home from that New Year's Eve party on the first day of '92. There was only one question that I didn't know the answer to: How do you get God to start doing things in your life? After all it had nothing to do with what I was doing, it was all about what God wanted to do. In all those stories I read in the Bible it was always God showing up on people's doorstep and starting to mix things up. Hind site is 20/20, so looking back years later it was obvious that God had already been at my doorstep working in things I never would have thought of, such as putting a quote from the Bible in a cheesy made for TV sci-fi series with the main target audience of teenage boys. So I set out to find God in whatever way I could, but little did I realize that God had already set His plan of reaching me into motion.

A few months earlier one of my friends at school started to go to church and he would occasionally speak about it. At the time I paid no attention to it, so I had no clue what church he was going to or what he believed. All I knew was that it was a Christian church and they used the Bible, so I told my friend I wanted to go to church with him. He had no objections and I jumped in full steam. I would go to church on Thursdays, and Saturdays and twice on Sundays. I just wanted to see God starting to do things in my life. First it was exciting and interesting, than slowly things started to get boring and disappointing. They told me all the don'ts, and there was a very long list of don'ts. Actually most of church was all about the don'ts. Problem was, I wanted to do all the things they were telling me not to do. I still wanted to watch TV, talk like a trucker, watch adult movies, go out and party and try to get laid. So, there was really no change at all, except that I had a whole list of the things I wasn't supposed to be doing, but I was doing anyway. These people at this church wanted me to do, or actually not do all these things for God! That's nonsense, that is not what I read in the Bible, it was the exact opposite of what I read about and wanted in my life. No wonder within a few months I grew disillusioned with the whole church experience, but I wasn't about to give up. I knew God was bigger than this one church. Immensely and unimaginably bigger.

We know from Isaac Newton that 'every action has an equal and opposite reaction'. This must be true in some form in the spiritual realm as well. The same people that I spent New Year's Eve with invited me to join their little club. Which I started to do at about the same time that I started to go to church. Their club was simply the local chapter of the unofficial Hungarian club of Dungeons and Dragons. Dungeons and Dragons is a role playing game. It is very entertaining and extremely addictive. Games can go on for weeks, months or even years and each session lasts for hours. It is a way to get introduced and sucked into the occult, black magic, druids, witchcraft and wizardry. The exact things that will draw someone away from God. So while I went to church on Thursdays I would spend my Friday nights playing Dungeons and Dragons into the wee hours of Saturday morning and then go to church again Saturday afternoon. All this while trying to get into the good graces of the very cute girl at the club whose brother puked through New Year's. Not to mention making friends with some really strange fellows, one of them, my new best friend at the time, who was convinced that he was a thief in a former life. Some of my new friends with whom I was playing Dungeons and Dragons started to confuse reality with their imaginary characters they were playing out through role playing.

The summer of '92 found me in this most peculiar situation. Disillusioned with the church I was trying to find God in, while courting the forces of darkness through my life of Dungeons and Dragons and pursuit of pleasures. Then comes my dad. Now this is where God's sense of humor really blows the mind. My dad had nothing to do with God or religion or anything spiritual. He was a good old fashioned atheist - I learned from him and he was a good teacher. But at the time he wanted to learn English badly and would do just about anything to practice talking with anyone whose first language was English. He worked for the Hungarian oil company which just happened to purchase new equipment from a company in Huston, TX and part of the purchase was training for the people who would be using the new equipment. The training would of course take place in Huston and it would require fluency in English. So, for several months the company would be sending my dad to different English courses making sure he is fluent by the time he'd be going to

Huston for the training. This made my dad so motivated in his quest for speaking perfect English that he wouldn't even shy away from going to church if it was held by Americans. So one day my dad says that there are some Americans in town starting a new church and asked if I would be interested in checking it out. What a great sense of humor God has, he works in mysterious ways indeed. Missionaries show up in our small town in Southern Hungary, my atheist dad runs into them, actually goes to a church service than invites me to go with him. Now, that is exactly what I was reading about in the Bible, God working in people's lives and doing things for them in the most amazing and unimaginable ways. And now it was finally happening in my life in a way that I could see.

So I went to church with my dad to see what these Bible teaching Americans were up to. And I was in for a great surprise in every possible way. The only religious people I've met before were stuffy or weird. My aunt was all about the list of don'ts and rituals. My grandfather was in a charismatic church acting like what I would consider a religious freak and fanatic, it was downright embarrassing to go out in public with him. And at the time I had been going to a church that was all about wearing suits, looking and acting proper and keeping to the list of the don'ts. I went to the church meeting expecting to find the same stuff. The meeting was held in a room in the basement of the local water company's headquarters. Hardly a place one would expect a church meeting to be held at, considering we were in a country with a thousand years of Catholic history with their gigantic cathedrals and church buildings. If that wasn't enough of a surprise then the real shock came when I met the preacher: a surfer from San Diego, wearing shorts, a tank top and flip-flops, a tall muscular guy as friendly and nice as one could wish for. There was something definitely different about this guy that I'd never seen before. Is that what everyone in San Diego is like? Or just the surfers? Than he started to teach from the Bible, from the first letter of the apostle John. Now this was completely new to me. I had started to read the Bible from the beginning, so I had only read the Old Testament, never made it to the New Testament and knew just about nothing about Jesus. The church I had been going to didn't place any emphasis on teaching from the Bible. All the sermons were about the dos and the don'ts of how to live a Christian life that is acceptable to God. And now there was this surfer from San Diego talking about how God is love and how he showed

his love for us through his Son, Jesus Christ. I'd never heard any of that before. This was exactly what I had been looking for ever since I read all those stories in the book of Genesis. It was truly all about what God had done for us, for me personally. It wasn't about what I had to do to reach God, but about what He had already done to reach me. As I listened to the teaching I knew I had found what I had been looking for. Actually it had been God all along working on revealing Himself to me, I just hadn't realized it yet.

It only took a few weeks to fully immerse myself in this new found grace that God offered through His Son, Jesus Christ. Within a month of going to that church meeting on a Wednesday evening in the summer of '92 I found myself at the Calvary Chapel conference center in Millstatt, Austria. The guest speaker came all the way from Seattle, WA to teach. During this week of doing nothing else but listening to teachings about God's grace, His forgiveness and the new life He has given us, I finally found what I had been searching for. God was really doing things in my life and I could finally see it. I wasn't just reading about what He had done in other people's lives thousands of years ago, I was experiencing it in my own life. Salvation given freely by grace, a gift of God, earned and paid for by His Son, Jesus Christ and all I had to do was believe and enjoy the ride through life with God at the helm.

It has been well over a decade since that summer of finding God and it has been very interesting. He sure lived up to all my expectations and many times more. Just like those stories in the Bible where God was doing strange and wonderful things in people's lives. He has been doing strange and wonderful things in my life. Sometimes strange, really strange and sometimes wonderful, but never dull. I pray you found my story of finding God interesting and that your story of finding Him is just as interesting. He is a wonderful story teller and has an amazing story for your life, amazing beyond anything you or I could possibly imagine. For me it all started with a cheesy science fiction TV show.