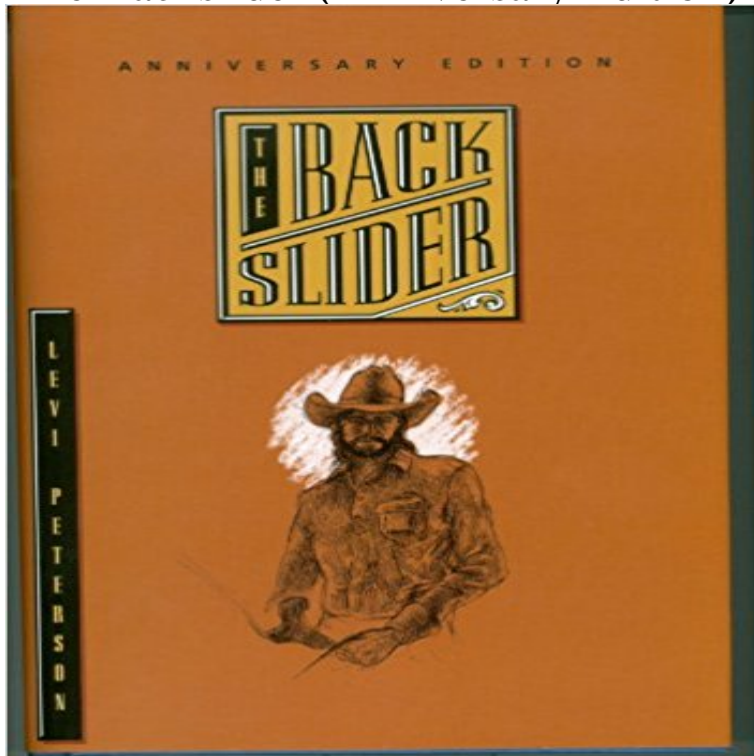


The Backslider (Anniversary Edition)



Recognized as a Mormon classic twenty years after its release, *The Backslider* features longstanding Christian conflicts played out in a scenic, sparsely populated area of southern Utah. A young ranch-hand, Frank Windham, conceives of God as an implacable enemy of human appetite. He is a dedicated sinner until family tragedy catapults him into an arcane form of penitence preached among frontier Mormons. He is saved by an epiphany that has proved controversial among readers, either interpreting it as an extreme impiety or celebrating it as a moving and entirely plausible rendering of a biblical theme in a Western setting. Frank comes into contact with a host of rural and urban characters. Of central importance is his Lutheran girlfriend, Marianne, whom Frank seduces, begrudgingly marries, and eventually loves. Frank's extended family is just a generation removed from polygamy and still energized by old-time grudges and deprivations. Along the way Frank encounters a closeted secular humanist, a polygamist prophet, a psychiatrist, a Mason, government employees, college professors, lawyers, and entrepreneurs all drawn with heightened realism reminiscent of Charles Dickens or the grotesque forms of William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor. The story engages readers as it alternates almost imperceptibly between Frank's naive consciousness and the more informed awareness of its narrator. It can be read as a love story, a satiric comedy, or a dark and sobering study of self-mutilation. Shifting from one to another, it builds suspense and elicits complex emotions, among them a profound sense of compassion. More joyous than cynical, it sympathizes deeply with the plight of all of God's backsliders.

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