



The Dragon in Me

Jeff Morris

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"This is a wise book...full of good advice about managing tragedy, addiction, and recovery...."

---INDIEREADER

"A beautifully written book about fighting the demons of drug and alcohol addiction within family and among friends. This riveting story paints a realistic depiction of traditional martial arts, both as a physical fighting method and as an emotional tool for combating those unseen but very real demons."

---GEORGE E. MATTSON, 10th degree black belt, Uechi-ryu Karate, Author of *The Way of Karate*

FROM INDIEREADER PROFESSIONAL REVIEW:

Rob Ethan has a difficult life. His parents are separated, and his mother is an emotionally-abusive alcoholic who cannot be relied on to do anything but embarrass him and damage her own life.

Rob's main comfort is karate, where he is working on his black belt with the help of his wise Sensei, and the less-healthy habit of picking fights on the street in order to lose his feelings in pain. The book opens with his first philosophy class in college, where he meets Julius, who becomes a good friend but struggles with his drug habit and his own physically-abusive alcoholic father, and Alana, a lovely British-born young lady with whom Rob begins to fall in love. A car accident leads his mother to seek help from Alcoholics Anonymous, but is it too late for her relationship with her son? Can Rob get help, too, to rebuild his own life and his own heart and learn to move forward? When another tragedy strikes too close to home, how can he constructively grieve when he's shut off his feelings for so long? And can he win over Alana's heart when he's not sure how to admit that he loves her?

This is a wise book, full of good advice about managing tragedy, addiction, and recovery, told from the point of view of one deeply affected by other people's addictions. It covers many strategies for coping, from martial arts and breathing exercises, to programs like Alcoholics Anonymous and dependence on a "higher power" (which the author is careful to explain need not be a deity – in Rob's case, it is a dragon), to Buddhist practices like mindful meditation and the effort to live in and fully experience the present. The story itself has some narrative appeal, along with the advice.

Rob is a likable and charming character, whose self-hatred is painful to watch, and whose growth and self-discovery are worth cheering. The story doesn't pull punches, either – its central tragedies are portrayed in all their raw pain and heartbreak, too, making it all the more impressive to watch Rob cope with them and grow past them.

The book is rather didactic, though, and in places feels more like a manual or a textbook told in narrative format than an actual story. Every character in the story, from his girlfriend to his Sensei, appears to be there either to test Rob or to teach him something, rather than simply to interact with him. Even the fellow student Rob runs into casually in London, and ends up sharing a room with, becomes a teacher expounding on doctrine to a willing disciple rather than conversing as a friend to a friend. In places, too, the strategies expounded require a great deal more time and practice than the story can allot to Rob. Therefore he appears to master, or at least has substantial success with, rather difficult spiritual practices more quickly than most

human beings ever will (to be fair, with some of them, such as his karate, he has put in substantial time and effort before the book begins as well). This may be discouraging to someone who takes up these practices in order to survive a tragedy, deal with an addiction in oneself or in a close friend or family member, or simply to grow as a person, and finds that they are not as easy or as quick as Rob makes them appear.

The book could also benefit from a good editor. While the author's grammar and writing style are generally good, occasionally there are words missing from sentences and other simple typographical errors, easy enough to make but also easy to correct with an editor's help.

If you are looking to survive difficult times without losing yourself as a person, this book can provide you with some useful strategies to work with, as long as you allow yourself time to work on them, and forgive yourself and keep going when you can't master them immediately or sustain them consistently at first. Read this book as a guidebook rather than a story, and if you can, treat its explanations as a jumping-off point and find teachers of your own to help you implement these strategies, as Rob does.

The Dragon in Me Details

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From Reader Review The Dragon in Me for online ebook

Nikki says

“The Dragon in Me” is a new young adult novel by Jeff Morris. Rob’s mother is an alcoholic. Not only is she slowly destroying her own life, she is taking down everyone with her as she goes. Rob has one escape, his martial arts. His mother isn’t the only dysfunctional one in the family; Rob has turned off his emotions and feelings off to deal with his childhood.

The character development wasn’t bad. I liked Rob and his family and friends. Each has different qualities and personalities. While it was set in the 70s, I still had a hard time believing a teenage boy would think and behave quite like Rob does.

The message in this book is a good one. It discusses the blame, guilt, and suffering dealing with someone close to you who suffers from addiction. Having said that, I found the message to be very repetitive, even down to different characters using the exact same phrasing. In the end, I felt a little like the overall message was being forced upon me. I would have appreciated it to be a little subtler.

Overall the book is an easy, straight forward, and fast read. The message is definitely a good one for anyone touched by addiction, even remotely. I do think the way it is explained is a little to clichéd to have young adults really connect with. The martial arts was a nice addition, especially for those who have an interest in it.

I received this book through Goodreads First Reads. This in no way influenced my review. I was not required to, nor compensated for, writing a review.

Darcee Kraus says

A unique insight to addiction and recovery, Morris is deeply connected to this topic and does well portraying the harsh emotions that accompany this well-traveled road of humanity.
