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Wrestling Demons



Synopsis

Varsity wrestler Connor Morgan and his mother moved to Portland, Oregon to get away from his drug-addicted father, but they didn't move away from trouble. At his new high school, three heavyweight wrestlers chase him through the halls. He runs away, in his underwear, past the girl he likes, into the January cold. Then something weird happens. The next thing Connor knows, he is fighting for his life against supernatural evil with the help of new friends as he learns the powers and dangers of his new destiny. The stakes rise as he discovers a powerful enemy bent on destroying more than just his high school. Ultimately, he must embrace his role in an ancient fight if he wants to save the day. And he still has to get good grades and a date for the prom.

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Customer Reviews

"Good and evil, witty banter...and of course good action. Jason Brick mixes all this well together in a fast-paced, young adult novel." -- Douglas Sedivy
"Written in the straightforward style of Gary Paulson with a dash of Terry Pratchett's magic." -- Debby Dodds, author of Amish Guys Don't Call.
"A perfect balance of dramatic action, entertaining humor, and honest relationships." -- Heather Ransom, author of Going Green.

Jason Brick began his lifelong martial arts habit with wrestling in 7th grade, and credits the discipline he learned there as why he has what it takes to write for a living today. When not writing or training, he cooks and spoils his family. He lives in Oregon.

The title might not make you think *Unlovable*, but that's what *Wrestling Demons* is. This sports-fantasy mashup is smart, funny, and sweet. It opens with the natural drama of a high-school sporting event, in this case a wrestling match. Protagonist Connor Morgan is big and athletic, good enough to get a varsity slot as a sophomore. But he's the new kid, unsure of himself socially (a nice realistic touch), and on the bad side of the senior he beat out for that varsity slot. After the match, things go weirdly supernatural in a scene that is equal parts horror and farce. Apparently some of Connor's schoolmates are . . . demon hunters? And apparently, so is he. Connor is an appealing character, his inner voice filled with comedy and pathos. His Maori heritage is a nice touch of diversity in the beginning (and should appeal to fans of the movie *Moana*, too!). With its sports and action emphasis, this is a story aimed at male readers, but with plenty of genuine, natural emotion and strong female characters, including Connor's wrestling teammate (and demon hunter) Sage Kaiser, like-interest Susan Freaking Parker, and his mom, a hardworking nurse who moves herself and Connor frequently to stay away from his dad's addiction issues. Exposition about wrestling and Connor's backstory are handled gracefully, dribbled into the action of the early chapters so even readers with little or no background in the sport can keep up, and Connor's loneliness makes sense. He longs to make connections, but almost doesn't dare because what if he has to move again? But Susan Freaking Parker seems to like him, and training to fight demons naturally leads to friendship with his fellow champions. Can he dare to care when they're up against a powerful, unknown enemy? Brick does a terrific job of hiding the main villain's identity from both the characters and the reader while providing several plausible candidates, leading to a nailbiter final confrontation in which Connor has to reach down deep and find his real strength.

Back when dinosaurs ruled the Earth and "urban fantasy" was stories rather than an official marketing genre ("*Smoke Ghost*", "*The Snarkout Boys and the Avocado of Doom*") the idea was exciting. Elfland wasn't behind an old mound in a disappearing countryside. It could be around the corner of the street you never walk down. Then it was grafted onto the series romance genre, and it had to be a vast, sprawling series that went on until every drop of juice was formulaically pressed out of the characters, especially the protagonist - a hardboiled detective with a stain on his soul (male) or a bare midriff and unprecedented supernatural powers (female). "*Wrestling Demons*" is a bit of a throwback. The story is simple and self-contained. The characters are believable and sympathetic. There are magic, romance, and martial arts, insecurity, real-world problems, and supernatural threats. But they're all there in the proper measure. The protagonist doesn't have

godlike powers and isn't being chased by the Men in Black. He's a highschool wrestler whose single Mom is trying to keep away from her angry ex who has a meth problem and give her son some stability. It's that sense of proportion which makes the whole book credible. And the author is a professional craftsman who keeps the plot moving along with a real beginning, middle and end (Hallejullah!) and just enough twists to keep you turning the pages as fast as you can finish them. It delivers and delivers well.

I tend to be a big fan of the urban fantasy -- actually of fantasy in general. Urban fantasy, however, is always interesting as each author explores a different way in which the mythical world intrudes upon our own. Wrestling Demons includes many of the aspects about this general genre that I enjoy: a struggle against good and evil, witty banter, the occasional witty monologue, and of course good action. Author Jason Brick mixes all these well together in a fast-paced young adult novel. What sets this book above most in the broader category is that he takes heavily from eastern mythology, more specifically Japanese folklore. As a result it comes off as fresh and different. Even better, though there's physical action the primary threat is spiritual and frequently dealt with in the spiritual. The oni of the book feed and nurture negative emotions of which there's fertile ground in high school. Having grown up and from my memories of school, I can say he picked a perfect setting. Connor and his friends can see the creatures attacking. The oni are not always defeated with force alone, and they must counter negative with the positive. Even more, this book rests on a foundation of the concept of Bushido. Connor and his friends are each present incarnations of the principles of Bushido. It's an idea that's discussed in depth in one chapter, but after that Brick allows the concept to be a backdrop of the story without hammering the reader about it. Most urban fantasy deals heavily with the ideas of good and evil, but Wrestling Demons offers a strong standard to follow. It makes the overall work stronger and gives the heroes of our story something to grasp tightly to beyond their own judgment. It adds to the work overall. Bushido offers a moral guideline for the protagonist and his friends that few in this broad genre have.

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