

## Paintball with Dragons

**Hope Bolinger**

Chicken Scratch Books (Dec 1, 2023)

Softcover \$11.99 (240pp)

978-1-953743-28-2

In Hope Bolinger's fantasy novel *Paintball with Dragons*, a boy begins seeing dragons after the loss of his older brother.

Thirty-six days ago, Mason died in a car accident from which brother Xander and the rest of his family escaped unscathed. Xander suppresses his grief until a large black dragon appears in the hallway of his school, silent and looming. Xander tries to shake the vision of the dragon, but he begins seeing other dragons and similar creatures everywhere. He learns that dragons are real; they hide from humans after centuries of violent clashes and appear to those burdened with grief. However, Xander seems to be the only one aware of them.

In this story about the persistence of grief, the appearance of the dragons seems like a distraction at first. But as Xander researches them, including via a book of folklore that's given to him as a gift, his attempts to understand the dragons push him to connect with new friends and spread a message of kindness. And there are whimsical narratives connected to the dragons, who are unique and iconic; nestled within the stories of each are lessons that Xander internalizes without realizing it. As Xander learns to lead a thoughtful life post-loss—connecting with his family, finding commonalities with friends, and accepting that he can choose how to react to pain—the dragons transition from scary to humorous. Evocative illustrations further convey the dragons' spirits and match the lessons.

In the thoughtful novel *Paintball with Dragons*, a boy reckons with his grief, learning healthy ways of coping—thanks to mythical creatures that only he sees.

JOHN M. MURRAY (November / December 2023)

*Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.*