



Choppy Socky Blues

Ed Briant

Flux (April 2010)

\$9.95 (264pp)

978-0-7387-1897-2

Jason Smallfield's father, Trevor, is a professional stuntman and karate instructor. To everyone else in the world, Trevor might seem like a hero, but for Jason he is the exact opposite. Trevor left his wife when Jason was very young and never acted like a true parent to his son. Not only that, he lies and manipulates people all too frequently. Trevor's favorite stuntman role was a Star Wars storm trooper, and Jason often compares his dad to that nefarious archetype.

Jason's ultimate goal in life is to not be like his father. He believes that if he lies, cheats, or practices martial arts, he will become like the man he detests. He starts to avoid Trevor and even quits karate right before his blue belt test. After two years of this, Jason's life is turned upside-down when he meets Tinga. She is smart, pretty, and totally into martial arts. Hoping to build a relationship with her, he tells Tinga that he will go to her blue-belt test and participate. Unfortunately, the only person who can prepare Jason for this test is his father, the "storm trooper."

Lying about karate complicates Jason's life, but what happens next makes everything even harder. He discovers that Tinga is his friend Malcolm's girlfriend. Not only does Jason feel like a heel for hitting on his friend's girlfriend, but he is fearful of what might happen if Malcolm finds out. Malcolm is perfecting a tornado kick, a powerful combination that bends the punching bag nearly in two and sounds like a gunshot when he demonstrates it. Jason doesn't quite want to die, but he really does like Tinga. What some people will do for love...

Author Ed Briant took up the "choppy socky" arts—karate, taekwondo, and boxing—because he enjoyed swimming but had to pass through dangerous gang territory in order to reach the beach. By the time he became proficient, "the punks had jobs, the skinheads had grown their hair, and the bikers were driving station wagons. In short, nobody cared much for fighting any more." However, his experience gives authenticity to his writing.

This novel is aimed at teenage and older audiences, and it's a book that has it all; the storyline, pacing, underlying messages, and even the title fit perfectly. "Blues" in the title refers not only to the blue belt test, but also the pain that comes from relying on his father once again—and from getting beat up. Readers who pick this book up will want to keep reading.

(March / April 2010)

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