

The Wings of Dragons: Book One of the Dragoon Saga

Josh VanBrakle

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Japanese mythology blends with an epic fantasy adventure to create a vivid world and a lovable young hero.

In a time when being left-handed is believed to signify a demonic nature, eighteen-year-old Iren is doomed to a life of near-solitary confinement. Constantly ridiculed and ostracized by everyone around him, his life begins to change when he is drafted into a dangerous mission to save his village from a vicious invasion. *The Wings of Dragons* brings readers on a fast-paced adventure inspired by Japanese folklore and led by a compelling cast of characters.

As his family legacy is revealed to him, along with the responsibility that comes with it, Iren must discover his natural, unique abilities and place in the world. The isolation he has suffered most of his life leaves him ill-equipped to deal with something as simple as a hug, and readers will root for him as he overcomes his reticence and opens up to possible attachments. Betrayals and danger abound, and Iren must figure out who—and how—to trust. Josh VanBrakle keeps the mysteries going throughout the novel, revealing the truth bit by bit, allowing Iren's heroic nature to surface as he grows ever closer to discovering his fate.

Although *The Wings of Dragons* may be considered somewhat evocative of epic fantasies such as *Lord of the Rings*, the novel never feels derivative; VanBrakle takes the tale down an innovative and intriguing path. The community of Kodamas, for instance, resides in a forest among the trees, similar to the Japanese mythical race of the same name. Yokai monsters and their more vicious Oni counterparts also derive from Japanese folklore, and VanBrakle brings them to frightening life.

VanBrakle has undoubtedly put a great deal of effort into this fantasy, and the results are laudable. Each main character is multilayered, from protagonist Iren to Rondel, his unusual mentor and sometimes nemesis. Although there are several fierce battles, violence is not excessively graphic beyond an intense opening scene.

The Wings of Dragons is Josh VanBrakle's first novel, and it's an impressive debut. The compelling story line, characters, and myths are certain to intrigue adventurous readers and leave them eagerly anticipating book two of the saga.

JEANNINE CHARTIER HANSCOM (Winter 2014)

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