



Talker 25

Joshua McCune

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Debut author Joshua McCune's gritty and heart-pounding novel is a masterful reimagining of popular dragon fantasy lore, set in a militant future reminiscent of Paolo Bacigalupi's *Ship Breaker* and Ann Aguirre's *Outpost*.

It's a high school prank gone horribly wrong-sneaking onto the rez to pose next to a sleeping dragon-and now senior Melissa Callahan has become an unsuspecting pawn in a war between Man and Monster, between family and friends and the dragons she has despised her whole life. Chilling, epic, and wholly original, this debut novel imagines a North America where dragons are kept on reservations, where strict blackout rules are obeyed no matter the cost, where the highly weaponized military operates in chilling secret, and where a gruesome television show called *Kissing Dragons* unites the population. Joshua McCune's debut novel offers action, adventure, fantasy, and a reimagining of popular dragon lore.

Talker 25 Details

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Author : Joshua McCune

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From Reader Review Talker 25 for online ebook

Take Me Away To A Great Read says

This book was a really cool, dystopian-dragon read!!! Joshua will definitely pull on your heartstrings as to what the characters should do. In this book you want to choose sides and feel that there is a right or wrong side but the author does such a great job of showing that all have played a role in the war of hatred and destruction. This really is a brilliant novel and I look forward to where it is heading.

Melissa's mother was killed by a dragon. She hates the monsters and wants nothing to do with them. One day she sees a young attractive boy named James and he rides Dragons and talks to them. Soon Melissa is wrapped into a world she never thought she would be a part of and didn't think she excepted, let alone would fight for. What she feels to be right and wrong change based on what she experiences, and Melissa and James go through so much in this book. The dragons and the humans are both equally tortured to make a point, join a cause or suffer.

This is a must read, I am giving it 5 out of 5 stars. I can't wait to continue this series. I loved the friendships between humans and dragons in this book. It was a cool, dystopian book with a touch of romance, but mostly lots of action, and strife!!!

Rashika (is tired) says

****This review has also been posted on [Tangled in Pages](#)*

This book is a big fat joke and I really wish I hadn't been drawn to it because of it's pretty cover. I should have learned my lesson but I never do. Plus I decided to not read any of the reviews which could have prevented me from wasting the painfully long time it took me to read this book.

At first there was some potential. The first couple of pages made me think this book stood a chance and could either blow my mind or go down the drain. It took the latter path. The first time I knew this book was a goner was when the main character referred to her friend's appearance as 'the whore look'. Slut shamming right there and it happened so many more times. There wasn't only slut shamming though, there were so many instances where female characters were mocked for various things.

Melissa falls under the teenagers that I'd like to slap category. She is self-centered and insensitive. She yells at her father and brother all the time and goes so far as to publicly humiliate her younger brother. Sure it was an accident but just because you're fucking stressed doesn't mean you have the right to take your anger on whoever the hell you want to. Melissa, like any other annoying ass teenager out there, swoons when she encounters a hot guy. Never mind the fact that the government thinks she is an insurgent and will most likely arrest her.

The insurgents are stupid. They are supposed to be rebels. They support the dragons and you know what? These shit heads aren't rebels. They are kiss-assesses. They kiss up to dragons and try to win their favor. I am not kidding. The dragons are apparently self-sufficient so I don't even understand why they need humans to help them. I don't think the dragons even care. Like seriously. This is basically what the insurgents are like when it comes to dragons.

They fawn over them but aside from that, they don't know shit.

The James dude, the love interest is equally as annoying.

"Probably. I don't know. If you don't face death every once in a while, how do you know how to live?"

It reminds me of a book I read a while ago, *The Wicked We Have Done*. The book referred to this ideal as Chaos Theory and because of the events of that book, his ideas don't make me think, they just piss me off. No. Going out of your way to look for trouble is only going to end up with you being dead. There is something known as self-preservation and I am not sure James has it. Thankfully though, he doesn't play a major role in this book so I didn't have to put up with his stupidity for too long (this also means that there wasn't much of a romance so yay for that too).

A lot of the instances of slut/woman shaming aren't exactly portrayed in a negative light. They are supposed to come across as jokes but they didn't. For example, this

"Claire, whose hairy legs could be very well belong to a sasquatch.."

I didn't laugh. I might have if I was the sort of human who thought that all women should shave their legs because otherwise, they're just disgusting freaks, but as it is, I DON'T! Melissa also called her friend at the 'camp' a whore, and of course it was playful because she is one. She uses her body to get alcohol. If you cannot tell, I am being sarcastic here. Instead of mocking and making fun of her friend, she should try to help her. If she is so dependent on alcohol, then there is obviously something wrong here. But no. The world revolves around Melissa and no one else matters.

There are other completely insensitive instances in this book. Like this one.

".sitting all retarded in the restroom"

This sentence was used to refer to a girl who just died and they were trying to think of things to comfort themselves so that they wouldn't feel so bad about her death. I cannot even. I seriously cannot. SO MUCH RAGE. SO SO SO MUCH RAGE.

The book is way too fast for the first 1/3rd of the book with things happening one after the other and no time for readers to digest what is going on. The next 2/3rds slows down and kind of reminds me of some odd mix between *The Program* and *The Hunger Games* except with dragons. These kids are sent to Antarctica to be reconditioned so that they aren't 'dragon friendly' anymore. The government is completely evil and for what reason I don't understand. Of course humanity is going to freak out if a bunch of dragons came out of

nowhere. Humans are not required to accommodate them. THEY SHOULD. They definitely should out of common courtesy but dragons are the strange species here and not humans (or the animals that inhabit the planet). Their presence could result in fractures in the ecosystem and a whole heap of other problems so I am not sure why the government is seen as evil (and also portrayed as evil in a very cartoonish way). Things are not so black and white and shouldn't be portrayed as such.

Also there is a weird TV show in this book which is why I said *Hunger Games*. These people are made to dress up and kill dragons to entertain the dragon hating public. *rolls eyes*. I don't even know what to say to that.

The world building is very weak in this novel. The dragons came out of nowhere 15 years ago (the dragons don't remember where they came from either), they are digging a giant pit in the middle of Kansas. Why? Also the dragons themselves make no sense. Their reproduction techniques remind me of flowers which just makes me go huh? On top of that, the 'baby' dragons remind me of giant puppies. The dragon in one scene goes so far as to 'lick' Melissa's face a bazillion times. What? WHY? The adult dragons just reminds me of stuck up humans. We're talking about dragons here and as someone who loves dragons, I am annoyed. There was a LOT of potential here for developing interesting dragons but the potential just went down the drain.

I ended up skimming huge chunks and even then it took me ages to read. This book dragged on and on and made me rage and even writing this review kind of makes me angry. I wouldn't recommend it to anyone unless you're sure you're be able to handle it. I am pretty sure I won't read the sequel unless I am feeling masochistic and decide I want to know what happens from this point onwards.

Note that all quotes have been taken from an uncorrected proof and may be subject to change.

Joshua McCune says

So, yeah, I wrote this, so I may be a little biased ;)... and while I think the sequel's even better, I'm extremely proud of this guy.

Parental advisory: violence and explicit language.

Nick says

"I won't run from death. I won't run from pain or fear. Life hurts sometimes, sometimes so much that you think it's never gonna stop hurting. That's a beautiful thing."

You can find the full review and more about this book on my blog!

First we should appreciate this ***freaking awesome cover***. It looks like it has something to do with military and there are wings, freaking dragons' wings which make it perfect. I was intrigued to read this by this beauty, and I don't regret doing it.

Talker 25 is a dragon vs military/government kind of dystopian and it's about dragons invading Earth and killing nearly 100 million people, and there's this girl, ***Melissa Callahan***, who for me was not very suitable main character, she has some good qualities, but she seemed a little stupid. And there was a contrast between her actions and her thoughts, which bothered me a lot. She gets captured and everything starts to change, and now she has to communicate with dragons with some power that she owns.

I actually found ***the plot*** very interesting, but it was lacking a lot. The world build was poor, and it left me with million questions. The whole thing with dragons invading Earth was a little confusing and I really want to know more about this world, because it is not bad, it's a great idea that the author has made. I just think that it needs more details, because sometimes the story dragged a little and the author could have put some useful information instead of that.

I enjoyed the ending and also the second half of the book. It has action and dragons, which are totally freaking awesome, and I really want to continue with the sequel. I ***recommend*** this book to every reader out there, it may seem a little off in the beginning but give it time, you will end up liking it, as I did.

Tara says

I loved this epic, brutal story, and can't wait to see it continue.

I will admit that, for a while, I wasn't completely sure about it. I found the near-future world dominated by human-dragon war interesting, and the descriptions of the dragons fascinating, but sometimes had a little trouble understanding all the backstory and following the sequence of events that led to Melissa ending up at

an insurgency camp.

But around page 150, all of that changed--and the book became unputdownable for me. I don't want to give any plot twists away, but from that point on, the stakes are raised, the characters face moral dilemmas of epic proportions, and the plot tears forward right to the end. You'd think that, after finishing a 400-page book, I'd want to be done with that world for a while, but if the sequel was available right now, I would have grabbed it and kept on going with the story immediately.

So if you pick this book up and are on the fence about it at first, keep on going; persistence pays off in a huge way. Amazing, thought-provoking debut.

Laurie Thompson says

Wow! This book is insanely intense and very well done. There is a lot to think about in addition to the action. And fantasy dragon lore set in realistic modern times? Yes, please! I must admit that, as an animal lover and general softie, some parts of it were pretty hard for me to take, but it just drove home the themes and made me sympathize even more with the main characters. I couldn't put it down, and I definitely can't wait for the sequel!

Ornella (Nyx) says

75% of this book was a major struggle. Had to keep making myself read it, and just when it was finally starting to get good, it ended...I usually don't mind cliffhangers, but in this case it didn't help the book at all.

This book was a hot mess. I could not stand Melissa at all. First it was the way she thought of her friend (the whore look) and then when she publicly humiliated her younger brother. I have a younger brother and I would NEVER do that. It's just messed up on so many levels.

The plot. I didn't get it. I mean I get what was happening I just don't understand WHY. The dragons get to earth, god knows why or how, the start digging a whole in Kansas, again, don't know why, the government for some reason starts making the dragons look worst than people would naturally react to them. Because let's be honest here, while dragons may be awesome, I'm not going to be a big fan if they are eating and terrorizing people, but I'm a firm believer of just leave them the fuck alone and they won't fuck with you. Apparently, this is a foreign concept to everyone in this book.

Not only does the government make the dragons out to be worst than they are, but they actually torture them and control them, and the whole thing just disgusted me.

The whole book made no sense. The depiction of the dragons, the government and most of the characters was horrifying just for the hell of it, and that's something that just doesn't fly with me.

Mike Jung says

TALKER 25 is fantastic. I'm a believer in the central importance of the main character's emotional journey in

any book, and it's to Josh McCune's credit that a story filled with richly detailed worldbuilding, high-octane action, and a genuinely original take on dragons still makes me connect to and empathize with its protagonist. Mel is a character with real emotional depth and personality, and it's not hard to feel her struggles as her circumstances grow increasingly dire.

That said, the book shines brightest in its depiction of dragons. The dragon-human war (and its aftermath, and its encore) is, to use an ironically cliched phrase, wholly original. An aerial dragon battle (whether it's dragon vs. dragon or dragon vs. human) will always undergo serious scrutiny from me, and the aerial battle scenes in this book are stunning - fast and kinetic, but also vivid and cinematic. I want to see that first dragon battle on a big screen - it'd be a knockout.

There's a lot of intense, explicit violence in the book, and that will definitely make it a bad match for readers who don't care for graphic depictions of a morally ambiguous war. That's what this story truly is, at its core: a depiction of war in all its ambivalence and uncertainty, without clearly defined heroes and villains. But with DRAGONS! I was thrilled by TALKER 25 from start to finish. I'm positively salivating for the next volume in the trilogy.

Khanh, first of her name, mother of bunnies says

Over the next hour and a half, twenty more dragon names cross my computer screen. All ignore me.

“Why aren’t they answering?” I ask Lester.

I scan the script for what I’m supposed to do but can’t find anything that applies...the section near page bottom—For arrogant or annoyed dragons. “Please help me. I am weak. Without your help, the invisible men will...”

DNF at 58% because there's just no point in continuing. This is the worst book about dragons that I've ever read.

I still have enough to rage about, as it is. This is a book about a girl who --for lack of a better description-- becomes a **dragon telemarketer**, at least, that's where I stopped.

This book is one of the most plotless, nonsensical books I've ever read. Dragons? DRAGONS? My left shoe has more personality than these dragons. I think I gave this book a fair shot. If there's absolutely crap world building by this point, then why should I continue?

This is a book about dragons vs. the government, sprinkled with reality TV, catfights, whore-name-calling, and a magical makeover. There was no world building, a terrible main character who SCREAMS AND YELLS AND OMG DADDY FUCK YOU I HATE YOU and YOU'RE A STUPID LITTLE SNOT, DUMB FUCKING LITTLE BROTHER with all the signs of being a special chosen snowflake later on for no apparent. It's all telling and no showing and as emotionless as Nicole Kidman's face after a Botox binge. I've been warned that there's slut shaming (thankfully, I didn't get to that part, but I stopped right after a catfight, so I've no doubt there was going to be some unholy feminist rage later on had I continued further).

The writing was unremarkable, so much so that I took almost no notes on this book. There was nothing that stood out. As such, you're going to have to endure a review with remarkably few quotations from the book (for me, that is).

The Summary: 15 years ago, dragons came to earth. They're terrifying, destructive monsters, killing over 80 million people. For some fucking reasons, we conquered them. The dragons, Reds, Blues, Greens in color, are now sent to, like, dragon zoos. No idea what happened to the rest of the world, or the rest of the US, because we're living one military city, Mason-Kline, and it is as if nothing else exists outside of it.

Melissa Callahan is a stupid teenager who does stupid things. When we start the book, she and her friends have broken into a dragon compound (where's the motherfucking guards?!?) and taken some stupid Facebook frat boy/douchebag style photo, posing on top of a Blue dragon (respect, yo!). A hot boy appears, says something mysterious to her. She hears a mysterious dragon voice in her head! Boy disappears. Melissa's like "Huh."

Her dad finds the stupid photo of her mounting the poor sleeping dragon. Melissa gets into trouble. She flips her dad off, she yells at her dad, she yells at her brother. Her brother runs off in tears. All of a sudden, there are dragons eeeeeeeeveryfucking where, breathing fire and shit on people. The military comes in, they subdue the dragons, but not before the dragons do some major damage. The dragons carry her off to some kind of dragon camp. Hot boy is there. He tells her that dragons are really nice people, they just want to live in peace. They talk a lot. Melissa still thinks the dragons are murderers. They talk some more, and I don't know what the fuck they talk about because I can't remember a single fucking thing about their fucking conversations.

Melissa gets captured somehow. **She, for some fucking reason, gets a makeover where she turns into a blond beauty.** There was no point to this, because she gets sent to some kind of rehabilitation camp with a bunch of catty girls who call each other "whores," where she pretty much uses her TELEPATHY MAGIC SPARKLY UNICORN POWER to tune in to dragon radio and call dragons to recruit/trick them as needed.

Lester hands me a different call script. A single page with two paragraphs of text. One for introduction, one for rebuttal. Only one fill-in-the-blank (my alias) and one handwritten note (Growl as you speak).

“Bryzman, my name is Christina Grace, I am a member of the Diocletians,” I say, adding a throaty rumble to my words. “Join us or die.”

The Green responds immediately in a guttural voice that spikes a shiver through me. I will enjoy sucking the skin from your roasted body, human. His call frequency updates to 98.667 iGHz.

The rebuttal section—When the dragon threatens to devour you—is simple. “Join us and you can eat well every day without fear of—”

Where's the fucking world building??!: As I said, 15 years ago, dragons came to earth. I don't know what the fuck happened, apparently, neither do the dragons. They're destructive, they killed over 80 million people (that's 1/4 of the current US population) before they were stopped. How were they stopped? They can't see the color black, but how were these dragons stopped? What happened to the rest of the US? Why are the dragons confined? Why aren't they locked up or completely destroyed, instead of being in research zoos. Why are they left completely alone otherwise? Why are they so poorly secured that a bunch of drunk teenagers can break into a dragon holding area?!

These dragons have killed 80 fucking million people! Why aren't we more careful with them?!

80 million people have died! What happened to the rest of the world?! What happened to the government? Why are we living in a military town? Why is the fucking military town so poorly secured that it takes one little dragon attack to demolish the whole town. IT'S A MILITARY TOWN. IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE MORE SECURE.

The dragons breathe fire! They breathe ice! Why are they so fucking docile all of a sudden after HAVING KILLED 80 MILLION PEOPLE? Why are they allowing themselves to be imprisoned with their full powers intact AFTER HAVING KILLED 80 MILLION PEOPLE? Why are we even giving them a chance AFTER THEY KILLED 80 MILLION PEOPLE? How many fucking dragons are left on earth anyway?! We don't know anything! What kind of weapons did we develop that's so special and awesome to defeat the kind of fire-breathing, smoke-spewing dragons THAT KILLED 80 MILLION PEOPLE?

They're like cuddly happy warm little carebears happy to talk to telepathic humans who are on their side. **The humans who befriend and talk telepathically to these dragons aren't normal people, they're fucking dragon fanboys.** Furthermore, these dragons are tremendously fucking boring. They don't say anything of importance. They don't remember anything. They're pretty much useless, which makes me wonder HOW THE FUCK DID THEY KILL 80 MILLION PEOPLE?!

From what I read, there were no point to the dragon colors. They might as well be like brown or golden puppies, because despite the distinguishing colors, there were little difference between them. **There was no dragon lore, since the dragons don't remember anything about where they came from.**

Don't get me wrong, I love dragons! I've loved dragons ever since I was a child. **If you're going to give me a book about dragons, don't make them boring!** Make them destructive, sure. Make them bloodthirsty, cruel, demonic. Awesome! Don't make them boring! Pokémons are cuter and more interesting than these creatures. That's just a fucking travesty.

All of a sudden, we have these **reality TV shows** where dragons are hunted. The guys who hunt them are celebrities, like those in *Dog, the Bounty Hunter*. REALITY SHOWS, WHAT THE FUCK?! It's been 5 years since the war against the dragons ended. 80 MILLION PEOPLE DIED. It's like having a reality show about hunting the Taliban after 9/11. It's a fucking dumb idea, and you can't tell me that this sort of shit would fly in an alternate universe.

Where's the mourning? Where's the emotion? All the emotions in this book is ANGER ANGER ANGER ANGER KILL THE DRAGONS UGLY DESTRUCTIVE ASSHOLES versus the insurgent OMG MAGICAL HAPPY BEAUTIFUL LORD MASTER DRAGONS. Where's the wonder? Where's the history? Is there any sort of introspection about the legend of the dragons in our mythology and lore versus the cold, hard reality at all?

The dragons can talk. They might as well have been mute. They're all telling and no showing, because there was nothing to them. They're like lions who have been bred and raised within a zoo. Powerful potential. Interesting to look at. No personality. No complexity. They eat. They breed. They get fawned over. Oohed and aahed by the humans with twinkles in their eyes who have conveniently forgotten that THESE DRAGONS HAVE KILLED 80 MILLION PEOPLE.

Roar about us dragons, roar about your god, roar at yourself if you must, roar as loud and long as you can until there is nothing left to roar about. Send all the badness away.

^ Says the dragon. What the FUCK does that even mean? So this is the equivalent of **dragony purple prose**.

The Makeover: What the fuck?!

I thought I recognized the girl in the mirror before, but this one I've never seen. Her hair's blond and falls in glorious curls around her shoulders. Eyebrows are also dyed, what remains of them. Smoky eye shadow. Enough foundation to fill a grave. Skin a shade between gold and bronze. Midnight-red lipstick to offset the silver circlet nestled in her hair.

After Melissa is captured and imprisoned and given crappy food and put into solitary confinement with a single nasty toilet that doesn't flush...**all of a sudden, she gets a fucking makeover**. And then given some kind of...I want to say **Hunger Game-esque pin?** Is that where this book is headed? I don't know, I don't care.

I was confused as fuck, and I'm still confused as fuck. Without any ceremony, she's thrown in front of a camera. It's a reality show. They're going to make a documentary out of her. They put her underaged brother on camera. They're filming everything. It's the dumbest fucking thing in the world.

The Characters:

When [my father]'s past the fire pit, I give him the finger, turn around, and march right up Dragon Hill.

“Bullshit. You—”

“Watch your language, missy.”

“Bullshit, bullshit, bull—”

Melissa is a little snotty, bratty, shrieking, perpetually unhappy and angry bitch. I hate using the word bitch, I really do. I hate a word that specifically targets a girl or a woman as petty, snippy, perpetually angry, ball-breaking for no reason at all, but it is so perfectly fitting for Melissa's personality.

The Romance:

“Strong spirit, fragile mind.” His expression grows serious. “I thought it would be a run-of-the-mill recruiting trip, but when I met her, she absolutely floored me.”

“How so?”

“Look at her,” James says. “Not the hair or the makeup or the dress. Look into her eyes. There’s something magical in them. I’ve never met anybody like her.”

James is a fawning insta-lovey-dovey nitwit of a yelping puppy. There was absolutely no point to the romance whatsoever. There was zero chemistry.

I'm gonna go reread my beloved *Dragonriders of Pern* series so I can erase this book from my memory. Hell, *Puff, the Magic Dragon* makes more sense plot-wise than this book.

Suzy Manning says

A super-good read. Action, Romance, Danger, and DRAGONS.

The Twins Read says

This review can originally be found at The Twins Read.

I really wanted to like this book because dragons, right? But try as I might I just couldn't get into it. I wasn't happy that it's been compared to Ann Aguirre's *Outpost* because that book is amazing. This just falls flat.

After sneaking into the dragon sanctuary and inadvertently catching the military's attention, Melissa finds herself an unwitting participant in the war between humans and dragons. This book is basically a war between humans and dragons. That is about as much as I could glean from it because it's all about who's on which side and a whole lot of dragon torture which is not amusing.

The characters in *Talker 25* are poorly crafted. Melissa is a crass, judgmental, insensitive and spiteful girl and I don't like her attitude at all. She flips off her dad, shames her brother in public and calls her friend a slut behind her back. From the very beginning, I knew she was going to be an issue. Add to that list the fact that she instantly swoons over a hot guy? I don't know why the dragons even bothered with her since apparently she's useless.

James, the hot guy, is as annoying as Melissa. Love at first sight? Yeah. I have nothing against that but the way it was executed here was just terrible. The romance served no purpose in the story and it just added fuel to the fire. He's a really terrible insurgent who throws temper tantrums and compromises the safety of his group by running off to mope when he's all sad and depressed. Not cool, James.

Also, where was the backstory? I don't understand how the dragons found their way to our world and apparently they don't know how that happened either. REALLY. Is this some sort of a cop-out? The dragons had no idea how they found humans? They were just dropped there? Out of the blue? They can't see the color black? What. Is. That. Where was the world-building? Someone please explain.

And the humans! Attack first negotiate later? I get that fear makes people act rashly, but having the government lash out at dragons when they haven't initiated anything? That deserves a massive face palm. And the torture scenes in this book were horrible and annoying because they were just cruel for the sake of being cruel. It's just unnecessary and unexplained hatred everywhere.

I also didn't get the role of the dragon fanatics or rebels because the dragons seemed to do okay on their own. And here comes these people who want to help them? By riding on their backs and talking to them in their heads. Ugh, if I were one of those dragons I wouldn't even bother.

Basically *Talker 25* is about dragons and dragon fanatics fighting the government and they all hate each other and try to one up the other. They also do reconditioning on humans and use them on their TV show. It's doesn't help that you've got a bratty heroine narrating the story and I wouldn't trust her with my life. If you want a dragon book I'd point you towards *Seraphina* by Rachel Hartman and just overlook this book.

Leona Carstairs says

****0.5 stars****

This is probably one of the worst books I've ever read, IT WAS SO SO SO BAD. The plot was the most confusing, dumb, random thing ever. I really had no idea what was going on, we jumped around all the time. I don't think anything happened, maybe stuff did, but it made NO SENSE at all. At all. It was so stupid I am not kidding you. I highly recommend you avoid this book at all costs. I would only recommend this to my worst enemy.

Brandy Painter says

Originally posted here at Random Musings of a Bibliophile.

I was pretty excited to read Talker 25 by Joshua McCune because, well, DRAGONS. Despite futuristic-the-world-sucks novels not at all being my thing, I couldn't wait for this one. Again I say, DRAGONS. I will read anything with a dragon in it. Unfortunately this book is heavy on the life-sucks and light on the dragons. (Except when they are being tortured in horrific graphic detail.)

I read an ARC received in exchange for a fair review.

The writing in Talker 25 is almost hypnotic. I was certainly drawn into the story and it was riveting reading. When I was reading it, I was completely engaged. Dragons came to earth 15 years ago, no one knows how or why (including the dragons). Some people got killed. The government went into high security mode, locked down the population, and went on a dragon killing rampage. They are still attempting to annihilate the remaining dragons. There are groups of insurgents trying to protect the remaining dragons. The military is engaging in controlling dragons and injuring civilians in order to blame the insurgents. They've even created a war camp where they hold teens capable of telepathically communicating with the dragons to help control them. The plot is fast paced and, while purely derivative of other stories, explores some interesting themes about modern entertainment, loyalty, government power, and ethics in war. The problem is the execution of all this is incredibly muddled and this is largely due to the characters.

I'm sure that there are a lot of reviews out there that will declare Melissa as unlikeable. And she is. She is supposed to be. She is an angry, confused, lonely teen as the story opens. There's little there to like. But she is so very human and I appreciated that about her. Her character almost made me really like this, but there was too much I couldn't overlook. One of those things is that none of the character's motivations every made any sense to me, and that included Melissa's even though the story is told in first person from her point of view. This a plot heavy story, and with so much action and characters, the character development is bound to suffer. I think it is a major flaw though when the reader can't figure out why anyone is doing anything they are doing. Melissa's original hatred of the dragons was understandable. Her sudden desire to rescue a random insurgent boy (hot, of course) in the midst of a military hospital is less so. She throws some line about the dragons not being what they thought out during this scene, which I read four times to figure out where the heck that came from. I still don't know. If you ask me, she still had reason to be wary of the dragons. They aren't evil incarnate, like the government is making them out to be, but they aren't fluffy bunnies either. They are often hungry and they like to eat humans. And at this point she had no real reason to fear the military

both of her parents worked for. She spends a very brief time at some dragon caves communing with a couple dragons and not liking them much still. Once she is captured by the military and sent to the camp, she suddenly becomes the dragons biggest champion. Part of this is a deep-seated desire to not be broken, which I can appreciate. And it turns out the government is evil incarnate. They are killing innocent people, torturing dragons, and being all around horrifically cruel and villainous. And for the life of my I can't figure out WHY. I know power corrupts and all that, but the villainy here is almost cartoonish and a bit excessive. In books like *Fahrenheit 451* and *1984*, I understood the government's motivations. One of my major complaints about modern books of this sort, is this. I can't figure out why the governments even want to be doing what they are doing, and this book suffers greatly from that flaw.

Another issue I have is how gruesomely detailed the violence and torture scenes are. You can write scenes of great impact that leave the reader chilled and horrified without going into gruesome detail. (I offer as evidence chapter three of *The Queen of Attolia* and all of *Code Name Verity*.) In fact, I am often MORE impacted by descriptions that leave more to the imagination. I have a very good imagination. And when violence is this descriptive I simply start to shut down.

Reading *Talker 25* was rather like experiencing a video game to me. And I didn't particularly enjoy the experience. I'm sure there will be readers out there who will and won't have the same issues I do, but I can't really recommend this without serious reservations.

Content Note: graphic violence, strong language, sexual references, may be a trigger for those who have suffered sexual assault or abuse

I read an ARC received from the publisher, Greenwillow Books, via Edelweiss. *Talker 25* is on sale April 22.

Debbie Narh says

0.5 Stars

Close your eyes (do it.) Now, imagine a mythical creature that terrifies you, it's okay you don't have to tell anyone what it is. Got it? Good. Keep that creature in your head, think of how scary and fucked up it is, now turn it into a fluffy adorable version of itself. Disney-fy the shit out of it if you have to. That, is what you get in *Talker 25*. You get these badass creatures lying around sleeping and then getting ridden like some kind of pet. That's pretty much it and I'm sad to say it never gets any better.

Melissa, Mel, Callahan, whatever you want to call our protagonist is an idiot who thinks she's brave and has a lot of spunk. She doesn't. She's just stupid and naive. Half the time, she doesn't make sense. She has spent the better of three years fearing and hating dragons because of what they did to her mother, yet at the first chance she gets, she rides them. Why? Did I miss something in this sudden change? It makes no sense, if something killed my mother I would not under ant circumstance befriend it/ them. On top of that, nothing is well explained. There are three types of dragons yet all I really understand about the green ones are that they're the most military like. The other two are lost causes to me nor do I care about them. The romance is also very pathetic and annoying since we have the protagonist be a snotty brat one second and then worried about the way she looks the next when a complete stranger who was following her knows her name. It's so

forced and I really didn't see what the love interest saw in her. To make matters worse is the military, the US can make these insane weapons yet can't keep some teenagers out of a dangerous compound? The military in the book is a complete joke, maybe worse than the protagonist and the romance combined. They do nothing, think of nothing, and just allow these teenagers into the compound with fucking Dragons and don't even send these kids to jail because, "they were just having some fun." What the hell is this book? I believe in having fun and taking chances but this is a damn dragon compound. These kids could get killed and it seems that the military would still sit on their asses. *Shakes head*.

What did I like about this big joke of a novel? Believe it or not, despite the super cheesy summary, I was expecting something exciting and I liked what I thought was the concept of this story. Turns out that was a joke too.

Talker 25 is just bad, from every angle. From the first page, I was confused. Dragons aren't some kind of side plot, they are the plot or at least should be, so I would like to know about them before the 30% mark other than they're red or blue or green and the red and blue can mate. What the fuck am I supposed to do with that information? It also doesn't help that no one can make up their fucking minds on what the fuck to call our protagonist and I'm aware that this is silly but it's not. One sentence her friends are calling her Callahan, and then the next they're calling her Mel. Why? No reason, it's not to show anger or anything. I don't recommend this one to anyone because it is absolutely horrid and stupid and bad and you will either get really angry or really sleepy reading it.

Jeanne says

INTENSE! This action-packed dragon tale takes place in a near-future America, giving it a whole different feel from your typical dragon fantasy. The story doesn't sugarcoat the atrocities of war, making it a great vehicle to launch discussion on topics such as torture, coercion and whether the end justifies the means.
