



Restless Souls

Dan Sheehan

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After three years embedded in the Siege of Sarajevo, war correspondent Tom returns to Dublin a haunted shell of his former self. His childhood friends Karl and Baz know they're laughably unqualified to help him, but are determined to see him through the darkness. Together, they embark on a journey for an unlikely cure, to an experimental Californian clinic called Restless Souls.

But as they try to save Tom from his memories, they must confront their own - of what happened to their childhood friend Gabriel. And in doing so, they must ask how their raucously funny teenage souls became weighed down - and why life got so damn complicated and sad.

Restless Souls is about young men grappling with the aftermath of tragedy. Darkly comic and deeply moving, it's an extraordinary portrait of male friendship, the power of memory and what it means to come home.

Restless Souls Details

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From Reader Review Restless Souls for online ebook

Oryx says

It's a rare thing wishing to have written a book. I can't say why it doesn't happen with all books I love, but it doesn't. It's an odd thing. First there's the envy of the author, then the scrutiny of every detail, until all you're left with is admiration.

I read that maybe some historical elements to the book aren't quite correct, are lacking, are way-off -- but I don't care. The characterisation and prose from the smallest simile to the grandest gesture; the weight of heart and humour; Sheehan's gift for the sentence...; It was all too beautiful.

Oh, and it reminded me of Geoff Dyer. I love Geoff Dyer. But we all know that now, don't we...

4.174

Paul says

Um . . . wow, what a mess. An absorbing mess, to be sure, made by a talented writer with more range and imagination than you'd guess from the first couple of chapters, but still, a mess. Mr. Sheehan seems to have a young writer's gift for short fiction, but is impatient to publish his first full-length novel, so he crams several slight but compelling plotlines -- a gritty account of dirt-poor orphans coming of age in Dublin, a doomed love affair between a freelance war correspondent and a medical student in early-90's Sarajevo, the friends of a suicidal man dealing with survivor's guilt (among others) -- into a unwieldy narrative structure that strains credibility as it forces all these disparate elements to cohere into a single story. Add a sojourn in a California desert hippie commune and a neuroscience lecture and you've got a book that seems to sprawl way more than its 256-page length would suggest. That's a perverse achievement, but I suspect Mr. Sheehan will accomplish a few interesting things in his career.

Mark says

I wasn't sure I would enjoy this book. It was highly recommended and reviewed and the subject matter seemed interesting enough.

It's a story about three friends and their struggles with loss, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and family. The friends seek ways to deal with the suicide of the brother of one of them and their experiences as journalists covering the Bosnian war in Sarajevo. The narrative switches from Sarajevo to a road-trip in the United States, where they are seeking assistance for the most profoundly affected among them from a remote facility providing experimental therapy for PTSD. The scenes in Sarajevo give context to the PTSD and during the road trip, they reflect on the suicide.

The plot sounds a bit sad and depressing, but the book doesn't end that way. I found the final chapter to be quite moving and encouraging, showing that friendship is a bond that can carry people through. It gave me hope for the characters.

The book taught me a lot about the atrocities of the Bosnian war and how those who witnessed many of them suffered afterwards. It made me realise that the PTSD from that particular war is not so widely discussed. Also, the characters are Irish, which adds an interesting dimension to how they develop.

Jaclyn Crupi says

Funny sad books are definitely my thing and although this is no *Imagine Me Gone* I enjoyed it more than I thought I would when I realised there are no women characters of substance. It's about male friendship, trauma and the disappointments life has in store for us. But it's also funny and tender and charming in a very Irish way.

Siobhan says

Restless Souls is a novel that combines a road trip narrative, PTSD treatment, tough upbringings in Dublin, loss, and the hope of unlikely cures as longtime friends Karl, Baz, and Tom try and work through their pasts and present. Tom's desire to be a war correspondent led him to Sarajevo, but when he returned, he came back haunted and suffering from PTSD. His old friends Karl and Baz aren't sure what to do, but they're willing to try out an experimental clinic halfway round the world in California, and so the three of them depart Ireland to see if they can find a desperate solution to help Tom.

The novel feels similar to a certain kind of comedy-drama film where friends must confront their past in a road trip type setting. However, what makes Sheehan's version of the story distinctive is his focus upon PTSD and suicide through Tom and through their childhood friend Gabriel, which makes the characters' journey a necessity rather than an indulgence (as can often be the case in a road trip drama narrative). Elements of the genre are apparent—arguments, revelations, a lack of belief in the point of their journey—but the novel also does not only focus on the journey, but what happens whilst there and what happened when Tom was in Bosnia. The narrative moves at quite a fast pace but slows down for Karl's remembrances, a style that may make it less engaging for some but which tends to suit the story.

Restless Souls mixes hard-hitting moments with light banter and reminiscence in a way that doesn't undercut its serious themes, but gives a kind of black comedy often found in life.

I Read, Therefore I Blog says

Dan Sheehan's debut literary novel is an uneasy mix of road trip adventure, Irish comedy and war diary that features some strong and at times hilarious dialogue and some moving individual scenes on male friendship but Tom's reasons for going to Sarajevo are thin and the suicide little more than a plot point while it's unfortunate that the female characters are literally girlfriends and mothers.

Miriam Smith says

'*Restless Souls* is about young men grappling with the aftermath of tragedy. Darkly comic and deeply moving, it's an extraordinary portrait of male friendship, the power of memory and what it means to come home.....'

I loved this book and really enjoyed reading it. Poignant, moving, heart breaking yet comical, heart warming

and fun at the same time. One moment it would be saddening to read the chapters covering Sarajevo, the next you'd be smirking at the camaraderie of Tom, Karl and Baz on their hilarious road trip to California - this story is not meant to overwhelm you with upsetting emotional feelings of a war torn country but to truly represent the power of friendship and how three young men stick together through thick and thin to help one of them overcome his mental health issues associated with PTSD.

I liked all of the characters, I particular had a soft spot for Barry (Baz) and I thought the relationship between the three of them was one of a kind and beautiful to read.

I love the simplistic cover too - the three circles representing comedy, road trip and tragedy and how they interact together.

This is an excellently researched debut novel by a very talented and intelligent writer - Dan Sheehan, that deserves a lot of publicity and recognition and I wouldn't hesitate to recommend "Restless Souls" - it's a fabulous read and I LOVED it!!

Thank you to the Goodreads Giveaways for my copy of the book.

5 stars

Jill says

3.5, or a Goodreads 4. As others have pointed out there is a metric ton of plot and backstory crammed into this 250 pages and the pacing rages all over the place to make it happen, but I got on board and really enjoyed it. Apart from the occasional forced bit of wit, there's no over-writing, a small feat given all the crises and angst.

If the book didn't fit my interests (Irish identities, banter, the personal side of national trauma) like a glove, this might objectively be a high 3. But it delivers as a novel across time and place; think Jonathan Safran Foer's fiction but funnier and less momentous.

Jo says

Restless Souls is one of those 'sleeper' debuts. Little buzz prior to publication; understated cover art. Even the publisher synopsis, for me, exudes an unassuming, typically Irish stoicism. But Dan Sheehan's simple act of prefacing his debut with the haunting opening lines of U2's iconic song Miss Sarajevo triggers memories, big ones, for those of us old enough to be cognizant of the atrocities that inspired them — and speaks to the author's ambition. **Read full review >>**

Earl says

Restless Souls from Dan Sheehan is a wonderful mix of genres that manages to strike just the right balance between dark/heavy and light/humorous. Like life, the humor is in the mundane everyday that surrounds the large life-changing events and relationships.

While a bit of a buddy road trip type novel, thus a lot about what constitutes friendship and what are the possible limits of a friendship, it is also about war and the effects war can have on not only those present but

those related to those present.

I recommend this to almost anyone primarily because there are so many ways to engage with the story. Friendship, PTSD (and associated disorders), limits (to friendship, to what constitutes a cure, to whether there are even limits to things such as grief or guilt), and then there is the humor that exists between lifelong friends (which often hides or cushions conflict).

Carole says

I liked the humour in this funny sad tale of 3 friends on a quest to help one of them survive the horrors he experienced in the war in Bosnia. The traumas that led them to this point are told in flashbacks. All 3 men are flawed but friendship and a common past binds them together. Tom's PTSD may be a bit too generic but an otherwise ok read.

Jane Griffiths says

A coming of age story, and a debut novel. An excellent one, too. Irish, and the characters are from Dublin, but there is no real Irish sense of place. Was that deliberate? Are the characters (all male - the women are mothers, wives and girlfriends) meant to be homeless and wandering? They are the product of tough upbringings, parents sometimes alcoholic or absent, brought up in foster care, and so on, but they are all very much rooted in Dublin. The only real sense of place though is in Sarajevo, where I HAVE been. Where, arguably, the 20th century both began and ended. There, you feel the love. But the one who comes back from there with PTSD is a bit too much the romantic hero, and like most romantic heroes he is rather boring.

However, I am probably being mean-spirited. The craic is often hilarious, and the suicide of the never-seen friend is terribly moving, as I suspect real-life friends' suicides (I never want to have to find out) are usually not. And the denouement in the California hills is a tour de force. A cool addition to modern Irish fiction. I'll be reading his next one.

Emily says

This felt, for better and for worse, like a much bigger and more sprawling novel than its length can really contain. Some really fantastic pieces woven together and some (like how and why Tom went to Sarajevo in the first place, or what happened with the women in Karl and Baz's lives) that got left behind. It lost me a bit in the descriptions of what went down at the clinic, pulled me back in every time the guys started bantering and arguing again. So a bit uneven for me, but altogether a unique angle on the road trip comedy and the trauma story.

A few other reviews bring up the fact that there are barely any women in this story, and none who aren't defined by how our main characters basically idealize or are taken care of by them. It's true, but it at least feels like a deliberate choice the author made to specifically depict men relating to one another, struggling to do that emotional work they've never considered theirs to do until now. Definitely a book about men and masculinity rather than one that's supposed to be about the whole world and just ends up being disproportionately dudely.

Lisa says

Long List for the 2018 Center for Fiction First Novel Prize

Ronnie Turner says

It has been three years since Tom left his home and family behind to be a war correspondent in the Siege of Sarajevo. Now, his two best friends, Karl and Baz stand by the arrivals gate in Dublin awaiting his return. But their old friend is a shell, a man no longer the boy from their teenage years who laughed with them, joked with them and helped them through their troubles. Desperate for a way to scale the heights of his suffering and help him through it, Karl forms a plan of action. He and Baz will take him to a special clinic in California, a place overlooking the sea, quiet and peaceful, somewhere to ease his restless soul and heal his hidden wounds. It's a long way. A vexing journey that will be rough on them all but what other choice do they have? Leave him be and watch him deteriorate? Abandon him to his memories and nightmares? As they leave behind their beloved Ireland for the promise of hope, of help for their old friend, the ties forged in their youth will be stretched and paths questioned. But if they are to help Tom, their pilgrimage must continue to the place called Restless Souls.

This book is told from both Karl and Tom's points of view. And both were equally affecting but for different reasons. Tom is in the middle of the Sarajevo Siege, a place where blood, ash and flying shrapnel arc through the air, where birdsong has been replaced by the peal of screams and fighting and people who scurry for safety are felled within seconds. Having left home to be a war correspondent and who now toils to help the victims of this onslaught, the horror Tom witnesses is almost impossible to comprehend.

Karl sees his brother's ghost everywhere, plagued by his death and the guilt of not having done more to prevent it. He is suffering in another way entirely, thoughts and memories of his closest friend and confidant constantly needling their way into his days. It is a slow torture and nothing can remedy it.

Populated with a troop of witty, utterly wonderful characters, Restless Souls conjures a sense of hope and emboldens the reader with every turn of the page. It seeps into your heart and vows to leave you feeling somehow changed come the end, as only the truly special books do. There is a lot of sadness in this book – Tom's chapters were especially difficult to read – but running alongside all of this is a wise, funny and joyous tale of friendship. And just as it spears your heart with its tragedies, it lifts you with its humour, its love and its honesty.

I loved Restless Souls. I loved the characters and I loved the writing! It is such a wise and touching novel!

Fully recommend!

Heartrending. Poignant. Touching.
