

Email: bridget@paperdragonreads.com Phone: (407) 212-7759

Family Reading Guide for "The Last Dragon on Mars"

Conversation starters for parents and children

Getting Started

What This Book Is About

"The Last Dragon on Mars" follows Lunar Jones, a boy born on a dying Mars who survives by keeping his head down and his expectations low. When a salvage run goes wrong and he takes shelter in a restricted zone, he discovers something impossible buried in the Martian dust—the last dragon. What follows is an adventure that forces Lunar to confront everything he's been taught about hope, stories, and what it means to be worth saving.

Key Themes Your Child Will Encounter:

- **Hope as a survival strategy:** Lunar has been taught that hope is dangerous—the novel challenges that belief head-on
- **Myth and storytelling:** The presence of a real dragon on Mars asks what stories do for us: do they describe reality, or do they create it?
- **Scarcity and community:** Life on Lunar's Mars is organized around resource scarcity—how this shapes people, relationships, and ambition is central to the world
- **Courage and discovery:** Choosing to investigate the restricted zone—and then to act on what he finds—is a series of choices that define who Lunar becomes
- **Ancestry and belonging:** The story's human characters carry stories from Earth to Mars—questions of heritage and identity are woven throughout

Tip for Parents: This is a wonderful book for teens who love science fiction but also for those who are drawn to questions of identity, legacy, and what we do when our circumstances feel impossible. The dragon is the hook—but the story beneath it is about whether hope is a weakness or the only real power we have.

Discussion Questions

About Lunar and His World

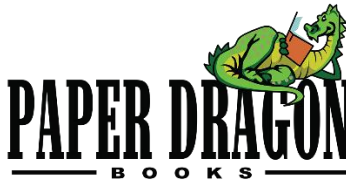
- Why does Lunar believe that looking up—literally and figuratively—is dangerous?
- What does Lunar's scavenging life tell us about the society he lives in?
- How does finding the dragon change Lunar's understanding of the stories he grew up with?
- What does Lunar risk by exploring the restricted zone—and why does he do it anyway?

About Hope, Stories, and What's Worth Believing

- Why might someone in Lunar's situation learn not to hope? Is that a reasonable response to their circumstances?
- What does it mean that a creature from ancient mythology exists on Mars? What does it change?
- Do you think stories about dragons and heroism could actually help a society survive? How?
- What's the difference between hope that gets you through hard times and hope that sets you up for disappointment?

Fun Conversation Starters

- If you were born on a dying planet, what one story or legend from Earth would you want to carry with you?



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- What would you do if you found something impossible buried in the ground—something that shouldn't exist?
 - What's a story (book, myth, film) that genuinely changed how you see the world?
 - If you could name a dragon, what would you name it and why?
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Discussion Activities

Exploring the Power of Stories

- Discuss: Why do humans carry myths and stories with them even in the most desperate circumstances?
- Share a story—family legend, myth, or book—that changed how you or your teen sees something
- Ask: "If humanity had to carry ten stories to a new planet, which ones should they bring?"
- Explore: What's the difference between a story that comforts and a story that empowers?

Connecting to Real-World Space Exploration

- Research current Mars exploration missions—what are scientists actually finding?
 - Discuss what life on Mars might actually look like if humans colonized it
 - Talk about the ethics of terraforming or settling other planets
 - Explore: What would it mean to be born somewhere you didn't choose and can't easily leave?
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Conversation Tips for Parents

Talking About Hope in Hard Circumstances

- Share a time when hoping for something felt risky—and what happened
- Discuss: Is it ever wise to lower your expectations to protect yourself? When does that become limiting?
- Ask: "What does Lunar's world look like when he finally allows himself to hope? How does it change him?"
- Explore what healthy hope looks like—not wishful thinking, but the belief that action is worth taking

Connecting to Heritage and Identity

- Discuss your family's stories: What legends, histories, or myths have been passed down?
 - Ask: "What would you want future generations of your family to know about where they came from?"
 - Explore: How does knowing where you came from affect how you move through the world?
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Questions by Age Group

For Younger Readers (Ages 11–13)

- What does Lunar do for a living on Mars? Why is it necessary?
- What does Lunar find in the restricted zone?
- Why has Lunar been taught that hope is dangerous?
- How does the dragon change things for Lunar and his crew?

For Older Readers (Ages 13–15)

- What does the dragon represent beyond just being a creature in the story? What does its existence mean?



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- How does Reintgen use the setting of a dying Mars to explore questions about human resilience and hope?
- What does the novel suggest about the relationship between the stories we tell and the world we're able to create?
- How does Lunar's character change from the beginning of the story to the end—and what drives that change?

Activity Ideas

Creative and Analytical Projects

- Write a "mythology" that Lunar's ancestors carried from Earth to Mars—what stories survived the journey?
- Design a "survival pack" for life on Lunar's Mars: what ten items (including stories or knowledge) would you bring?
- Write a scene from the dragon's perspective—what has it been waiting for?
- Create a map of Lunar's Mars with the key locations from the story labeled and described

Research and World-Building

- Research what scientists currently know about Mars—could it support life? What would need to change?
- Compare the dragons from different world mythologies—European, Chinese, Norse—and note what they have in common
- Explore the concept of "hopepunk" as a literary genre—how does "The Last Dragon on Mars" fit?
- Research the history of land scarcity and resource conflicts on Earth as a parallel to Lunar's world

"The Last Dragon on Mars" is a story for anyone who has ever been told that looking up is a waste of time—that the smart move is to keep your head down and your expectations low. Lunar Jones learns, at great cost and great reward, that the stories we carry matter more than we think. That hope isn't a distraction from survival—it's the engine of it. Let this book spark a conversation about what stories your family carries, what you're hoping for, and whether you're allowing yourselves to look up.