

# The Dart League King

a novel



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## **The Dart League King** Keith Lee Morris

A dart contest on a Thursday night in Garnet Lake, Idaho brings together five very different characters, whose fates are threaded together more closely than they realize.

An intriguing tale of darts, drugs, and death.

Russell Harmon is the self-proclaimed king of his small-town Idaho dart league, but all is not well in his kingdom. In the midst of the league championship match, the intertwining stories of those gathered at the 411 club reveal Russell's dangerous debt to a local drug dealer, his teammate Tristan Mackey's involvement in the disappearance of a college student, and a love triangle with a former classmate.

The characters in Keith Lee Morris's second novel struggle to find the balance between accepting and controlling their destinies, but their fates are threaded together more closely than they realize.

## **The Dart League King Details**

Date : Published October 1st 2008 by Tin House Books

ISBN : 9780979419881

Author : Keith Lee Morris

Format : Paperback 270 pages

Genre : Fiction, Contemporary

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## From Reader Review The Dart League King for online ebook

### Jurvis says

I knew this would be a punishing book when I read that it was set in Idaho (which drove Hemingway to insert a shotgun into his mouth and pull the trigger amongst other brutalities) and Morris certainly doesn't pull his punches. Once you get past the proverbial shotguns in the mouth, Morris's prose really sparkles. He has a penchant for using small words that make you feel big things. I was particularly fond of his ability to spin split-second decisions into paragraphs of back story. No decision is black and white and he does a great job of capturing the real gritty ambiguity that translate into a character's action.

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### Chris says

Thursday night is the only night of the week when Russell Harmon, the dart league king, can forget about his worries, snort a few lines of coke off of his framed high school diploma, drink a few pitchers of beer, and throw some fucking darts, man! Well, he probably does that every night of the week, but it's the only night of the week when he can do it and win some fucking trophies, man! Russell Harmon lives for Thursday night, but this is no ordinary Thursday night because Russell Harmon might not live to see another. You see, Russell Harmon, God bless him, isn't punctual when it comes to reimbursing his coke dealer, Vince Thompson. And Vince Thompson is at the end of his goddamn motherfucking rope and has decided it's about goddamn time that he dust off his motherfucking Beretta and waste this fuzzy-brained dickwad before heading out of town and leaving his asshole motherfucking Air Force father and the rest of these stupid goddamn assholes behind. But Vince Thompson has a soft spot for Russell Harmon and after seeing Russell Harmon getting along so well with Kelly Ashton, the hot chick with breasts as big as grapefruits, Vince Thompson doesn't know what to fucking do. The only reason Kelly Ashton is even out on a Thursday night - her toddler is at home being watched by her alcoholic mother who often passes out with a burning cigarette in her hand -- is because she needs to find a man to get her out of this place and that man could very well be Tristan Mackey, a college graduate who is destined to leave this town in his wake but who has a dark secret that he wants to reveal tonight. But maybe Kelly Ashton is better off with Russell Harmon, her former boyfriend. Sure, Russell Harmon isn't the smartest guy in the world but he is genuine. Plus, Kelly Ashton has a secret involving him that she may want to reveal tonight. Now if Brice Habersham, a former professional dart player and Russell Harmon's only threat to the dart league throne, decides that tonight is the night to reveal his secret, then all hell is going to break loose.

*The Dart League King* is told from the close third person point of view of five different characters, all of whom seem to be in the midst of an existential crisis. I was a little thrown off by the fact that the five main characters present at the dart league championships at a bar in a small town in Idaho spend the better part of their respective chapters trying to figure out their place in this crazy, mixed up Idaho town. Not that there's anything wrong with that. If this were a novel about five young, literary, Ivy League graduates who end up drinking together in an Irish pub in Manhattan, I would expect each of them to spend their evening grappling with questions about their place in the world and "what does it all mean, Basil?" and on and on until you want them to form a suicide pact just to get the book over with. As this book's plot started to form, it became apparent to me that the inner crises of these small-town folks was a convenient plot device rather than an attempt to explore their humanity through their hopes and fears.

I think this book would have worked for me if I had truly bought any of the characters and if I didn't feel like everyone's situation was forced to make the plot work. In my opinion, your enjoyment of this book (as with almost any book) comes down to whether or not you believe in these characters as plausible people.

I did thoroughly enjoy the book's descriptions of the actual dart matches. They are full of suspense and perfectly describe the rare feeling (for most people) of finding the zone and performing at the highest level. I wish the rest of the book had worked as well for me.

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### **Adrienne Mathiowetz says**

There were no gorgeous sentences to underline in this book: no specific phrase that rang especially poignant or true. There were a few moments where I really had to suspend my disbelief: "really, this person reacts this way?" "Wait, he's the type to do that?" "That's kind of *extreme*."

*And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare  
As any she belied with false compare.*

Fact of the matter is, once I got to page 36 (this number may or may not have something to do with a female perspective finally entering the scene), I wasn't going to stop reading this book until it ended. Love! Mysterious disappearances! Grungy bars! Rage problems! So much cocaine! Who is the father? Car sex! FIGHT! It's like Chuck Palahniuk was scheduled to go on the Jerry Springer Show but midway through, decided to drag his ass to small-town Idaho and ask his characters, honestly, what they were doing, still in those factory jobs and taking care of their alcoholic parents, anyway. It's the best combination of dirt drama and real, relatable introspection: why do we get stuck doing the same things, over and over again? Is this really so bad? And if so, who can save us?

Start this book at bedtime at your own risk.

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### **Karen Germain says**

I had zero expectations when I started reading "The Dart League King" by Keith Lee Morris. It was one of the books that I had bought at the Tin House booth at the LA Times Festival of Books. I love Tin House and totally bought it on a whim, without really reading the synopsis. It was fantastic.

I don't want to give away any details, but the book primarily takes place on the evening of the Dart Championship in a small town in Idaho. All of the characters lives intersect and some major secrets are revealed. The book has a very big twist ending that I did not anticipate. Morris had a beautiful way of tying up the story with epilogue. It's a really sad novel, with a lot of harsh realities and a few gruesome moments. I feel like it will stick with me, as I have been really thinking about it a lot in the past twenty-four hours.

One minor thing, the end of the book has the list of Dart League rules, as drafted by the main character. I wish this had been placed at the beginning of the book, as I did not clearly understand some of the rules. If I had realized that it was in the back and in no way compromised the integrity of the story, I would have used it for reference.

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### **Stephan says**

Stream of consciousness, dive-bar style. Carver brought into the age of meth. A great read, a good yarn, with a wonderful cast of characters, including the Everyman of the Underclass, The Dart League King. How New York City stayed away from this one is beyond me. Are there only five men still reading in America or something? Is that the belief?

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### **Jeff says**

This is the kind of book that you give to your redneck brother-in-law when you want him to start reading. That is the highest compliment I know. It shifts points of view ratcheting up the events of one night of darts to an unforeseeable pitch. There's murder and sex and fistfights. It worried me a bit early on with its peon to the "gotta get out of this town" ethic, but that worry is shelved early on. Mr. Morris knows how to write. I will give this book to my redneck brother-in-law should I ever have one. I don't really know if it will work, but it could.

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### **Kathleen Maher says**

This is one of my favorite books. Keith Lee Morris is paired with Joan Silber as my favorite writers. (I can't get either to show up on my list here.) But Keith Lee Morris and Joan Silber are my favorite writers of all time! I love the classics and studied most of them in college. I've reread my favorites since then.

I like these two writers better!

"The Dart League King" is a psychological novel revolving around a group of people in Lake Garnet, ID. Mostly men who sell and ingest cocaine. They're small-town people who've known one another from one generation to the next their whole lives.

Among the group is one young single mother who factors or has factored or merely attracted most of the men.

Written in an intimate, interior third person, Morris tells the story from one character's point of view and then the other's. He gets the young woman right, I think. She's not radically different from the male characters except that being a mother and even female requires her to care for others, and put them first.

None of the male characters need to do that and so they don't. One of them, who's the Dart League King, has a coke habit, and is sloppy and not at all bright has a decency, kindness, and general love of life that the woman ends up depending on and recognizing as much more valuable than the smart man who managed to go to college.

Lots of bashed heads and bloody faces, continual threat--some of these guys swing from a desire to kill another, the weapons are on hand, to love him (or her.)

I'm not sure exactly why I enjoy this man writing so much or why I honestly "read it cover to cover." (It's not long but that's not a reason.) So although I finished it tonight, I'll start it again tomorrow.

It's a book I'll read every once in a while, for years. That's the way I read these days, which doesn't allow me to recommend many books.

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### **Markus says**

This book got me into darts. probably not its intended effect.

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## **Karen says**

Immediately upon finishing this, I felt a tiny bit cheated by all the loose ends left hanging. Now, a few days later, I appreciate having the freedom to think about where the characters ended up without already having an answer.

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## **Brad says**

I previously read Keith Lee Morris's excellent short story collection, *Call It What You Want*, and decided to check out this novel. I seen this book and started to read it many months ago back when I lived in Kansas, but it didn't grab me, so I set it aside. (This was prior to reading *CIWYW* and realizing I needed to read more Keith Lee Morris.) I am so glad I gave this book another chance. What I liked so much about Morris's short stories are present in this book and what make it so successful--he knows how to make all of the jumbled emotions and thoughts that make us human beings come to life on the page.

Chapters are told from the point of view of several of the main characters. I know this technique is nothing new, but Morris uses it with tremendous skill. So much more life is breathed into the characters and their feelings for and interpolations of those around them produces a much more robust novel than a simple telling from say the central protagonist's POV, or simple third person omniscient. But this technical stuff is getting in the way of me saying, *Hot Damn!*, this book is phenomenal. It is essentially the story of some guys playing darts one night, but Keith Lee Morris pulls more emotion and genuine nail-biting intrigue into the story than you could imagine. I could hardly believe where the book ended up after such a simple-seeming opening. I can't say enough good things about Keith Lee Morris. I now have to track down some of his older books and anxiously await new works to be published. He is certainly under appreciated and deserves a much larger readership.

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## **Lynne Favreau says**

I happen to see a review of this book that touted the authors characters so I requested it from the library. What a great find! I read it in about a day and half. Morris writes about people I could have known so you feel a very personal connection to the story.

Small town characters, drugs, drinking, lives stagnating, secrets, sex, love, hate, father and sons, mothers and daughters, all coming to a head at the bar on dart night with the League Championship on the line. The lives of characters intersect, intertwine, parallel and run head long into each other. The build up chapter by chapter each around a central character was very effective and built suspense that had me turning pages all night.

Morris used character voice very effectively, especially Vince Thompson, whose rapid fire, explicative, angry missives were unmistakably that of an unstable mind. Hilariously, Vince went on for a few pages without a period in a rant against first his friend, then his father, mother, and the unfairness of it all.

“...Chuck who, when they were in sixth grade, hit Vince with an iceball on the playground after school and scratched the cornea of his left eye, and then his fucking dad, Vince’s fucking dad, the hardcore Vietnam air force colonel asshole, had said Vince was being a baby and didn’t need a doctor, and before he changed his mind the eye was infected and next thing you know Vince is half blind for the rest of his life and it probably

caused his fucking hard-ass father about two goddamn seconds of actual fucking sorrow..."

Each character had a speech pattern or words, a way of expressing themselves that stood out as unique. The plot was not complicated, it wasn't the story itself that was so compelling, I'd figured out the ending well before I should have, but it was the characters behavior and what they were going to say that kept you reading. I'm really glad I read this book. It felt like something I could use, emulate in way. Not specifically but the character driven aspect appealed to me.

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### **Kevin Kelsey says**

I cannot recommend this novel enough. It's a story that is equal parts hopeful and tragic, full of love and despair, longing and hate, and with fully-realized characters. It's beautifully written, and perfectly crafted. This is a great american novel... and almost no one has heard of it.

When something this brilliant goes under the radar, it's perfect evidence for how essential the smaller publishers like Tin House are in the current literary world.

This should be read.

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### **Meave says**

hello, I'm every gross dude you ever hung out with in high school. Don't you feel pathetic about sleeping with "older guys" now? It's not so cool now that you're the same age as the creep who gave you a tattoo in your friend's living room because at 16 you were two years too young to get one legally done in a nice sterile shop, is it? Ten years ago you could never have imagined that some guy would write a book all about these jerks, and that you would find yourself in circumstances that necessitated reading it, and that it would bring back all those memories, and that after three chapters you would have to throw down the book in utter disgust--for the guys, for your sixteen-year-old self--and take a shower, with steel wool, because it takes more than a decade to scrub the loser off.

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### **John says**

Morris builds a compelling story around a dart game, played one Thursday night for the championship of the Garnet Lake, Idaho, Dart League. Weaving different points of view and sliding backward and forward in time, Morris is funny, gritty, eloquent, tragic, epic, and a little absurd. He is a skilled ventriloquist, bringing each character to life with unique voices that tell the characters stories and the greater story of this one day. The book progresses swiftly, with vivid imagery and details.

The final choices of one of the characters (I won't say which, to avoid spoiling the story) were hard to accept, making me think that I disbelieved that character's choices, but in reflection I think I was swayed by my sympathy for the character. That character's vulnerability and isolation made the ending painful to read, but the ending was well-written and believable, and reinforced that character's strength of will and flawed judgment.

This was a very good book, one that I would like to re-read for the wealth of detail and also for the nuanced characters.

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### **Jodee says**

Outstanding. No other writer I know is this brilliant at taking small, ordinary moments in the lives of ordinary people and creating beautiful, dark, fully realized worlds out of them.

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