



Running on Empty

Don Aker

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All Ethan Palmer wants is wheels of his own, and he's finally saved enough money to buy his dream car... when he accidentally rams his dad's Volvo into their garage. It's not like his lawyer/politician father can't afford to pay for the damage, but of course his old man is going to turn this into another Big Life Lesson. With all his hard-earned cash going into repairs, Ethan won't be sliding behind the wheel of that Mustang Cobra anytime soon. Or will he? He thinks he's found a way to make some easy money, and suddenly nothing is more important. Not school, not the girl he loves, not even the secrets that divide his family. For Ethan, it's all about payback. But he has no idea what his choices will cost him.

Running on Empty Details

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From Reader Review Running on Empty for online ebook

Linda says

I really don't like this book. I do not find any of the characters likable, and I have absolutely no sympathy for Ethan. He's actually annoying me now. The book isn't written very well, it's just plain. I'm quite disappointed. I usually complete books, no matter how bad they are, but this one I couldn't get through. I kept trying, but I couldn't finish it

Me says

With the abundance of sympathy books this year in Forest of Reading, I had to be careful when rating this book. It deals with an issue, but it never tries to make you feel simply based upon the issue.

The thing about Don Aker books is that I simply love the relateability of the characters. I personally don't have any predetermined notions about the issues, but I love the characters. Their emotional choices are well written and make sense. I just understood the character.

The actual issue was very predictable, but that's okay.

This was a horrible review, but you should definitely read this book.

Sarah Collie says

Throughout most of the story, the pace was...consistent. Events lead into each other smoothly almost to the point of predictability. The narrative was very effective, very real and uncut. There were a few hints in the dialogue however where you could tell the author was trying way too hard to sound like a rebellious teenager, but nothing too horrible. What really drew me in was the ending. The last few chapters especially were written and composed beautifully. Unexpected, emotional, exciting with an ending that made you feel complete. Well done, Don Aker.

Toby says

Real tear jerker at the end

Evie says

*****Originally posted to: Bookish Book Blog |YA and Adult Book Reviews, Author Interviews, Guest Posts, Giveaways and news! ^__^**

Full of emotional honesty and thoroughly riveting reflections, *Running On Empty* is a gripping, haunting and memorable story of one teenager's downward spiral into the dangerous world of money-borrowing, gambling and guns. Beautifully structured and written with utmost care for details, it's a fascinating exploration of dreams, expectations, disappointments, and ambitious goals that, if pursued blindly and ruthlessly, have just as much power to create, as they have to destroy.

Ethan is just two days away from his eighteenth birthday. Only two days away from being able to finally buy his dream car, a gorgeous Mustang Cobra. He's been working really hard, saving up every penny for more than a year and a half. This car is his dream, he can't wait to slide into the driver's seat and feel the thrum of the engine. But, only two days before his dream is about to come true, his hopes and plans are suddenly shattered to pieces by his own reckless actions and the unforgiving character of his father. When Ethan - driven by a stupid 20 dollar bet - rams his father's car into the garage door, he's about to get yet another bitter life lesson from his strict lawyer/politician dad. Ethan's dad is almost filthy rich and he could easily let the insurance company pay for all the damage, but that wouldn't teach Ethan anything, would it? So instead, he decides to make him use all the meticulously saved up cash to pay for the repairs, using this occasion to teach his son yet another priceless, life-changing and absolutely necessary lesson. Desperate to find a way out of this situation, Ethan starts looking for ways to make some quick and easy money. But the thing about money is it's never quick and easy, and if it appears to be.. well, then you better brace yourself for all the trouble that will come with it. And there will be trouble. Plenty of it.

I loved this book. I loved its honesty and clarity, and the way Don Aker skilfully weaved the plot, presenting us with an absolutely phenomenal examination of the motives behind Ethan's actions. The tension was building up slowly, but steadily, and although I wouldn't say that the book was moving at a break-neck speed, it definitely had a great flow that allowed me to stay focused on the plot all the way through. The premise of this book was something new, too. I have never read a book that would tackle the issue of teenage gambling and its consequences, and in such an excellent way, too! Don Aker nailed it to the very last detail. He captured all the riveting emotions, too, from the excitement and hopefulness, to the desperation, anger, and panic. I loved how the story progressed, starting off quite innocent and then getting darker and heavier with every chapter. *Running on Empty* had a really great build-up, followed by a thoroughly devastating conclusion.

Ethan was a genuine and very convincing character, almost achingly so. The author perfectly captured his personality, complete with all its virtues and flaws. He was hard-working, dedicated, focused and persistent. When he decided he wanted something, he would find a way to get it. No matter what. After the accident with his father's car, he was angry and let down, but he never gave up on his dreams. Of course, in hindsight, his almost crazy determination pushed him to do some really dangerous things. He made some bad decisions and, eventually, his life spun totally out of control. What started off as a power struggle between him and his father, quickly escalated into a far more serious situation, and one that would put people's lives in jeopardy.

Ethan's father was a very interesting, well-drawn character himself. He wasn't physically present all the time, but his constant demands, Big Life Lessons, and never-ending criticism affected Ethan in more than just one way. He was overly ambitious and wanted to see Ethan succeed entirely on his own, to the point that he'd make him earn his own pocket money and pay for all of his expenses from the day his son turned sixteen. Strict, unforgiving, almost cruel at times, Jack Palmer was always giving speeches and forcing Big Life Lessons down his son's throat. He'd say things like: "A person is invariably defined by his ability to meet his obligations." and "Life seldom allows us the luxury of choosing our own consequences." And he would repeat that over and over again. As forceful and harsh as he was towards Ethan, I can't say that he was being mean on purpose. I believe he really did care about his son and wanted nothing more but to ensure that Ethan grows up an intelligent, strong person who will do something meaningful with his life. While I somewhat

understood where he was coming from, I didn't care much for his methods, and wished that he'd show his son a little bit more understanding and affection. Because, while his ultimate goal might have been teaching Ethan important lessons about life and money, what he ended up doing was pushing his son just a little bit too much and in a totally wrong direction.

Overall, *Running On Empty* was a really great read. Thrilling, absorbing and ambitious, it's a book full of meaning and hidden messages. While its plot revolves mainly around Ethan's desperate attempts to make money (even if it means doing some potentially risky things), ultimately this book offers so much more than just that. Don Aker presents us with a thoughtful, intelligent and very psychologically accurate examination of a difficult father-son relationship, one tainted by conflict, mistrust, and lack of communication. It's an examination that is just as disturbing as it is moving, and its spot-on accuracy is just as bewildering as it is terrifying.

Running On Empty is book worth reading, I highly recommend picking it up!

Ruju says

I just finished this book, and I liked it a lot. I cried like 3 times near the end when Ethan was desperate and felt like he had no one else to go to. I feel that I misjudged Jack Palmer and was a lot more judgmental against Ethan and Jack and even Jillian than I had the right to. I mean, they're all human and I guess I forgot that while I was reading the book. I felt that Ethan made a LOT of bad choices in the book and those bad choices just came out of that one mistake he made at the beginning. He got himself stuck and things happened to him that weren't fair. His father made life an illusion for him, almost, and yes, he felt like it would be good for Ethan and Raye, but I don't know how I feel about that. Raye, I think is an amazing person and a hero. I didn't know if Ethan would even get out of the situation that he put himself in at the end and what happened at the end was both surprising and shocking to me. I felt so happy when Ethan learned what REALLY was important to him, and I feel that I learned a lesson from this book, too.

Angus says

Great book. Only complaint is how slow the book moves along. The book starts off with all the characters unlikable but as it progresses they become more likable as more is revealed about them. Ethan perfectly embodies the way teens feel and his relationship with his father will be relatable to everyone on some level. Great coming of age book, but not much action.

Joyce says

Good read, good character and plot development, care that protagonist is making bad choices, want to know what happens next. Deals with serious problem of gambling, very believable story of the downward spiral that could happen to any teen. Author's notes at end make story seem that much more important. Gritty language, and some potentially objectionable sexual content, but I think it's a good book to have on the high school library shelf.

Lia says

This book was absolutely beautiful, I have read plenty of sad books before and none of them have made me cry as much as this one did, I was expecting something big to happen at the end but when it finally happened I was so shocked by it that I didn't fully process what happened until I was reading the last page, running on empty is a book everyone should read as it has life lessons about family, love, and friendship that it describes in a tragically perfect way

Vito says

I first met Aker five years ago when he gave a presentation to a group of students at the school I was working at. Similar to many teacher-turned-authors, his journey began in the classroom as a means of hooking students on reading.

Running on Empty is a clear example of someone who knows their audience. The main character, Ethan, is a prime example of an entitled young person who can't see beyond himself. This makes you frustrated with him and recognizing he probably matches the personality of someone you may know (to some degree). For a young adult, it will probably resonate closely as they will most likely be able to put someone they know directly in those shoes.

Quick summary: Ethan wants a car, smashes up his rich dad's vehicle, is forced to pay the repairs as a lesson and tries to find a way to build his savings to buy the car. As you can imagine, the plot revolves around the method he uses to build up that savings.

While enjoyable and page turning, at no point did I ever empathize with Ethan. Even in his "turning point" moments, I kind of shrugged and kept going. In some respects, I do applaud Aker for not giving him much growth as it portrays a realistic picture of a person who can't see beyond themselves. While Ethan started his transition at the end of the book, some people take longer... much longer... and with even harder lessons.

A great read, especially for students.

Diana Thompson says

A 2014 White Pine Award nominee. I liked that the father made his son accountable, though the teens in book club thought the father's expectations were too high. I believe the son learned some valuable lessons through this, about making money, being responsible, the wrong kinds of activities to get into, etc.

Vanessa says

A teenager that really messed up. I guess that's how I will summarize it. This story deals with the topic of addiction- and to the severe extent. Being that teenagers are vulnerable, Ethan gets sucked into the dangerous

world of online poker. His life goes down South and he just keeps falling into it. Trust, relationships, and school is unimportant while money is. Ethan breaks all ties with family and friends just to spend it on online poker. He can't stop.

I really enjoyed this book because it stunned me how bad life could get until you have no where left; then you're just "running on empty". It shows the dangers of addiction to a raw emotional moment that truly got to me how bad addictions can become.

Cardine says

This was so far my favorite book out of the five books I've read for white pine. I was interested throughout the whole book, mostly because I wanted to find out why he was holding a gun on the cover. I cried at the end. Oddly I cried more about Allie being with Pete than thinking his sister was dead. Overall, the book was sooooo good!! ♥

Dylan says

The book's name is Running on Empty. It's about a young man named Eathen and he hangs out with his friends and breaks the rules and gets in to trouble. His dad always ends up getting him out of trouble when he does get into it, he does have a job goes to school here and there but he got into a car crash right down the street from his house and his dad isn't helping him this time. Plus the guy wants Eathen to pay for the damages so that's all his money that he saved up. Eathen now has to find a way to pay for the damages, keep his money and buy his new car he wants.

What I really liked so far in the book is that Eathen and his friends always break the rules because that reminds me of what I use to do with my friends. I never really got into trouble like Eathen does. Plus I really never had my dad bail me out of everything even though I was in the wrong but Father like son.

What I didn't really like about the book is that Eathen really wanted a car instead of paying off the Man who had the damages to his car but Eathen wanted a new car instead it didn't really make sense to me. Because I would have paid off what I messed up but that didn't mean nothing to Eathen but I guess that's makes Eathen's character.

I recommend this book for young adults because it's a really good book when it gets more into detail about Eathen's wild life. Plus most teens could kinda relate to Eathen in way how ever your life is going at the time.

Lauren says

Very compelling story. There was a LOT of information at the end; a little overwhelming for me. But I really enjoyed it.
