

# Slaying the Depression Dragon

Michael Streeto

## BEFORE YOU READ:

1. There is some wonderful, descriptive vocabulary in this essay. Note the words in bold as you go through the text. If you don't know them, see if you can figure out their meaning from the context. If not, look them up after you finish reading.
2. The title is a metaphor. Explain what you think this essay will be about.

## Darkest Time

In early 2020, I found myself in the darkest time of my life. I felt empty yet heavy at the same time, numb yet sensitive to everything around me. I couldn't find reasons to push forward. I wanted simply to fall and never get back up.

I didn't want to tell anyone how I felt because I didn't want to **burden** them with my sorrows

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and my feelings of self-hate over what felt like little things: my inability to focus, the way I looked, the way I over-analyze every detail of everything, the fact that I can't remember people's names. I was so **distraught**, I

could hardly pay attention to what was being said to me.

I was a 22-year-old high school dropout with no job and no purpose. Despair made me want to **lash out!** But at the same time I wanted to keep it all inside like a **putrid** stone in the pit of my stomach.



Mohamad Hasan, Pixabay

This was my inner **turmoil** during early March. I had a constant internal **monologue** where all of these feelings would **regurgitate** themselves over and over again in a maddening **crescendo**. I just wanted it to stop.

I wanted to go back in time and undo everything that I had done up until that point. If only I had stuck it out at school, then I could have graduated with my friends. If only I hadn't wasted so much time drinking alcohol and smoking pot, then I could have done more to help myself. If only I could undo the biggest mistake of all: pushing away my high school sweetheart. All my mistakes made me feel so guilty.

## A Reprieve that Makes a Difference

Then, something happened that gave me a brief **reprieve** from those thoughts. It's silly, but I started playing Dungeons and Dragons (D&D). I looked forward to the weekend because I knew

this online game would drown out all of that negativity. During the game, I stopped being me, or at least the version of me that I **loathed**. I became the **charismatic bard** known as Jin—a mystical shapeshifter who could change his face on a

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**whim**. As strange as it sounds, I lived for those brief hours as Jin, when I could be the optimistic fool who could spread joy and hope to a group of weary adventurers. In our little online group, I made other people happy. This in turn made me happy.

With a little encouragement from my D&D friends and a large shove from my thoughtful stepmother, I made that first attempt to get help. I remember going into the clinic that day incredibly nervous that they were going to judge me, and they were going to deem my problems too **petty** to deal with. I even thought about lying and not telling them everything. It was bad.

### An Invented Character Inspires Me

Then I thought to myself, would my **fictional** character hold back any detail of his **glorious** self? I invented Jin and could act as Jin for hours at a time, so that encouraged me to have a very **long-winded** conversation with the therapist where I went into **excruciating** detail about the last decade of my life. Honestly, it did make me feel a tiny bit better. Long story short, I ended up getting a prescription for medication and seeing a therapist once every two weeks.

I still play D&D with my online friends every week, and I'm starting to do better. I'm taking a few steps to make myself happy in real life as well. I'm working on getting my high school diploma by attending night school. I'm keeping a positive attitude in hopes that maybe it keeps me from the crushing jaws of depression.

### Standing Triumphantly Over the Depression Dragon

I know my story is a bit small and silly, but it's mine. I'm the kind of person who doesn't mind being laughed at as long as it makes others happy. I might still have my own dark thoughts from time to time but as long as I'm with the right people, whether it's online or in person, I think I'll be able to stand triumphantly over the dreaded depression dragon.

#### AFTER YOU READ:

1. Go back through the text and underline examples of figurative speech. Find metaphors (e.g., "crushing jaws of depression") and similes (e.g., "like a putrid stone"). How do these phrases affect you as a reader?
2. Has Michael succeeded in "slaying the depression dragon"? Or is he still in the process of slaying it? How do you know? Point to which parts of the text make it clear.
3. According to the author, what stops him from getting help? Who encourages him to get help? How does the "Jin" character help him?

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*Michael Streeto is a student at Shoreline Adult Education in Branford, CT. He enjoys reading science fiction and fantasy. He hopes to one day become an author himself after getting the education he needs.*

