



A Stalker's Journey

John C. Lukegard

CreateSpace (Jun 20, 2015)

Softcover \$12.95 (108pp)

978-1-4909-3021-3

This novella tells the tale of a mentally ill man's criminal escapades.

In *A Stalker's Journey*, John C. Lukegard introduces Curtis Evan Ware, a force of evil to all he encounters. Lukegard attempts to share the depths of depravity this stalker will go to in order to satisfy his terrible desires.

Ware wanders from his home state of Iowa to the town of Riverside, Maine, after he is released on parole. Riverside is never the same. Ware begins his reign of terror by harassing citizens as a game operator at the annual Riverside carnival; he soon goes on to cause a great deal of trouble for a group of boys he feels have wronged him. In his wake, he leaves the residents with horrible memories of violent attacks and thefts.

The writing style is the greatest hindrance to this book's success as a horror story. Phrasing and word choice give the story a pedantic feeling, causing the writing to feel clunky and awkward. The pacing never varies, and this hampers the feeling of terror the author is attempting to create with Ware's hideous actions.

There is no development in either the good or the evil characters throughout the book. They are all drawn from stock stereotypes. Ware is evil from the beginning, and there is no change in his actions, including no escalation of his depravity. The neighborhood boys are there simply as Ware's foils, and their actions are predictable.

The dialogue is stilted, awkward, and unnatural: "Thank you, Karen. ... I just love the scenic view and the historical atmosphere of Riverside." Add to that the fact that much of the dialogue simply does not keep pace with the events, as when a character exclaims, "Someone is on the field with us! I'm being hit by small rocks."

The plot holds potential; Ware could be a truly stellar bad guy if he were more terrifying and less awkward. His obsession with the boys in Riverside and his untreated mental illnesses could be more completely developed to give his depravity depth. Also, additional knowledge about Ware's family and history would give a more complete picture of the villain.

Because of its short length and despite its issues with pacing, this book may appeal to those who are looking for a short story about a mentally ill man's criminal escapades.

LYNN EVARTS (August 11, 2015)

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A Stalker's Journey

John C. Lukegard

J&J Writing Corp (Jun 13, 2016)

Unknown \$12.95 (208pp)

978-0-9975964-0-3

This is a disturbing thriller likely to appeal to readers of horror and crime fiction.

The stalker in *A Stalker's Journey*, a troubling novel by John C. Lukegard, is Curtis Ware, an antihero who struggles against the world at large and antagonizes a paperboy in a small town in Maine.

Ware's story is told as a series of episodes in which he repeatedly causes injury to others and generally disturbs the peace. An early altercation leaves him disfigured, blind in one eye, and with a grotesque face to match his warped mind.

Again and again, Ware seizes every opportunity to terrorize people and prove himself a villain. He convinces a friend to help him rob a family at the beach and when his friend stumbles, injuring himself, Ware leaves him behind. Later, he goes to a community center, where "Everyone watching the lights was in a cheerful mood because of the holiday season." Ware approaches them "in a fit of rage." He tears down a Christmas tree, crying out, "You people make me sick! ... This is bullshit! I'm an atheist, and I'm ripping these fuckin' lights down!" In multiple scenes, he lingers in the woods and throws rocks at bystanders, in one instance injuring a child.

Behavior like this warrants explanation, and its lack stands out in the novel like the missing piece of a jigsaw puzzle. Ware appears to simply be a bad person through and through; no attention is given to what made him so terrible. The novel presents him as a natural-born maniac, someone whose behavior indicates no grasp of propriety or regard for the well-being of other people.

Rather than dwell on why Ware is a misanthrope, the book emphasizes the failure of authorities to do anything substantial to put a stop to Ware's lifelong rampage. Soon after he is caught harassing Ace Gordon, the paperboy with whom he has an ever-deepening rivalry, it emerges that he had "conned the police into believing that he would reside in another town and that his criminal tendencies were no more."

Ware runs across the young Ace repeatedly, until they identify one another as archenemies. Everywhere Ace turns, it seems, Ware appears there. As much as Ware is bent on Ace's destruction, however, he mostly seems to come across him by happenstance. This is where the novel is most successfully disturbing: it is as if some magnetic force repeatedly summons prey to predator.

In a novel in which the wayward protagonist is a villain who lashes out at whatever crosses his path, it is the height of misfortune for someone to find themselves in that path. Such is the fate of the paperboy Ace, who plays the quarry in a thriller likely to appeal to fans of horror and crime fiction.

ROBERT FOREMAN (January 17, 2017)

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A Stalker's Journey

John C. Lukegard

CreateSpace, 103 pages, (paperback) \$12.95, 9781490930213

(Reviewed: July, 2015)

A Stalker's Journey depicts a series of violent incidents perpetrated by a sociopath, particularly those involving the offender's obsession with Ace, a paperboy.

Despite being only 103 pages, this novella covers a large timespan. The opening chapter acts as a prologue, depicting events in 1983 and 1984. The story then jumps to the early 1990s, when Ace is a preteen and his antagonist, Curtis Evan Ware, is a young man. About halfway through the book, the story moves forward 14 years, when Ware is released from prison and returns to again torment Ace, now a young adult.

Ware's obsession with Ace is curious. At the book's start, a teenage Ware rips off a drug dealer and is seriously injured in a subsequent car crash. He loses an eye in the accident and is sentenced to a detention facility where he is violently assaulted. One might expect those incidents to inspire Ware's anger and vengeance.

Instead, the author focuses his character's wrath on Ace, who first crosses Ware's path in 1990. Ace is among a group of friends who pelt his car with snowballs. Also, Ace and a friend break into a gardening shack on Ware's property. This is what leads Ware to repeatedly attack Ace and the boy's friends.

A Stalker's Journey suffers greatly from a lack of interior logic; character motivations don't always make sense and serve to remove readers from the story as they puzzle through events. Awkward dialogue is another issue. On two occasions, Ware yells at Ace melodramatically, "Revenge is mine!" During another encounter, Ace exhorts, "You're my sworn enemy. I hate you!"

In addition, because it is written as a straightforward recitation of criminal events, the novella never succeeds in building compelling suspense. And although the book appears to have been copyedited and proofread, many words are improperly hyphenated.

Overall, *A Stalker's Journey* requires heavy revision in order to appeal to a wide audience.

Also available as an ebook.

KIRKUS

REVIEWS

TITLE INFORMATION

A STALKER'S JOURNEY

Lukegord, John C.

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BOOK REVIEW

A two-bit con artist focuses his aggression on a local paperboy and his friends in Lukegord's (*The Haunted Trail*, 2014, etc.) thriller.

Curtis Ware, six years after serving time in juvie for a B&E in Iowa, now makes his home in Riverside, Maine. He runs a few scams, including cheating people in a carnival game and accepting donations for a disabled veterans' taxi service that doesn't actually do anything. But a small group of preteen hellions, including paperboy Ace Gordon, sends him in an entirely different direction. They pelt his car with snowballs and later sneak into his shack, unaware that he owns them both. Ace inadvertently leaves behind his newspaper bag, and he and his pals become Curtis' mortal enemies in a series of increasingly dangerous encounters that span more than a decade. The author provides stellar coverage of both its villain and his young victims. The narrative, with its intermittent dialogue, often comes across as a chronicle relaying just the basic facts. However, Curtis' actions are inherently creepy, and his behavior becomes more and more unsettling as the story progresses. For example, he shows up in costume at a Halloween party just to torment Ace, and he moves from chucking rocks at a football game and tapping on windows to chasing the kids with a buck knife. Lukegord provides readers with a modicum of sympathy for Curtis, who was raped and beaten back in juvenile detention. That said, it's hard to side with a man who grows his fingernails long to use them as weapons, so readers are likely to root for Ace and company instead. The sparse dialogue exchanges can be stiff and sometimes recall *Scooby-Doo*: "I would've gotten away with everything had it not been for those nosy kids!" rants Curtis at one point. Some of the descriptions, too, are repetitive; the story repeatedly refers to Curtis as "disgruntled," and his actions as "sketchy," even in a newspaper article detailing one of his crimes. The ending, however, is fittingly disconcerting.

An unquestionably eerie baddie helps this uncomplicated but dark tale stand out.