



## A Stalker's Journey

**John C. Lukegard**

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*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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