

The Killer Trail

D. B. Carew

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This fast-paced thriller is full of danger and psychological action.

D. B. Carew's *The Killer Trail* begins as a straightforward thriller about a man who is dragged into a dangerous situation through unfortunate timing and who winds up having to contend with a killer he formally treated in his role as a social worker. The story benefits from a fast pace and a protagonist with enough self-awareness to question his growing paranoia, though the plot begins to unravel later in the narrative.

The Killer Trail opens with a murder in a park that Chris Ryder passes on his regular jog and where he finds what he thinks is a lost cell phone. Of course, the phone belongs to the hit man Ray Owens, and dialing the last called number alerts the killer's boss to Chris and his whereabouts. The killer and bystander turn out to have a history and soon have a run-in that results in Chris recovering from a bullet wound and Ray again being treated at Chris's workplace. Ray pretends to be in need of psychological care while taunting Chris about his next move. The story also includes subplots that revolve around the divorced Chris trying to protect his daughter, an old flame back in the picture, and a kidnapping connected to the earlier murder—a kidnapping Chris believes must be Ray's doing. The elements are familiar, but the story reads smoothly, and the main characters have enough depth to keep the reader engaged.

The story begins to unravel in the third act, when the plot gets taken over by a few twists that feel over-the-top, along with a sequel setup that undermines the ending. These developments feel like "big plot twists" rather than part of the story to that point, and they go beyond a reasonable suspension of disbelief. For example, it's noted early that Chris recognizes the murdered man, but how he knows the man isn't mentioned until that fact is needed to set up the true identity of Ray's employer, whose name conspicuously pops up earlier in the book (once) but whose actions contradict his motives. This robs the book of one of its early strengths—its tight focus on Chris and how one small misunderstanding upends his life and risks the small number of people he cares most about. Some of the story lines in *The Killer Trail* work well, but it would benefit from fewer of them.

JEFF FLEISCHER (Summer 2014)

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