

Ursula Lake

Charles Harper Webb

Red Hen Press (May 17, 2022)

Softcover \$17.95 (288pp)

978-1-63628-021-9

In poet Charles Harper Webb's thriller *Ursula Lake*, a fishing trip is the impetus for a violent showdown between old friends.

On an excursion to British Columbia, Scott, an aspiring musician, bumps into an old friend, Errol. Despite having parted on bad terms years ago, the two reconnect with ease. Along with Errol's wife, Claire, they decide to spend their vacations together. At first, all goes well, and the trio enjoys getting reacquainted. But as the days wear on, old hurts combine with the lake's unsettling atmosphere to set up an inevitable, deadly confrontation.

Set in the 1990s, *Ursula Lake* evokes the mood of a classic horror tale. Three discontented people's buried jealousies boil over as the situation goes from bad to worse; unsettling finds and tales of a grisly murder dampen the congenial atmosphere; and, despite the men's fond memories of the place, the pristine lake doesn't feel quite right.

Each character is complicated and sometimes unlikable. Errol gave up dreams of theater stardom for the corporate world; Scott blames past traumas for his inability to make it as a musician. Claire, who's dissatisfied with her professional life, fears that her rocky marriage to Errol has reached a point of no return. For every pleasant moment they spend together, there is a moment where the three fall prey to insecurities or allow past grudges to resurface, making tensions rise to unbearable levels.

There are some stereotypes about mental illness involved in the book; despite its unnerving hints of a supernatural menace, it is the trio's own flaws that doom them. It is only a matter of time before one of them snaps—and takes the others down with them.

Ursula Lake is a dark, slow-burning thriller about the depths to which people can sink when they're pushed to the edge.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (May / June 2022)

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