

The Caveman's Valentine

George Dawes Green

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#2998889 in Books 1994-01Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.25 x 6.25 x 1.00l, #File Name:
0446517224323 pages | File size: 26.Mb

George Dawes Green : The Caveman's Valentine before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Caveman's Valentine:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Everyone Has ValueBy Scott E. HighI can't remember how this book came to my attention but it was probably recommended by a source I trust. While other reviewers have given a pretty good synopsis of this novel, I had to take a step away and try to rationalize how the author came up with this unique and unusual story line. Today, a book written about our (often mentally ill) homeless population would be a timely discourse on our current society. After our federal, state, and local governments began closing mental health facilities and eliminating necessary services in the 1980's, it is not uncommon to see local law enforcement devoting almost half of their time and resources to the incarceration and control of the mentally ill. Having tried to keep tabs on a distant relative who has been diagnosed bipolar and schizophrenic, I have had several interactions with law enforcement officials who are doing the best job that they can under the circumstances. These officials know that jail/prison is not the answer for those afflicted with mental illness and yet they continue to do the best they can with the limited resources available to them.The main problem in dealing with the mentally ill -- at least the schizophrenics -- is that they often dwell in a world which is different from what we perceive, resulting in aberrant behavior not accepted as "normal" in society. Other people can perceive their actions as dangerous and therefore contact law enforcement to deal with the apparent problem. In reality most people suffering from schizophrenia will do anything possible to avoid unwanted attention. They are well aware of the consequences of being scrutinized by

law enforcement personnel. In fact, many of these severely mentally ill people can act as normal as you or I for short periods of time, convincing anyone who might interact with them that nothing strange has been going on. They can be excellent salesmen/saleswomen. Unfortunately they will revert to type if detained and questioned for longer periods of time. The main character in this novel, Romulus Ledbetter, is portrayed quite realistically for a non medicated schizophrenic. He has quirks and outbursts, his family has pretty much given up on him, his contacts with law enforcement are frequent, he can exist in the "real world" for short periods of time, and he moves in and out of shelters as need be. However his most comfortable home is a cave in the middle of a NYC park. Another fairly common trait he exhibits is high intelligence, the ability and willingness to figure things out by trial and error -- although his errors are often quite large and misleading to whatever question he is pursuing an answer to. The people around him heavily discount his thoughts and actions for this reason, not knowing what to believe during his tirades. Romulus has the time and energy to follow up on what he suspects is the murder of a young white man, whose frozen body is found not far from the mouth of his cave. Through imagination and persistence, by talking to people similar to himself on the street, he picks up the faint trail of a killer and is lead to places where the other half lives. And then things get really interesting.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A schizophrenic whodunit mystery that reads almost like a thriller. Great read!

By JM Harvey Author of Justice For None

The protagonist of this book, Romulus Ledbetter, is a gifted piano prodigy trained at Juilliard who once had a career and a family, but schizophrenia and his refusal to be treated has reduced him to living in a cave in a park in NYC where he hides and form spies upon the evil genius Cornelius Gould Stuyvesant whom he believes is out to control the world. all of this is obviously a delusion, but when a man he barely knows is found murdered near his home and the 'caveman' starts to unravel the mystery, managing to briefly drag himself out of his delusions (or at least hide them) as he pursues the man he believes is the killer. Part mystery, part psychological drama, this was an engaging and entertaining read. Truly original, faithful to the limitations of the main character while not bogging down the mystery element with too much clinical info. A really great read.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. An extraordinarily original protagonist, a fascinating murder mystery and a well written narrative make for a 5 star read!

By Jana L. Perskie

Romulus Ledbetter is one of the most usual protagonists that I have met in a long while. And I found myself not only intrigued by his complex character but liking him very much. Rom used to be a brilliant piano student at the Julliard School of Music. He was a wonder on the keyboard and his compositions were extraordinary, according to his peers, professors and other musicians. When his girlfriend, Sheila, got pregnant, he married her and quit school to get a job that paid enough to support his new family. Then he began to manifest unusual behavior, which grew increasingly worse. He stopped making music, left his beloved daughter and wife, and moved into a cave. That was years ago. Doctors diagnosed him as a "well compensated" paranoid, with, perhaps, some schizophrenic overtones. He is deemed "well compensated" because, although he lives in a shallow cave in New York City's Inwood Park, he is able to take care of himself. He grows his own food during the warmer months and scavenges during the winter. Of course, it helps that his daughter Lulu, a NYPD cop, keeps an eye on him. And, when he is not having "fits," his logic is just fine and his high IQ shines through. He is called "The Caveman" by all who know him or know of him. Hallucinations, visions of his ex-wife, Sheila, looking as young as she did when they were first married, keep appearing before his eyes. She scolds him and dispenses advice as needed. Lulu visits him, in reality - not another figment of his imagination - and loves her father, who is still as kind and loving to her as he was when she was a little girl. Rom is convinced that a man by the name of Cornelius Gould Stuyvesant controls the world with Y-rays from the top of the Chrysler Building. He believes that he was brought to Stuyvesant's attention because he is a "free" man! And this curdles Stuyvesant's blood! A "free man busting through to his own divinity, right?" "Ghetto kid making it at Julliard. Making a name for himself? Young composer? Hot, jumping? Getting his notes straight from God." He also believes that his mind is inhabited by moth-like angels. On an especially cold night on February 14, Rom hears the sound of footsteps outside his cave. Swaddled in various coats and blankets, he leaves his shelter and finds a frozen body. He knows that this is not just another homeless man who froze to death. The person who made the sound of footsteps probably left the body at his front door, he deduces. The frozen corpse couldn't have walked there. The dead man is handsome, and well-dressed, without a mark on his body, according to the medical examiner. His wallet ID reveals his name, Andrew Scott Gates, an unemployed model. Rom insists that he saw a man in a fancy white coat driving a fancy white car leaving the "crime scene." Rom is determined to find the murderer, even though the police, who ignore his ramblings, determine that the death was caused by accidental hypothermia. But, Romulus found Gates and his sense of justice and responsibility kicks in. Of course, he is convinced that Stuyvesant, or one of his minions, is the killer. Rom is forced to reconnect with society because of his investigation. He leaves the narrow confines of his cave and journeys into the wider world, trying to keep his fits at bay. A homeless ex-lover of Scott's tells him that the murder was perpetrated by the famous avant-garde photographer, David Leppenraub. Leppenraub, according to rumor, is into drugs and sadomasochistic behavior. Apparently, Scott was the model Leppenraub used in most of his bizarre photographs. Rom hooks up with a former fellow student and musician who knows Leppenraub, and manages to wangle an invitation to one of the photographer's parties with the understanding that he will play for his supper, so to speak. Of course, he hasn't touched a piano in years. As the story unfolds, the reader is caught up in a tale of deception, violence, mystery and a man's

struggle against his madness. One of the most fascinating aspects of the novel is viewing the world through Romulus' sometimes deranged, sometimes almost normal mind. The extremely well written narrative is quirky and occasionally humorous. And the characters, especially the protagonist's, are very well developed. I really liked this most original novel and highly recommend it. Jana Perskie Ravens The Juror

Romulus Ledbetter wasn't always homeless. He once was a devoted husband, father, and Juilliard-trained musician with a bright future. He now lives in a cave in New York City, waging a strenuous one-man fight against an evil and imaginary power broker responsible for society's ills. When Romulus finds a corpse outside his cave one wintry night, he is launched on an obsessive quest for answers that leads him back into the harsh reality of "the civilized world". Suspenseful, deeply moving, and mordantly funny, "The Caveman's Valentine" is a remarkable novel from one of the freshest voices in literature.

From Publishers Weekly In this remarkable first novel, the caveman is Romulus Ledbetter, a Juilliard graduate, husband and father, former mental patient and current resident of a cave in Manhattan's Inwood Park. His valentine is the naked body of Scotty Gales, a homeless former photographer's model. The police say Gales simply froze to death, but Romulus knows that he was killed by agents of the evil Cornelius Gould Stuyvesant, who rules the world from his offices in the Chrysler Building. Sometimes aided--and sometimes humored--by everyone from his daughter Lulu (a police officer) to people he meets on the street, Romulus tracks Scotty's murderer, doggedly following his twisted vision of reality into a world of money and violence where things and people are never what they seem. Although Green's plotting is solid, the narrative draws its power from the superbly realized protagonist. Romulus is that rarity, a truly original character whose fits and rantings retain a dangerous edge and never become lovable tics. Green makes a wonderful debut with this gripping, well-written portrait of modern dislocation and homelessness--although Romulus would object to the latter term: he has a home; it just happens to be in a cave. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Romulus Ledbetter has seen better times. Once a gifted Juilliard student of jazz piano, he fell in love, married, and fathered a daughter who grew up to be a New York City cop. At some point, however, Romulus succumbed to the gremlin voices in his mind, dissolved his home life to inhabit a cave in Inwood Park, and was labeled a paranoid schizophrenic. An unlikely character to turn detective, he feels compelled to do so when the corpse of a beautiful, young homeless man named Scotty Gates lands at his front door. Early leads point suspiciously to the affluent art photographer David Leppenraub, who had adopted Scotty as a teenager and used him as his model. The meanderings of the plot collide and coincide with those of Romulus's confused mind, adding complexity and depth to a suspenseful, quirky, and well-written murder mystery. A first novel, this is recommended for mystery/thriller collections.- Sheila Riley, Smithsonian Inst. Libs., Washington, D.C. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. About the Author George Dawes Green is a highly acclaimed novelist and poet. He currently divides his time between Georgia and New York.