



Casting Shadows Everywhere

L.T. Vargus, Tim McBain

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In his own words, 15 year old Jake is a “huge pussy.” He flinches. Always. He's too timid to make a move on Beth, the buxom girl of his dreams, and too busy getting face-slammed into lockers by bullies to do much else. He seeks the guidance of the biggest badass he knows, his cousin Nick.

Nick is a professional burglar and makes Jake his apprentice. They stalk suburban neighborhoods night after night, ransacking houses for jewelry and sweet valuables. Nick teaches Jake the finer points of breaking and entering along with his dark philosophy - that there is no right or wrong in the world, just a series of events that happen without meaning.

At first, adopting Nick's callous worldview helps Jake get over his fears and confront his tormentors, but he also unleashes an aggression in himself he never thought possible. And as he learns more about his cousin, he realizes that Nick's crimes go way beyond burglary.

In the end, Jake must face not only the monster in his cousin but also the one in his own heart.

Casting Shadows Everywhere Details

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From Reader Review Casting Shadows Everywhere for online ebook

Alexis says

Holy crap! The main character's voice hooked me right away with a weird blend of funny, detached and dark. I laughed out loud a few times and got creeped out at others.

Early on the action was pretty light and amusing, but by the end there were some really intense, suspenseful scenes that had me teetering on the edge of my toilet seat. So yeah, it was rad.

Emily says

15 year old Jake is searching for meaning, control, and a role-model in his life. He doesn't have much to choose from. In his rambling, slang-filled journal entries he considers how he's always been a victim and begins to learn from his sociopathic older cousin, Nick, how to be "less of a pussy." As he's drawn into Nick's criminal enterprise, he learns confidence but also loses empathy. Jake's a pretty smart kid. It's interesting how he goes from a profanity-laden rant to philosophic musings in the space of a paragraph. The author has really captured the stream-of-consciousness, nearly conversational way of speaking and thinking of this lower-class teenager. Jake's a character study and an exploration on socio-economics and personal growth, but this isn't your average coming-of-age tale. I wouldn't recommend it for teen readers for fear they'd over-identify with Jake and emulate his behavior. The story builds with suspense, and a maternal reader really begins to fear for the protagonist. A fake-out near the end is almost too much, but it's reigned back in satisfactorily. Overall, this is not my usual genre, but I enjoyed the peek into a different kind of story.

Patricia Hamill says

Great story! Both surprising and clever.

Casting Shadows Everywhere is a story that takes the form of a journal. The narrator is a 15 year old boy called Jake. The opening scene captures an early memory Jake has of his Cousin Nick rescuing him from a bully by nearly choking his attacker to death, a frightening start to a story I entered into without having read the description or any reviews or ratings.

Yes, I went into this one blindly, didn't even know what genre the book was. I do remember jumping over to Smashwords to pick up a copy when the author posted a free coupon on a message board, months ago. I'm always up for a freebee, after all. Anyway, I blindly got my copy, forgot about getting it for a few months and then, coming off a slew of YA fiction, vampires, and romance, came across this one again. The catchy red and black cover, featuring a long shadow, stood out, though the title gave me few clues to what I was in for. So, all that being said, my verdict is this: wow!

I love this story. It combines psychology, thrills, coming of age, and humor into a package that just works. Random asides, musings, wonderings, and sometimes even nonsense pepper the work, as someone would do in a personal journal. I loved every one. The parting entry, in particular, left me in tears from laughing so

hard, but humor is only one element of the package.

Jake, the perpetual victim, wants to stand up for himself, but always finds himself backing down. He likes a girl called Beth, but lacks the confidence to connect with her. Overall, he's a pushover, and he knows it. He hates it. Then one day his Cousin Nick offers to give him lessons in confidence. Dangerous lessons. Despite misgivings, Jake keeps coming back, enraptured by the thrill of life and confidence they inspire. He finally stands up for himself, becomes friends with Beth, and learns to believe in himself.

Watching Jake gain confidence, I found myself both cheering him on and worrying about the direction he was taking. His cousin, despite being his rescuer and role model, is amoral, violent and downright scary. Jake's outlook continues to darken and draws you in deeper and deeper into the shadows with him, all building up to one of the most memorable climactic moments I've ever read. I was utterly in shock, mouth hanging open, literally (as in the correct usage of that word). I couldn't believe what I was reading, and I couldn't stop. I had to know what happened, even though I dreaded what seemed the inevitable conclusion.

Overall, I'd say this is a must read for anyone who loves a good psychological thriller with an edge of humor, all delivered in a realistic package. It's not the type of book I normally read, but I loved it. It's been several days since I finished it, and I still find myself musing over it.

Valerie Vigoda says

I couldn't put this book down. (I mean, I couldn't put my phone down while I was reading it on the Kindle for Android.) I found out about L.T. Vargus by chance on Twitter, tried the free sample and was immediately hooked. I see that some reviewers think this book has a slow start. AU CONTRAIRE: I was addicted instantly - I mean, come on! This is a fantastic opening paragraph, catnip for thriller-lovers: "Killing someone is a lot harder than you'd imagine. Physically harder, I mean. On TV a guy strangles someone for like 5 seconds and the body slumps to the ground in a heap of dead just like that. In real life, it takes so long you wouldn't believe it. See, I saw someone get strangled when I was 9." How could you NOT keep reading? L.T. Vargus makes you root for the relatively passive main character of Jake - who gets sucked into crime and nastiness by his sociopathic cousin - even when he's at his worst and least admirable. Her language is vivid (tight pants on a man are described as "smuggling plums"), her voice is unique - and FUNNY, despite the dark content - and I'm a new fan.

Monti says

This book felt to me as if it had shades of both Fight Club, and the Basketball Diaries.

The story, while divided into chapters, is written as if it were diary entries, but without the dates. As you read the book, it starts off slow, with the main character, Jake wanting to change his life and be "less of a pussy".

As I read through the beginning, I became more and more enraptured with Jake's life wanting to know what odd lesson he was going to learn next. Towards the end there were three big plot twists that left me with my mouth hanging open, not really believing what I had read. Each one topped the one before it.

I was impressed with the author at conveying the journal (Boys keep journals, not diaries, right?) of an

articulate fifteen year old boy. The thoughts and writings seemed age appropriate. I could easily believe that I was reading something from a fifteen year old's point of view. Something that some writers aren't able to capture. I wouldn't necessarily consider this a young adult book, due to some of the language and content though.

My main genres of reading tend toward science fiction, fantasy, and paranormal. I am glad I made this diversion though, as I enjoyed the read.

Sheri says

Casting Shadows Everywhere (L.T. Vargus)

Fifteen year old Jake is an outcast. Picked on by his peers and lacking in self esteem. He has a major crush on a beautiful girl named Beth, she is his dream girl, the one that boys like him can never have.

Jake's older cousin Nick is the opposite. He is a "professional burglar" with a bad attitude and the theory that there is no right or wrong in the world, things just happen. Nick is quick to take Jake under his wing and teach him his criminal trade.

Jake eagerly wants the acceptance and his new role in Nick's life does help boost Jake's self esteem. But soon he starts to question himself and his cousin, and he wonders if there is something sinister that motivates Nick to do what he does, and as Jake gets closer to the truth he may not like what he finds out.

A fast paced read, with some laugh out loud moments, a lot of teen age reality and criminal intents. I would recommend to YA readers as well as adults. I would love to read more by L.T. Vargus.

Danny Tyran says

Amazing novel in the form of a teenage boy's diary. I don't know whether the author is very young, but *she* succeeded to give to Jake, her MC, a very realistic teenage voice. The diary too feels real. This is full of things a teenager would write in his/her diary with a mix of questions about the meaning of life. And this is not dull at all. Since Jake is trained to become a thief by his cousin Nick, there is a little suspense too. His thinking about life or people often made me smile or laugh.

Sometimes, it's as if Jake is chatting with us. He stops writing because he gets a phone call from his mother. And when he gets back on writing, he comments the call in his diary. Or he has to take a leak. When he continues his story, he types "Back." Then he goes on with the account of his adventures of the day or with his reflections on life. He tells us his dreams and nightmares too and what he finds interesting in his psychology courses. It could have been like a patchwork of petty events and thoughts, but everything is linked together by these philosophical or sociological thoughts. I loved it!

Liz says

That was a quick read... and weird as hell... I might have skipped about 15 pages in total... There was so many different things yet none to the story? I don't know.

So, your man... Jake, has been bullied all his life. His dad is gone, his older cousin Nick becomes his role model... well.. a role model in stealing... but he's also a bit of an enigma, because he only reads non-fiction and I think, in the end, the reality of what the world really is just turned him into who he was. Smart, but brutal.

Then there's Beth. Yeah, there's always a girl. We stop on some school drama, popular girl hierarchy. There's snippets of psychology. Got properly schooled... even though I knew most of that stuff... it seemed like the writer wanted to seem smart and put those snippets in there. To use their intelligence and knowledge? No bad in that. It's all good knowledge.

Parts where I read about Jake's dreams...

I read it, but I pushed myself to finish. Yet it was kind of interesting, too?! Confused.

Safie says

I have to admit, I chose to read *Casting Shadows Everywhere* because I liked the title. Then I began it with a little bit of trepidation, because from the very first chapter, the dark themes inherent in the book's plot become evident. It is about a bullied teenager, Jake, who is given life lessons by his cousin, Nick, whom we first encounter when he tries to strangle somebody. I like novels with dark themes, but not always; and I was a little bit afraid that this book would turn out to be depressingly grim.

My fears were unfounded, however. Although Nick's lessons lead Jake down a progressively ominous path, the book is never dour. In fact, it is an absorbing and entertaining read, thanks mostly to the high quality of the writing. I was surprised to discover that this book is L. T. Vargus's first novel; she writes with a consummate professionalism. *Casting Shadows Everywhere* is an intelligent and interesting book, and I am looking forward to reading more work from this writer in the future.

Wendy says

WOW!! Shocking!! Twists you never see coming. I just couldn't put it down.

Bandit says

Surprisingly decent for what it was, that is a *Portrait of a Sociopath as a Young Man* sort of thing. Only not quite, because either for personal reasons or in keeping with a YA line of books with morals the authors actually do a 180 toward the end with the always lame...and then he woke up. Up until that point the story is consistent and consistently good, even after that point the morality is handed down pretty reasonably, it's just the pivot point is so terribly trite and unoriginal. Still though this story of a smart teen loner getting mentored into a sociopathic nihilistic way of life was well written and entertaining. The moral obviously being that sociopathic nihilism isn't the way to go. Pretty fun read and a good introduction to new authors who, excitingly enough, have moved on to adult geared literature.

Georgiann Hennelly says

Jake is fifteen years old and an outcast. His peers pick on him and he is lacking self esteem. He has a crush on Beth she is beautiful and is his dream girl, the ones guys like him never seem to get. Nick is Jakes older cousin and he is the complete opposite of Jake. He is a professional Burglar" with a bad attitude and believes that there is no right and wrong, things just happen. Nick quickly takes Jake under his wing and teaches him how to be a burglar. Jake eagerly wants Nicks acceptance, and Nicks acceptance of Jake boosts Jakes self esteem. But soon Jake begins to question himself and his cousin., he wonders if there is something sinister that motivates Nick to do what he does, and when Jake begins to get closer to the truth he may not like what he finds. A fast paced read with some laugh out loud moments. I highly recommend for ya as well as adult readers. I would love to read more books by L.T Vargus

Dale Ibitz says

Holy cow, this book was not what I was expecting. So first,don't judge this book by its cover. This book was awesome!

The voice in this book was so strong, so realistic, and so like a 15 year-old boy, that I assumed the author was male. She's not. It was amazing, and I was completely caught up in Jake's story. It's written like a journal, so you have a lot of Jake's internalization about his life and what he's feeling and thinking, but it's also written as though he's currently experiencing these events. You can't help but like and feel for Jake, and when he starts going down that dark path, you're screaming in your head, "What are you doing, Jake? Don't do it, Jake!"

I swear the kid has ADD. It's totally funny how his thoughts get distracted when he's writing in his journal.

Nick is a contradiction. You think he has Jake's best interest at heart, but towards the end you realize that Nick is not what he seems. He's a low-brow charmer, and it's easy to see how he can manipulate Jake into believing his dark philosophy. Even as a reader reading how Nick views the world, it's so close to the truth that you think he's onto something profound, until he tips over the edge into unrealistic assumptions and thoughts.

The twist toward the end had my eyes bugging and my mouth dropping open. I almost couldn't believe what I was reading and totally wasn't expecting the book to end the way it did. I loved the way the story veered sharply off the road and took me somewhere I wasn't planning on going.

There's a bit of violence, so if that's not your thing, you might not like it quite as much as I did. But if you can handle it, this is a must-read for young adult contemporary suspense. I've already recommended it to both my kids, and that's saying something.

Alain Miles says

'Young Adult', the author labels it. But I'm not going to be buying 'Casting Shadows Everywhere' for any 14-

year-old I know this Christmas. The story creeps and tiptoes into dark, scary places where 'there ain't no right or wrong' and 'reality is the only true nightmare'. It's a dead-eyed view of morality. No role-models here. No happy endings.

But what a beginning for L.T Vargus! For me, this is the debut novel of the year.

Jake is a gangling, angst-ridden 15-year old who knows he's a pussy, one of life's victims. If there's a bully on the scene, it's Jake that gets picked on. He knows he'll never have any luck with girls, not even Beth, who doesn't tune out when he starts talking about video games. What Jake needs is someone to help him stand up for himself. What he gets is big cousin Nick.

Under Nick's expert tutelage, Jake gets practical lessons in street-crime. Starting with shoplifting (Gelly Roll Stardust Bold Galaxy pens), moving onto house-breaking ... and beyond.

But Nick's a philosophical hoodlum: each lesson reinforces his nihilistic beliefs: '*None of it means nothin'.* *There is just things that happen ... When we drop bombs on people, that is good. When other people drop bombs on us or blow shit up, that is evil. It's all a joke. It ain't real.*'

Does it work? Hell yes. The act of crime shows Jake that anything really is possible, makes him 'feel alive as a man can feel'. He starts beating up on the bullies. He gets to date Beth - even though he still agonizes about whether to sit next to her or across the table at 'Pasta Pasta'. Things are looking up.

The whole story's told through Jake's journal, and Vargus does an outstanding job of capturing the authentic tone, style, nuances of a smart, streetwise 15-year-old. Never once does she falter or step out of character. Sometimes there's inspired imagery, but the words are always Jake's not some third-party author's:

'We were silent for a moment, the sky blackening around us like burnt chicken skin.'

Impressive too was the story construction. No formula narrative, this: Vargus is happy to let the diary meander through apparently unrelated episodes and experiences - lessons from Jake's psychology class, hanging out with the semi-autistic kid, descriptions of dreams - and it's only as the story ends that we realize every little patch has been expertly quilted together.

What I'll remember most, though, was the challenge to my comfortable moral assumptions. Like Jake, I know it's all wrong, but Vargus gets me to sense the thrill of living on the dark side. I found myself nodding along with some of Nick's perverse logic. Can I agree with Jake's summary towards the end? (modified to comply with review guidelines)

*'Life is way too f***** short, so leap straight for the goddamn jugular while you've got the chance, I say.'*

I don't know.

Gabby says

I was given a free copy of **Casting Shadows Everywhere** by LTVargas in return for which I agreed to do a

review.

CSE is Jake's story. He is 15 years old, and, for me, he is a mash-up between Holden Caulfield and Lenny from **Of Mice and Men**. When Jake decides to keep a written journal, we become aware of all his thoughts which become influenced by his cousin, Nick.

Nick has a somewhat twisted notion of life. Kind of an, "is that all there is" spin, and no matter what the subject or issue, for Nick it's just a load of crap. Jake begins his journal by telling us, "killing someone is a lot harder than you'd imagine." He got to reach that conclusion from his association with Nick. When Jake is in trouble because he won't stand up for himself during some bullying from his classmates, Nick is there coaching him on how to rise above life's problems and be the one in control.

Jake is fixated on pondering the meaning of life and how it all fits together. In his black and white world, if he can just get a handle on how and why everything works the way it does, he can then move on to the next big thing. He analyzes everything from how the right and left sides of the brain process information so differently to why McDonald's has successful marketing campaigns. But in the end, he only manages to see that nothing really matters because it's all a load of crap. I loved L T Vargas' descriptions of Jake's thought processes. By the time he finishes one of his explanations for how he arrives at the conclusions he reaches, I'm almost convinced that he does present a certain amount of logic to his arguments. This is what reminded me of Holden Caulfield. Both these boys could reduce any subject to its simplest components and almost convince me they saw the subject rationally.

Rationality left Jake when he began what Nick thought of as Jake's training sessions. Nick believes all Jake needs is a little coaching in how life really is, and Nick is the perfect mentor for him. This is where the story really takes off. There is an underlying sense of dread each time Nick wants to meet with Jake to further his lessons.

L T Vargas has very good insight into what a teenaged boy thinks about by really getting into his head with nothing held back. That is not a place I'd want to visit often. But just about the time I thought Jake was lost forever in the twisted mind set of Nick's tutelage, something would bring him back to rational thinking again. Throughout this book it's as though a constant battle is being waged for ownership of Jake's soul. It isn't until the very end with some unique twists and turns along the way before we discover what kind of life Jake will choose for himself, and whether or not it really does all boil down to a load of crap.

It would be interesting to revisit Jake in ten years or so just to see how he feels then about what he said and did when he was fifteen years old. I don't know if L T Vargas has such a sequel in mind, but in the meantime, I hope more books from this talented author are forthcoming. I'll be among the first in line to read whatever follows this book.
