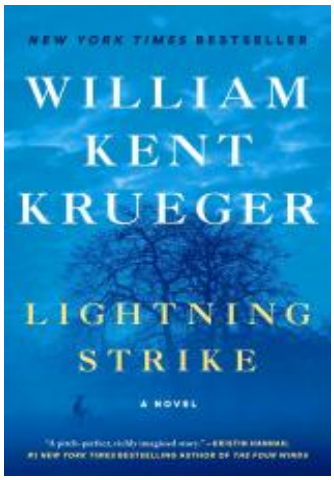
ReadingGroupGuides
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Lightning Strike

by William Kent Krueger



About the Book

The author of the instant *New York Times* bestseller THIS TENDER LAND returns with a powerful prequel to his acclaimed Cork O?Connor series --- a book about fathers and sons, long-simmering conflicts in a small Minnesota town, and the events that echo through youth and shape our lives forever.

Aurora is a small town nestled in the ancient forest alongside the shores of Minnesota?s Iron Lake. In the summer of 1963, it is the whole world to 12-year-old Cork O?Connor, its rhythms as familiar as his own heartbeat. But when Cork stumbles upon the body of a man he revered hanging from a tree in an abandoned logging camp, it is the first in a series of events that will cause him to question everything he took for granted about his hometown, his family and himself.

Cork?s father, Liam O?Connor, is Aurora?s sheriff, and it is his job to confirm that the man?s death was the result of suicide, as all the evidence suggests. In the shadow of his father?s official investigation, Cork begins to look for answers on his own. Together, father and son face the ultimate test of choosing between what their heads tell them is true and what their hearts know is right.

In this masterful story of a young man and a town on the cusp of change, beloved novelist William Kent Krueger shows that some mysteries can be solved even as others surpass our understanding.

Discussion Guide

1. The book begins with an older Cork O?Connor looking back on a childhood summer that changed his life. Do you have any similar experience of a pivotal moment when you were growing up that changed you, or an event that made you suddenly feel like more of an adult?

2. When Cork first sees Big John?s body hanging from the tree, he begins to cry and says, ?I?m sorry, Big John. I?m

sorry.? Why do you think he says that?

3. Why don?t the people on the reservation trust Liam?s conclusion that Big John?s death is a suicide? What is the history between the people who live on the reservation and those in law enforcement in Aurora? How does Dilsey, Liam?s mother-in-law, try to help connect Liam and the people on the reservation, and why does she get so frustrated with Liam?

4. What is Duncan MacDermid?s standing in the town? Where do his power and influence come from? Do you have ideas about what might have caused his deep-seated hatred of Native Americans?

5. At the funeral for Big John, Cork has some of his first interactions with Henry Meloux. What advice does Henry give him? Do you think it?s helpful? How does this establish their friendship and the kind of relationship that Cork will maintain with Henry as an adult and throughout the Cork O?Connor series?

6. Liam is used to relying solely on evidence and logic to do his job as sheriff. In this case, people around him are often telling him to approach the case in a different way. What do they want him to consider? Why is it so hard for Liam to open his mind to other possibilities, and yet seemingly so easy for Cork?

7. At Lightning Strike, Cork and his friends sense a powerful spirit they believe to be Big John. Do you think this is a trick of the mind or something more? Do you think there?s a connection between this experience and Jorge and Cork?s fascination with Hollywood monster movies? Have you ever had a similar almost supernatural experience or coincidence happen to you?

8. What are the deeply ingrained beliefs that impact Liam?s judgment in the case? He says he only follows the facts of the case, but is it possible to weigh facts without any bias? What motivates him to go back and seek out additional evidence that he might have initially overlooked?

9. How does Cork develop over the course of the novel? What events occur that take him from being an innocent child to an adult? What is lost and what is gained as we leave childhood behind?

10. Mary Margaret is a more complicated character than she seems at first. How does your understanding of her and her motivations change as you learn more about her life and her marriage to Duncan?

11. Why do you think Cork followed in his father?s footsteps and became a police officer? Do you have experience yourself or with a friend who followed in a parent?s profession? Was it a fulfilling choice?

12. In William Kent Krueger?s novels, the Minnesota setting becomes almost another character. What are the key settings in this book, and how do they play an important role in shaping the plot? How would this story be different if it were set somewhere else?

13. At the start of the novel, Cork worships his father, but his understanding of him changes over the course of the novel. Does Cork truly ?unravel the mystery that had been his father,? as he observes in the prologue?

14. Liam tells Father Cam, ?We all stumble in the dark, but that?s why the Great Mystery gave us voices, so that we can

call out, seeking others in that dark.... Alone, the darkness swallows us. But together, we help each other through.? Can you think of ways that hearing his father say these words might have informed the way Cork lived his own life?

15. After reading the novel, do you agree with the words attributed to Liam in the epilogue: ?We don?t choose our lives. Our lives choose us??

Author Bio

William Kent Krueger is the *New York Times* bestselling author of THE RIVER WE REMEMBER, THIS TENDER LAND, ORDINARY GRACE (winner of the Edgar Award for best novel), and the original audio novella THE LEVEE, as well as 22 acclaimed books in the Cork O?Connor mystery series, including GOD'S COUNTRY, APOSTLE'S COVE, SPIRIT CROSSING, LIGHTNING STRIKE and FOX CREEK. He lives in the Twin Cities with his family.

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