



The Lucid Dreaming

Lisa Morton

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Ashley, a twenty-something California girl, is a post-punk who would rather be called Spike and who worries about money, her family, and freeway traffic. She's also a violent paranoid schizophrenic living in a state facility west of Los Angeles, her disorder kept under control by confinement and the drug Prolixin.

One day Spike is shocked to find her cell door open and so she ventures out, only to find the walls smeared with blood and the staff missing or dead. She escapes and ventures into a world that's been driven mad by waking nightmares, where she's now the sanest person alive. Searching for answers, Spike embarks on a road trip that will lead her from Beverly Hills to a nightmarish Texas compound to the highest office in the land...

The Lucid Dreaming Details

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Nancy says

Posted at Shelf Inflicted

Ashley, who prefers to be called Spike, is doing time in Oxnard, an overcrowded, state-funded mental health facility about an hour from her home in Los Angeles. Her crime was stabbing a homeless man who was rummaging through the trash at her apartment complex while she was off her meds.

While Spike is serving her sentence, bizarre events begin to take place at the institution, and suddenly it seems as if she is the only one who is sane. Spike is a paranoid schizophrenic who doesn't act according to the voices in her head. Instead, she has vivid pictures in her mind that direct her actions, and most of them are rather dark and violent. The Prolixin she is required to take prevents those vivid dreams from occurring and enables her to lead a relatively normal life.

While Spike is doped up on Prolixin, those who are entrusted to care for their mentally ill charges have not shown up to provide food or dispense medication. Screaming, blood, incoherent mumbling, waking dreams and odd behavior finally drive Spike from the institution. On the way out, she grabs drugs, money, clothing, a gun, and an SUV and heads out in search of her best friend, Tommy.

Tommy is of no help. On her own, Spike encounters others suffering from the waking dream "epidemic" occurring all over the world. With her SUV and a companion with a gentle soul and passive nature who has happy dreams, Spike journeys across the US and finds that there are others who have learned of a way to control the epidemic.

The paperback edition has 92 pages and was a fast-paced and fun read. The story was told from Spike's own perspective. She was foul-mouthed, funny, resourceful, and had a cynical outlook on life that made her a vastly appealing young character.

I thoroughly enjoyed this story and plan to look for more by this very talented author.

Bark says

Spike is a 20 something violent paranoid schizophrenic who was locked away when she forgot to take her meds and went a little crazy with a knife on a homeless man. Her life consists of living in a medication muted haze surrounded by other various levels of disturbed folks. Recently her predictable world has been interrupted with an increased number of inmates and the place is getting terribly crowded. One day things are ominously quiet, her favorite nurse never arrives with her meals or meds and she ventures out to find blood smeared walls and to discover that the world has indeed gone crazy. She stockpiles her drugs to retain her sanity and fears she may be the only one immune to the "dream" epidemic.

This is a unique take on the apocalypse. People are dreaming when they're awake and doing terrible things and you don't have your typical cast of heroes. Spike is mentally unstable without her drugs, with them she's

a bit off kilter but not as dangerous. She hooks up with a hunk suffering from the dream sickness but she likes him because he has sweet dreams and he seems to like her too, even during his few moments of lucidity so she takes care of him. Danger looms, however, when Spike has a run-in with a band of baddies (and there's always a group of baddies in a book like this) who are using people as slaves and/or breeders to continue on their quest to rule the new planet.

This was a well written little story that held my attention all the way through. It wasn't overly gory, just purely entertaining mainly because of Spike's observations. Sure, there were unanswered questions, and I'd love to read an expanded version of this story someday, but I enjoyed it for the tightly written little novella that it was.

J.B. says

Could have been so much better...

I was really glad this was a shorter book, because it went in a completely different direction than I thought. And that's not a compliment. There was poor character development, with the stereotypical "angry alt-girl". Plus, there really was no resolution. All that aside, the thing I really despised, was the relationship between Ashley (Spike) and Teddy. The author just had to "modernize" everything, and have the main character be in an interracial relationship. There may have been some vague redemption, had she forgone all "romance", but I guess she thought she would gain a wider audience by including that trash in the story. I really didn't care for it at all, and I would not recommend it.

Lou says

A wacky tale of the mentally ill, the story was creative and strange amidst an apocalypse. This story could easily fit into the bizarro genre. There was a few elements missing for me that made me really like it more.

Mike says

Lisa Morton's *The Lucid Dreaming* won the 2009 Stoker Award for Best Long Fiction and is still available from Horror Mall in a signed/numbered limited edition trade for around 16.00. In addition to a great story you also get some wonderful art from artist Zach McCain. *The Lucid Dreaming* takes the best of "survival horror" from managing to invoke the humor of *Zombieland*, the destruction and devastation from *The Stand*, and the isolation from *28 Days Later*'s stellar opening scene while maintaining a flair all of its own. Ashley, aka Spike, a Los Angeles native and schizophrenic has been committed after forgetting to take medication. While at the state-run institution the young woman notes a strange increase in the population and not long after is surprised to find her door opened by her now seemingly crazy nurse and she is let out into a world, quite literally, gone mad.

At 90 pages the pacing of this novella is kept brisk. Spike is direct and no-nonsense when it comes to her narration; frank and unapologetic to both the reader and other characters met during her long strange trip.

The horror elements are light and the atmosphere and tone of the novel remains surprisingly bright. Spike's realist attitude is a breath of fresh air and she proves a surprisingly resourceful heroine. Much like in Stephen King's *The Mist*, and in many other survival tales, the real threat emerges from other survivors. In the case of *The Lucid Dreaming*, that threat emerges from a ranch operated by an opportunistic woman called Mama. Without lingering too much on the atmosphere of oppression and inhumane treatment of other people (particularly women) Morton manages to only scratch the surface just enough to reveal the foul stench of humankind's willingness to maim and kill one another in order to maintain a feeble and tenuous grip on power.

The narrative in *The Lucid Dreaming* is relayed to an unknown captive and, while the novella's end offers a strong hint on precisely who that might be, it is something never revealed outright. *The Lucid Dreaming* is a self contained tale but one that hints at the possibility of more; which I fervently hope we will see. While \$16 for a 90 page novella might sound like a bit much I think that the price was definitely worth the story, especially with McCain's gorgeous black and white drawings scattered amongst the pages. This is really a great little story that I highly recommend fans of horror and particularly post-apocalyptic fiction take a look at. Thankfully there is a preview over on scribd so go due yourself a favor and take a look.

Bethaney says

I make no secret of the fact that I am a Lisa Morton fan.

This story is an original and will keep you on the edge of your seat till the last page.

A must read. 10/10

David Agranoff says

I read it too long ago to give it a real review but I liked it a lot. Lisa Morton is one of my favorite writers.

Janet says

This is a longish short story. I liked the premise but felt that events happened so fast without enough explanation. That said, it was a quirky and quick read.
