

A GHOST WARRIOR ADVENTURE  
BOOK 3

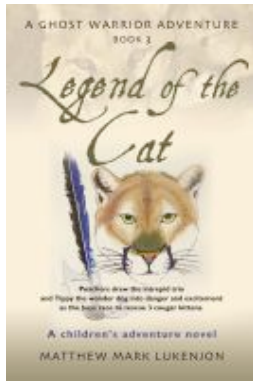
# Legend of the Cat



Poachers draw the intrepid trio  
and Tippy the wonder dog into danger and excitement  
as the boys race to rescue 3 cougar kittens.

**A children's adventure novel**

MATTHEW MARK LUKENJON



**LEGEND OF THE CAT** is a breathtaking adventure! The boys encounter a cougar in the wilderness that injures Tippy the Wonder Mutt. The intrepid trio race to save his life, and are pulled into a drama that draws them into danger when they see poachers kill the cougar. Excitement builds as the boys decide to rescue the cougar's three kittens, and raise them at Split Rock Cave.

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## **A Ghost Warrior Adventure**

### **Book III**

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**A Ghost Warrior Adventure - Book III**

**Matthew Mark Lukenjon**

**A children's adventure novel**

in association with the *Platypus, and Lady Bug Bookbinders Club*

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## CHAPTER 2

### LION HUNTERS THREE

**One thing was sure.** If we were going to find the cat before winter we would have to hurry. School had been in for almost a month and that meant we had maybe five or six weekends before the snow covered the mountains. We got permission from our parents for a Saturday trip into Martis Valley to hunt arrowheads. The southern end of the valley is only a couple of miles and a couple of hills from the desolation wilderness where we planned to locate the cat's lair. We agreed to meet at 6:00 am at Split-Rock cave and fix breakfast before heading out. I hadn't been able to talk to George yet so I was willing to trust our own knowledge of the woods. As it turned out it wasn't such a good idea. There's an old saying that "Ignorance is bliss," meaning that if you don't know how bad something can be you can just go along and be happy. Of course when things go wrong it can sure be a nasty surprise.

I woke up at five minutes after five, Saturday morning. It's funny how your brain wakes you up without needing an alarm clock. I lay under the covers listening to the silence of the high Sierra morning. I reached down and put my fingers on Tippys' head and gently rubbed his ears. He didn't seem too interested in waking up so I slipped out of bed and got dressed. My body was one big goose bump before I could get my shirt and shoes on. I whistled softly and Tippys' ears came up. He jumped off the bed and shook himself from head to tail to wake up. I grabbed my coat and hat off the dresser and tip-toed out the back door. I had packed my back pack the night before so I threw it over my shoulders as I walked down to my Honda.

I pushed the bike off the kick stand and set the gears to neutral. I pushed it down the hill away from the house before starting it so I wouldn't wake up mom. I hopped on, set the choke on the carburetor, hit the gas handle twice then pushed the start crank. My little Honda was a sweet machine and that baby

started on the first crank. I let the engine idle until the choke opened up then I kicked it into low and wound slowly up the hill to the trail that would lead me safely to Split-Rock without going on the highway. I had to promise mom that I wouldn't ride on the highway even if there weren't any cars around. The road that runs down the summit and along the lake is U.S. Highway 40 which goes from San Francisco to New York. It's a two lane road with only a narrow dirt pull off on each side. There was talk of a new freeway to be built in a few years and President Eisenhower was pushing to get it going, but until then I used back roads and trails to get from my house to Steve or Jim's about two miles away. A little past Jim's house I could cross the highway into Donner State Park and follow the trails to Split-Rock.

The moon was still up and the stars were sparkling in the inky sky. Tippy trotted easily ahead of me one ear up the other flopped over. He was hit by a car three years ago that broke his right hind leg. The vet put a steel pin in the leg to help set it. Unless Tippy was off chasing something, his right hind leg stayed bent and barely touched the ground. But Boy-Howdy! If he saw a squirrel or rabbit he forgot about that injured leg and used all four wheels while he jammed after those critters.

I yawned a couple of times, not quite ready to be awake, but enjoying the darkness and quiet as I headed toward the park. I pulled into the small parking area near the channel and put the Honda on its stand. I didn't see the other bikes so I figured to get a fire started while I waited for Steve and Jim to join me. The slugs were probably sleeping late anyway.

I wound through the brush to Split-Rock, squeezed through the opening, turned right and ducked into the cave entrance. The darkness of the cave made me a little nervous and I wondered if this is how the Egyptian Pharaohs feel buried in the pyramids. I struck a match and lit the candle we had set on a small shelf of rock. The soft warm light of the candle seemed cozy in the frigid stillness of the cave. I laid the wood for a fire and had it ready for cooking when my friends walked in.

"Hi midget," Jim said as he took off his pack and set it near the fire. "I heard you go by while I was getting dressed. We sort of took our time so you would have the fire going by the time we got here. Pretty good timing huh?"

"What all do we have to eat?" Steve asked, while he set his food and cooking gear on the large granite stone that sat beside the fire. If food was involved, Steve was always first to ask and first to eat. Not such a bad habit when you think about it.

In no time at all we had bacon sizzling in one pan, water heating in another and some eggs and onions scrambled together ready to cook as soon as the bacon was almost done.

While Jim kept an eye on the bacon I fed Tippy some kibbled food that I brought for him. He would end up with some bacon too so I wouldn't have to look in those big brown eyes and feel guilty.

We were pretty good cooks. Jim added just the right amount of salt and pepper to the eggs and cooked them until they were still a little loose. We divided the eggs and bacon and stuffed ourselves with the tasty blend of eggs, bacon, toast and hot chocolate.

I sprinkled a little garlic salt on my eggs. The other guys didn't really like it and more than once reminded me that the only reason I did is because I was Italian. All I know is mom always used it for cooking and I really liked it. So there!

When we were finished I rinsed and cleaned the cooking pans and plates while Steve scattered the coals of the fire and put some sand over them. We loaded our packs and headed out to the Hondas being careful to watch in case someone may be walking in the area and see us come out of the brush. The coast was clear so we started our bikes and took off for Martis Valley about three miles east of Split-Rock.

The stars had run from the morning sun and a gray pre-dawn color flooded the sky. We played leap frog on the trails taking turns with the lead. Once we hit the road that wound into Martis Valley we rode three abreast dodging pot holes and leaving a dust cloud trailing behind us. At the head of the valley Steve took the lead and started up a steep deer trail that we knew would

lead us over the mountain to a narrow valley cut by a shallow stream

Tippy stopped for a drink as we crossed the stream and caught up to us as we zig-zagged through willows and started to climb toward the crest of the next hill. When we reached the place where we had first spotted the cat we stopped and dismounted. I took the telescope out of my pack and scanned the area where I had spotted him before.

My stomach was jittery with excitement. I wanted to see the big cat move with fluid grace across the rocks; powerful muscles rippling his tawny skin as he travelled silently along.

"Let me look for awhile," Steve said, as he reached for the telescope.

I didn't want to give it up but I handed it to him and stood up. "What do you think Jim? If we spot the cougar today should we try to get over to the place we saw him and see if we can track him?"

"That depends how far away it is. We've never been any farther into the wilderness than we are right now. It may take all day to get over there."

"SO what!" I shot back, thinking that Jim was going chicken on me. "Even if it takes a couple of hours we still need to figure out some good paths to follow and maybe Tippy could pick up the scent and follow it."

"OK brains, and what happens if Tippy catches up to the cat. He may be tough but that cougar would chew him up and spit him out, and us too."

"No sir!" I insisted. "That cat would be on the run. The noise from our bikes would scare him off"

"If you say so," Jim said, with a look on his face that said I was full of beans.

"Hey! There he is! Right where we saw him before," Steve said, shifting his position and raising his voice in excitement. "He jumped up on some rocks and crouched. Now he's just sitting there."

"Let me see," I said, reaching for the telescope.



Steve held the telescope in place while I lowered myself and put my eye to the lens. There he was. Sleek, tawny-brown, powerful. His tail was moving slowly back and forth. I looked up at Jim. "Want to take a look?"

"Yeah," Jim said, dropping to the ground. I handed him the telescope and he moved it until he found the cougar. "Man he's beautiful isn't he?" he said, letting out a soft whistle.

"Find some landmarks we can use to find where the cat is then we can take off and get over there," I said, excited and impatient to get going.

On the first hill we had to cross we found a rock formation to guide us. On the taller second hill where the mountain lion was we used a tall pine that was dying and had a big dead, crooked branch near the top. Once the landmarks were set we put up the telescope and took off with a fury to find where the cat had been.

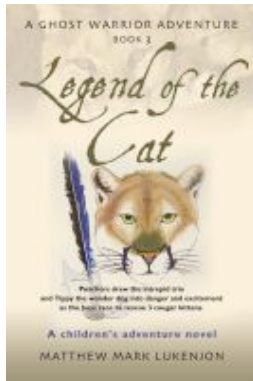
It was tricky going following the deer trail down the hill. The deer were skinny and could weave through the tough manzanita easily. We tended to get pretty scratched up by the branches.

We didn't follow each other close just in case we had to slam on the brakes. Tippy of course had no problem and sensing our eagerness was down the hill way ahead of us. It took a few minutes to find another good trail up the next hill. We hit two dead ends before finding one that took us to the crest of the hill. We stopped close to the rock formation we used as a marker, took out the telescope and re-sighted the place where we had spotted the cat. Once we locked in on our landmark we took off again in a cloud of dust just like the Lone Ranger and two Tonto's.

The Hondas weren't very noisy but we were sure the cat would hear us a mile away and take off so we weren't too worried about him coming after us. It took about forty minutes to reach the rocks where the mountain lion had perched. We parked the bikes and searched for tracks. Tippy found them first and took off following the scent. I called to him and he stopped. The three of us squatted down and looked closely at the pug marks of the cat. They were bigger than my hand with the fingers spread. I got a

creepy, tingling feeling in my back but I didn't want the others to see I was nervous so I stood up and told Tippy to go on.

"C'mon guys, Tip will follow the scent and maybe we can find out where he lives." We took off at a trot following Tippy. I had to call him a lot to make him slow down. I was kind of afraid if he got too close to that mountain lion maybe he would turn and fight instead of run. None of us were carrying a gun and I think we all figured a wild animal would only turn on us if it was cornered or hurt.



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