



Dark Horse

J. Carson Black

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DARK HORSE

a novel of suspense

“A terrific tale of murder and mayhem set on the Quarter Horse racing circuit in the American Southwest. Watch out, Dick Francis!”

—New York Times Bestselling Author J.A. JANCE

Despite the accidents plaguing his racing business, horse breeder Coke McCallister was sure that Shameless, his prized filly, would put him back on top. But now Coke is dead, and his daughter Dakota returns to Arizona determined to sell Black Oak. Dakota is not prepared for the bittersweet memories that greet her, and she really isn’t prepared to see her ex-husband, Clay Pearce. Although she has every reason to distrust him, who else can she turn to in an atmosphere fraught with danger? Who else can she confide in when her life is threatened by an unseen stalker?

When Dakota enters the filly Shameless in the All American Futurity, a desperate killer lays a trap. And on the eve of the race, Dakota learns the shattering truth. If she runs the filly to restore her father’s good name, her actions could bring down Black Oak and everything with it.

And she could lose her life.

>As featured in THE QUARTER RACING JOURNAL and THE QUARTER HORSE JOURNAL

“DARK HORSE brings readers smack dab to the center of the complex and fascinating world of horse breeding and racing, and will take readers on an intense and nerve-shattering ride that is bound to please.”

—ROMANTIC TIMES

“DARK HORSE should put Falk in the Winner’s Circle.”

—New York Times Bestselling Author TONY HILLERMAN

“...joins the ranks of Nora Roberts and Janet Dailey with her wonderfully fresh tale of mystery and romance. A book rich in character and place, where the reader experiences firsthand the fascinating world of Quarter Horse racing and the mélange of people drawn to it. DARK HORSE marks the arrival of a most welcome new talent in romantic suspense. Gripping. Satisfying. A keeper!”

—CAROL DAVIS LUCE, author of NIGHT STALKER, NIGHT PREY, and NIGHT PASSAGE.

“Suspense and romance combined with the excitement of Quarter Horse racing and thrill of competing in a million-dollar race make DARK HORSE a winner.”

—AMY OWENS, THE QUARTER HORSE JOURNAL

What readers say about DARK HORSE:

“I finished reading DARK HORSE last night (at 3 AM). I loved it and couldn’t put it down. ... I had to tell you how much I enjoyed it and thank you for writing it. There isn’t a boring page in it. You have it Just

Right. Thanks again – I'm glad I found you.”

—Alva B.

“I wanted to tell you of my recent excitement in reading your novel DARK HORSE. I purchased it because of the attractive cover and the praise of Judy Jance... a great lady and a wonderful writer. I am also a fan of Dick Francis. Your work is as good, if not better than his. ... Thank you for the good read.”

—Dan M.

“I received a copy from you at the All American Futurity. I am the Navajo Indian racehorse owner from Colorado. ... It was interesting to talk to you and see how you did your own track research. This research showed, as it really brings out realism in this book and makes it very enjoyable from my perspective as a horse owner.”

—Ross A.

“I have just finished reading your book DARK HORSE. To say that it was great is putting it mildly. I have been involved with horse racing, both at recognized tracks, as well as match racing all my adult life. ... I won the 1985 All American Futurity with Mr. Trucka Jet.

Dark Horse Details

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From Reader Review Dark Horse for online ebook

Jennie says

Dear Authors:

Not every novel needs a romance. We are just fine without them.

Thank you.

Seriously, what is with every novel having a (poorly written) romance in it? I feel like its this horrible epidemic sweeping through all genres of fiction and creating a plague on my reading world. This book is just the most recent example, and frankly a book that would have been MUCH better off without it. Was Black not aware that this book was good? That the goodwill the characters were building through the story was being destroyed by the horrible writing of the romance? That it felt tacked on and unnecessary? That it was distracting from the flow and pace of the mystery? Clearly not.

Without the "romance" between the protagonist and Clay I would have given this book 4 stars. I felt like the interludes where she spent time worrying about a relationship with her ex put a screaming halt on an otherwise nice buildup of suspense. Also, I really hate reading about women fighting over a man. It makes me want to vomit all over both of them.

Without this "romance" the book would have been much better. There would have been no distraction from the interesting world of horse racing. The author could have done more to explore the themes of familial relationships, particularly those fraught with conflict. I would have been more interested in the main characters resolution of her issues with her father than her romantic relationship.

There was nothing surprising with this novel. Everyone you thought was a bad guy actually turned out to be. The one surprise, I suppose, was just how nuts Lucy turned out to be. I say surprising because all of the other problem people had been telegraphed to the reader since the beginning of the book. In comparison there was a dearth of foreshadowing with Lucy. Perhaps Black should have tried a bit more subtlety with the others, no?

Gretchen says

I'm ashamed to admit I skipped all the romance parts (and I don't mean just all the love scenes, I mean everything about the personal relationship between the two main characters) just to get at the suspense and mystery of DARK HORSE by J. Carson Black. There was nothing wrong with the romance portion of this romance/suspense/mystery/horseracing novel, I just wanted to get right to the mystery.

DARK HORSE is about quarter horse racing in New Mexico and an owner/trainer being threatened from all sides. A compelling read, especially if you're into romantic suspense.

Pia Veleno says

(This isn't a review. It's only my notes to help me keep track of which authors I can read for what topics and genres.)

This is one of those Amazon freebies that sat on my Kindle for a couple of years. I'd forgotten what it was about and was hoping for a dark thriller of some sort. Sadly no. Yes, there is a murder, and threats too, but at the halfway point, I'm setting it aside because the "romance" aspects aren't my cup of tea. Yes, I read that genre sometimes, but this heroine likes to flirt and take advantage of her ex's responses to her damsel-in-distress situations, but then turn tail and run the second he acts like he cares about her. It's exhausting.

On the other hand, the horse stuff is interesting, so if I could focus on just the horses and the murder storylines, I'd probably still be reading.

Jon says

Loved it. Featured my home state, and I love race horses.

Lisa says

Interesting book. More of a romance than anything, but still a pretty decent plot. I would recommend fans of equine romances (especially western disciplines and the Quarterhorse breed) read this.

Glenn Harris says

A fine mystery thriller set among quarter horse owners and trainers.

Tammy Hanson says

Excellent read! This book will grab hold and not let go! I recommend it! Characters are very good at pulling you in to the story and making you believe you are right there with them! Check this one out!

Lillie says

Horse racing fans who like mystery novels will especially enjoy this.

Naomi says

I have to be honest, this book left me really cold. I just didn't see how it stood out from numerous other romance/mystery writers that are out there. I found that the writing to me was really choppy and I found that

I couldn't connect to the characters, which did make it difficult to get through the book. I thought the ending had a nice little twist to it, that is why I bumped it up to 2 stars.

Dee says

I loved this book, It was part murder mystery, part unrequited love, all set around stables. It's been a long time since I spent every day mucking stalls, and brushing and riding horses, but I could feel and smell the environment while reading this book.

Dakota comes back to her father's horse ranch after he dies in what some say was a drunken accident, some say it was a suicide and others begin to feel he was murdered. While trying to settle up the estate Dakota learns many things were going on behind the scenes which make her begin to feel there was something more sinister in her father's death than what they have been led to believe.

Along the way she reconnects with her ex husband. Sparks fly when they are together, but some old wounds are hard to heal. Someone is trying to send Dakota back to her acting life in California, but she gets caught up in the training of a horse her father truly believed in.

As the story gets closer to the climax, things start to come together, both in races and uncovering the culprit (or culprits) in the sabotaging of her ranch and the horses. I'm normally pretty good at figuring out what is going on, but only small parts of the bizarre goings on were obvious to me, and all the rest was pretty much a surprise.

Elva says

not a bad book.

i liked learning about the racing lifestyle and the pressures of owning and raising horses. i would have liked to known coke mcallister, murdered father of main character dakota, longer.

the action is set in new mexico and arizona and i enjoyed 'being' there. dakota is a good study in thoughtful determination, intelligence, and wanting to do the right things. she's kind, likable and strong. clay pearce is her hunky ex-husband. they haven't seen each other in 10 years.

now that coke is dead, dakota is muddling through selling the ranch to pay off debts, clay is kinda 'there' for her - and she's not sure how she feels about that.

coke had suffered several accidents and a maliciously suspicious run of bad luck; but there was never proof of any wrong-doing. his death, running into a tree, is ruled a suicide - which voids his life insurance. we know it's murder because we sort of witness it, but we don't know the killer.

the story is kinda heavy on the romance. i knew romance would be a big part of the storyline when i started the book. since i'm not a big romance reader - i simply skipped or skimmed those paragraphs or pages.

there are interesting sub-plots and minor characters. clay's sort of girlfriend, the ridiculously rich and model-

beautiful, rita, is an annoying, but amusing, nemesis for dakota.

i pegged the various bad guys as soon as i met them and pretty much guessed their motives...but the characterizations were realistic. i did guess the murderer, but not immediately.
