

Acid and Bribery

Jeanne Ann Off

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The mystery novel Acid and Bribery takes a deep dive into a horse racing community and the secrets that shadow it.

In Jeanne Ann Off's mystery novel *Acid and Bribery*, a young woman adopts the role of a detective to discover the culprit behind a recent string of horse attacks.

After being left penniless, Kelsey and her mom make a life for themselves as barn hands at a race horse track. The work is laborious, but Kelsey is happy tending to the stable and horses; she dreams of becoming a race horse trainer herself. But when one horse dies and others fall ill, including her favorite horse, Kelsey's harmonious life begins to crumble.

A veterinarian determines that the death and mounting illnesses are the fault of a virus, and the stables are put under quarantine. Despite the vet's verdict, Kelsey suspects something more sinister: that someone is killing race horses for profit, either to collect on their life insurance policies or to sabotage the races.

While the story is immersed in the particulars of horse racing, with thorough explanations of the sport, the density of its information overwhelms it. And often, the information shared is not pertinent to understanding the book's events. As the audience combs through horse-racing jargon and facts, the mystery elements are obscured; when they are the focus, the book's pace is fast, with clues uncovered rapidly.

Kelsey is a vague character who's built most in physical terms, as with mentions that she has light-brown, curly hair; she's absent a clear personality. Her speech patterns and internal dialogues are generic, blending with the voices of other characters. Her age is also ambiguous: it can be inferred that she is at least sixteen, as she has a driver's license, but her behavior suggests that she's younger. She has outbursts and tantrums; a sense of her innocence dominates.

The events of the novel largely play out within the race track grounds, with little action happening elsewhere. Even the race track, however, is a sparsely set location. Some layout information about the track and its surrounding grounds is given, but this light structural view is the extent of it; sensory details are left out, leading to an overarching sense of disconnect. Additionally, the book's improper grammar and punctuation, combined with agreement errors, make the text hard to read.

Dense with horse racing jargon and trivia, the mystery novel *Acid and Bribery* takes a deep dive into a horse racing community and the secrets that shadow it.

MELISSA LANCE (November 17, 2021)

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