

Clarion Review ★★★★★

ROMANCE

Horses Cry

Tony May

FriesenPress (Jul 13, 2016)

Softcover \$14.49 (174pp)

978-1-4602-8886-3

Rodeo details make for an evocative and convincing story.

Tony May's fast-paced tale of love and intrigue, *Horses Cry*, delves into the life of Spud Murphy as he tries to continue "living the rodeo dream" despite the forces against him.

Spud is traveling the rodeo route with his horse, Prairie Wind, when he meets Bella, a beautiful rhinestone cowgirl who is a champion in barrel racing as well as a stealthy DEA agent. Through Bella, Spud becomes involved with an investigation to uncover the hidden drug cartel within the rodeo scene. Spud's involvement leads to a number of tragedies that motivate him to succeed at any cost.

The novel is extremely well researched. The details of every rodeo event are accurately and confidently described, and are related in an informative, well-paced way. There are, however, moments when the presentation seems forced, as during a dinner when Wild Bill describes the rules of barrel racing in detail, though everyone at the table is already familiar with the sport.

Spud uses colloquialisms that bring a refreshing lightness to the mood of the novel. Recurring phrases such as "twist your melon" and "local yokels" characterize Spud and paint a portrait of his world. While many other characters feel underdeveloped, Spud's personality is cemented by his turns of phrase and his storytelling abilities.

There are a number of moments of strong imagery, especially when Spud is describing life on the road: "The nights would light up with country music, Black Jack bourbon, pyramids of beer cans, and the sweet aroma of wacky tobacky." Rhythms of the prose provide a sense of warmth, colored by the lighthearted humor that is so essential to the protagonist.

Though *Horses Cry* is billed as a romance, the central relationship between Spud and Bella is underwhelming. They meet, they have coffee, they kiss, they are in love. Romantic moments are often described simply: "We rushed into each other's arms, kissing and whispering our love." There is a lack of authenticity between the two, leading to the impression that Bella is just another sparkly rodeo belt to add to Spud's collection. Bella's character is made more complex by her superior skills at barrel racing and her fearlessness whilst upon her gray mare, inexplicably called Nipples.

Horses Cry features continuous action and a wealth of information, and succeeds as a tale of good prevailing over evil wherein the guy gets the girl. This is an incredibly informative look at what it is like to live the rodeo dream.

RENATE CHILDS (November 17, 2016)

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