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Clarion Review

Romance

Western Romance: The Ultimate Outlaw

Britny Coker
Hana Rass
AuthorHouse
978-1-4520-5425-4
Three Stars (out of Five)

Fascination with the Old Wild West permeates every facet of the entertainment industry, inspiring television shows, blockbuster movies, and award-winning books. This unique time was a difficult period in U.S. history that reached near mythological status. Fraught with political tension and brutal violence, this out-of-control environment is the perfect setting for a strong character with an agenda. In a realm where the distinction between hero and villain blurs into a murky haze, the outlaw has acquired a romantic aura amidst the crimes committed and the weapons fired, turning famous names such as Jesse James into Western icons.

Though the average woman would hesitate engaging in a love affair with a world renowned fugitive, the “what if” concept has been taken to the hilt in *Western Romance: The Ultimate Outlaw*. This lengthy tome explores three romances concurrently, with notable historical figures Jesse and Frank James and their cousin Cole Younger in the lead. At a whopping 662 pages in fine print, the novel is a daunting undertaking for two ambitious collaborators. Coker and Rass have combined these independent stories in a prolonged intermix that may have been easier to manage, as well as read, if planned as a three-part series. As written, the book overwhelms the reader with multiple protagonists battling for prominence.

Blue Johnston, a young bounty hunter in love with Jesse James, steals the show throughout the novel with her sparkling personality and invincible mentality. This heroine will please genre romance fans looking for a powerful woman attempting to resolve serious personal trouble in an impossible situation. Gutsy and daring, this somewhat questionable character elicits respect, if not admiration. With an old-fashioned, campfire-style delivery, this novel details the horrors of gunshot wounds and near-death bedside scenes, building to a succession of plot climaxes that often turn into anti-climaxes because of their frequency.

Broken into sixty-one chapters, the book has a somewhat disjointed, even disorienting impact, as the narrative veers back and forth between the individual storylines. The result is a choppy effect, rather than coherent and smooth. Stylistically, this time-consuming presentation has suffered in verbiage overload and insufficient editing. Filled with grammatical and punctuation mistakes, along with enough typographical errors to warrant a return to production, yet an otherwise good novel.

Britny Coker has written fiction and nonfiction since her teen years and resides in Georgia. Hana Rass is a bluegrass musician with a passion for the Wild West.

Western Romance: The Ultimate Outlaw will appeal to a varied audience, not just the stereotypical romance connoisseur. For readers intrigued by the criminal mystique and the gangland practices of the Old West, this novel will provide many hours of entertainment.

Julia Ann Charpentier