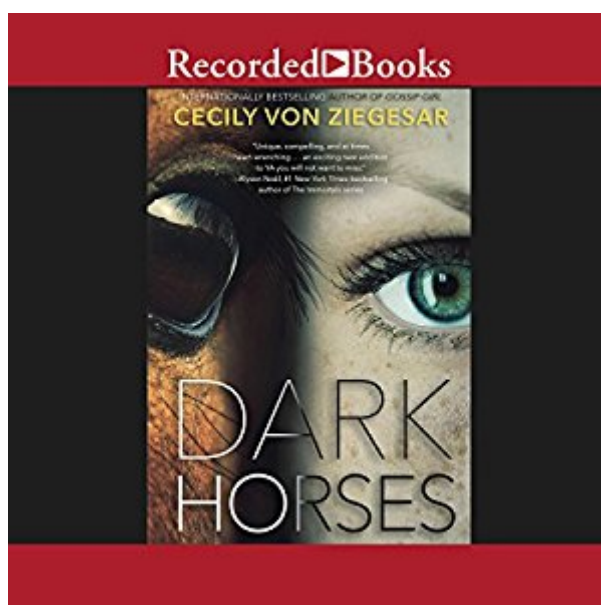


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# Dark Horses



## Synopsis

From the internationally best-selling author of *Gossip Girl* comes a dark, psychologically complex update of *Black Beauty* replete with jealousy, romance, mystery, and redemption. Merritt Wenner has been self-destructing ever since the tragic deaths of her grandmother and her horse, and after an epic all-night bender she walks out of the SAT and disappears. Her parents, looking for a quick fix, ship her off to a residential equine therapy program. At Good Fences, Merritt meets Red - a failed racehorse and a terror in the barn. Red has never bonded with anyone, but Merritt is not afraid of him, which makes all the difference. Soon they're sneaking rides after curfew, which catches the attention of Red's owner. Recognizing their potential, he funds their launch into the competitive hunter/jumper circuit. Against the cutthroat backdrop of competitive riding, Merritt and their groom, Beatrice, develop an attraction. Merritt also finds herself drawn to Carvin, a rival rider. But in Red's mind, Merritt belongs to him alone. Anyone else poses a threat. And Merritt can't foresee what he'll do to keep her to himself.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

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## Customer Reviews

Question: This latest book from the young adult author of the popular "Gossip Girls" series has which horse novel cliché?  
a) The horse is seriously injured in an accident, necessitating a change in its career.  
b) The horse starts out being ridden by a spoiled rich brat but then gets a better rider who is poorer (comparatively) but far more virtuous- and starts winning.  
c) The horse can only be ridden by one special person (the poor, virtuous girl). Even experienced riders get tossed right off this horse, but not her.  
d) The main equestrian in the book has limited experience, but unbounded

talent, meaning that she is chosen over more experienced riders to train the horse.e) All of the above. Answer: e), but bear with me, I did enjoy reading this book and would recommend it (hence the four stars). Plot: Ever since her equestrian grandmother died, Merritt Wenner has felt adrift. After walking out of her SATs prematurely, self-medicating with pills and alcohol, and disappearing without permission, her parents decide the best next step is to send her to Good Fences, a recently opened rehab center for girls. Here she meets her roommate, Beatrice's horse, Big Red (a former racehorse with jumping potential) and after Beatrice takes off, is assigned to care for him. When they bond, Red's rich owner chooses Merritt to show the horse on the "A" circuit, and she winds up bonding with Beatrice, who accompanies them to shows as a groom. Though Merritt feels a connection with the sparky Beatrice, her horse Red seems to be jealous, and as we get Red's perspective in alternating chapters, the reader finds that this is indeed the case. At first things go well on the circuit, but soon Merritt's unresolved issues start creeping in, and then an unexpected tragedy threatens to derail her dreams for good. Merritt is an odd heroine, when you compare her to far more feisty, plucky heroines that usually populate young adult horse fiction. She is passive to the point where you want to shake her. Things happen to her rather than vice versa. But there are reasons for this, and she is easy to root for. However, she does not change much over the course of the book. As for Red, his narrative is quite entertaining, even if I found the constant classic rock references somewhat irritating as the book went on. The author is clearly knowledgeable about the horse show world, and I didn't find any random mistakes (that often crop up in books like these). I felt the last third of the book went off course (sorry) and did not maintain the momentum it had previously done, but overall, I enjoyed the book.

I loved *Black Beauty* as a kid and read it so many times I had to replace my copy because it fell apart. When I saw that this book was described as an updated version of *Black Beauty*, I was all for it. Sadly, *Dark Horses* didn't live up to my expectations. The horse in this story is Red. He's headstrong, VERY opinionated, and talks like a 14 year old kid. If he were human, Red would be the mouthy football player that picks on other kids because he's bigger and it gets a laugh from his friends and he likes the feeling of power as deep down he's insecure and obsessive about his relationships with other people. In *Dark Horses*, Red does indeed pick on other horses, contemplates sabotaging them just for the fun of it, and behaving in such a way that riders and other horses get hurt when he doesn't get his way. I know that this is just a story, but the character of Red was incredibly off-putting from the start. Red soon finds himself paired with Merritt, a girl with a boatload of problems of her own. She feels like everyone around her dies because of her, and is

down a very deep hole of depression and self-loathing. She is partnered with Red at Good Fences, a sort of rehabilitation facility, and Red soon becomes enamored with Merritt. He becomes so enamored with her in fact that he becomes jealous of her human relationships, first with Beatrice, then with Carvin. It's Red's jealousy and possessive nature that cause things to begin to unwind. When coupled with Merritt's own personal unresolved traumas, things really hit the proverbial fan. While I didn't enjoy Red or his stalker/abusive personality, Merritt was a likeable character. The struggles in her life that she was going through were realistic and relatable. The author was very spot on when writing Merritt's chapters. The depth of the guilt she felt for the deaths of the people in her life that she lost was crushing, but Merritt was one of those people that holds it all inside in order to prevent others from seeing them as weak or in any way not in full control. Her moments of growth came when she confronted everything she'd been burying for so long. Merritt didn't have a stereotypical 180 degree total life change. Her changes were tiny, minor, incremental - in other words, realistic. If there had been more Merritt in this book and less Red, it would have been a much more enjoyable novel for me. Regardless if Red is a horse or a human, I could not bring myself to form a bond with his character. If he had been a human, Merritt would have taken out a restraining order against him. His actions and reactions were those of an abusive sociopathic boyfriend. His actions and thought process at the end of the book only reinforced my dislike of his character. I'm not sure why this book was compared to or called an update to Black Beauty, but other than having part of the story the horse's perspective, I really don't believe this is the right comparison. It is dark, it is psychologically twisted, there is romance, but I think that by comparing this to Black Beauty it sets up an unfair level of expectations for some readers (like me). The description for this book would be better if that little blurb "update of Black Beauty" were left out. There are enough twists and turns and drama in this book for it to stand on its own two (or four) legs without giving readers per-conceived notions of how the story should go.

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