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Editorial Review

From the Inside Flap

Satan has won the Triple Crown, yet Alec still misses the Black, who's living in Arabia with Sheikh Abu Ishak. Unexpectedly, Alec receives word that the sheikh has died and has left the Black to Alec. A race between the Black and Satan is inevitable, but unexpected events put the horses in the path of a raging forest fire. Suddenly, they are racing for their lives.

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Triple Crown

1

Alec Ramsay sat still and straight in his saddle, seemingly unaware of the thousands of eyes upon him. He wore black racing silks, and beneath his peaked cap the whiteness of his face made a startling contrast to his racing colors and the burly black horse beneath him.

They were third in the parade to the post for the running of the classic Belmont Stakes. Alec wished they had drawn an outside position instead of the number 3 slot. He didn't like being so near the rail. Henry's instructions were to hold Satan until the field approached the middle of the backstretch before making his move. It would have been easier to do this from an outside post position.

The parade had passed the clubhouse and was now opposite the grandstand. Alec didn't have to look to know that it was overflowing with people. The tumultuous roar from the stands took care of that. And he knew their eyes were upon Satan, wondering if the big three-year-old would win the Belmont Stakes, as he had won the Kentucky Derby and the Preakness, to take his place among the few great horses of the turf who had captured the Triple Crown! They wondered only because of the condition of the track. It was ankle-deep in mud after a heavy morning rain, and the early June sky was still overcast as a fine drizzle fell.

The last remaining doubters of Satan's greatness asked themselves, "But can he race in the mud? He never has, you know."

Alec's hand went to the thick, muscular neck of the colt as Satan sidestepped quickly to the middle of the track. He spoke to him, and the heavy ears swept back at the sound of his voice; then the restlessness left Satan's giant body and he was back in line as the field continued parading past the stands.

From the pushing, heaving wave of people at the rail, a man shouted, "Hey, Ramsay! You think it's a horse show?"

Alec heard the man's words, but his eyes never left the muddy track which he could see between Satan's pricked ears.

"A Good Hands class maybe?" the man called again.

Only then did Alec Ramsay become aware that he was sitting much straighter in his saddle than the other jockeys. The whiteness of his skin gave way to a sudden flush of color, but his seat remained unchanged. He couldn't have sat his horse any other way.

"Bring him home, Alec!" someone else shouted. "Bring him home like you did in the Derby an' the Preakness!"

The post parade ended when they had filed past the stands, and Alec allowed Satan to go into a slow gallop. He rose in his stirrups and leaned forward, his face pressed close to the colt's bulging neck.

Henry had said Satan could race in the mud as well as on a dry track. Henry should know, for he had been training Satan all winter and spring while Alec had spent most of his time in school. Henry said they had worked Satan in all kinds of weather and the big-boned colt didn't know the difference between a dry track and a wet one. Alec had to take Henry's word for it. He'd raced Satan only twice this year, once in the Kentucky Derby and again in the Preakness. The track had been dry and fast for each race, and Satan had had no trouble winning by many lengths.

He took the big black colt to the outside rail and went past the two horses in front of him. He let him go far around the turn, finding reassurance in the ever-lengthening and confident strides of the colt as he galloped fetlock-deep in the mud. And Alec thrilled to the swift and thunderous movement beneath his knees. But finally he rose still higher in his stirrups and drew back on the reins until Satan had slowed to a prancing crabstep.

He turned the colt to find the others already on their way back to the starting gate, now set in front of the grandstand. He kept Satan to a slow trot, and his hand slid down the thick neck before him. High above Satan's craned head, Alec saw the many cameras set up on the top tier of the grandstand; they were trained on the field as it went to the post.

"Easy does it, Satan," he said as one of the starter's crew took hold of the bridle. Prancing, pulling a little, Satan moved inside the gate. The door behind them was closed; there was only one way out of the stall now.

For a moment, there were the heavy thuds of hoofs against stalls and the soft whisperings of jockeys to their mounts; all accompanied by the loud, shrieking clamor from the crowd, awaiting the break. Then, very abruptly, a heavy silence fell over the great stands, a silence which finally descended to the starting gate.

Only Satan's big ears moved. Restlessly they pitched forward, then came back until they were flat and heavy against his head. Alec felt the tenseness of the giant colt beneath him. Close to Satan's head he whispered to him. The break would come any second now, any second and they would be off.

"A mile and a half this time, Satan," he said softly. "It's a little longer than the others. Plenty of time for you. Easy getting away, Satan. Easy now . . . wait for me."

The grilled doors clanged open; the starting bell rang. There was an outcry from more than fifty thousand voices that was quickly pommeled to deadening silence by racing, pounding hoofs.

Satan broke with the others, took two fast strides and stumbled! Alec felt his head go down, gave him more rein, then drew back, helping Satan to recover his feet. There was a sickening second of sliding, thrashing hoofs seeking foothold in the mud. Satan's strides came fast and short as he tried to control the hurtling momentum of his heavy body over the slippery track. Alec felt the straining of the great muscles beneath him. He was afraid to move lest he offset Satan's balance still more. He gave the colt his head, yet Alec's hands on the reins were ready to help Satan when he needed it.

Satan's strides were unrhythmic as he plunged forward, but Alec knew the worst was over. The big black colt

had gathered himself and his feet were firmly beneath him once more. Even now his strides were lengthening, his body leveling out.

Only then did Alec become conscious of the heaving, sleek bodies to the front and side of him. The start on the muddy track had been difficult for all the horses, but now each was in his stride and moving fast.

Satan's head was pushed forward and he was pulling. Bending low to the side of the black neck, Alec drew back on the reins. "Not yet, Satan. Not yet," he called.

Driving hindquarters rose and fell in front of them, sending mud into their faces. Satan didn't like it, but he didn't attempt to free himself from Alec's tight rein.

The three leading horses swung into the first turn, followed by Satan and the rest of the field. Alec saw the jockeys on his right starting to close in on him; they wanted to bring their mounts into the rail ahead of Satan going around the turn. Momentarily he gave Satan more rein. The colt surged forward, keeping the rail. But the others held on, pressing Satan as he sped about the turn.

The leaders were four lengths ahead as Satan came into the backstretch. Alec took a firm hold, keeping the black colt just to the fore of those running behind him.

"Make your move in the middle of the backstretch," Henry had said. "Not before then. It's only the gray you have to worry about, and he'll be back with you, biding his time."

The gray colt was behind him, as Henry had said. Alec could see his head coming up close beside them. He gave Satan a little more rein to keep ahead of the gray.

The leaders, having spent their early speed, were dropping back, and Satan bore down upon them with giant strides. But the gray was still pressing the black colt. Together they passed the tiring horses who had set the pace. Together they swept by the half-mile pole and drove toward the far turn.

No mud flew in Alec's face now. The track ahead was clear of horses and only the racing gray, moving at Satan's hindquarters, could keep the black colt from winning the Triple Crown!

"Now, Satan!" Alec shouted into the wind.

He moved forward and the white rail went by with ever increasing speed. Alec bent low, lost in the colt's heavy, flowing mane. Nothing could stop Satan now, for he was running free, and there was a savage wildness to his action.

For only a few yards did the gray match Satan's tremendous strides. Then he fell back before the fresh onslaught of speed and power displayed by the black colt. And as Satan rounded the turn in all his fury and came down the homestretch, the eyes of the crowd were on him alone. He was all power, all beauty as he swept beneath the wire, winner by a dozen lengths and the first undefeated Triple Crown winner in turf history!

High on the roof above the stands, a man kept his camera on Satan until the black colt was brought to a stop far up the track; then, turning to another cameraman, he said, "Never in my life have I seen a horse run like that. Never."

"I have," the other returned. "But only once. He was the Black, the sire of this colt. Alec Ramsay was up on him, too. That kid's life is like something out of a movie," he concluded, shaking his head.

"Why?"

"You mean you don't know his story? Where've you been?"

"In Peru, shooting Inca ruins for the last five years."

"Oh."

"What's the story?"

"Alec Ramsay and the Black were the lone survivors of a shipwreck, and the kid brought him home. It turned out that Henry Dailey, the old trainer, whom everyone had just about forgotten, was a neighbor of Alec Ramsay. And when Henry saw the Black he knew what the kid had hold of. They kept the Black in what's no more than a back lot over in Flushing; then they sprung him in that big match race that was arranged for Sun Raider and Cyclone a few years back, and he whipped them both. I saw him do it. It's the only time he raced, but I'll never forget him." The cameraman turned toward the track and Satan. "They could have been one and the same horse today," he added.

"But what happened to the Black?"

"As I heard it, an Arab chieftain by the name of Abu Ishak turned up not long after the match race and proved the horse was his. So he took the Black back to Arabia."

"And that's the end of the Black?"

"It is, as far as I know."

"But where does Satan come in? How did Alec Ramsay get hold of him?"

"The story goes that this Abu Ishak promised the kid he'd send him the first foal by the Black. He kept his promise. Satan is that foal."

"What a break for the kid."

"Yeah. He and Henry Dailey raised Satan in the same lot where they'd kept the Black. They brought him out in the Hopeful last fall. You know the rest . . . he hasn't been beaten yet."

"From back lot to undefeated Triple Crown champion," the other cameraman mused as he turned to the winner's circle, where Alec Ramsay sat on Satan amidst a crowd of photographers. "He's riding high in the big time now. No more back lots for Alec Ramsay. Lucky kid!"

Lucky Alec Ramsay?

2

Alec Ramsay closed the door of the jockeys' bungalow behind him, muffling the shrill voices which rose

above the hiss of showers. Standing on the porch, he looked across the wet and empty courtyard to the hoof-furrowed ground of the paddock's walking ring. And his gaze stayed there while he slipped his long arms into the sleeves of his raincoat and drew the belt about him. Then he went down the steps into the steady drizzle.

As he walked to the gate in the iron fence, his hatless head was tucked deep within his coat collar, so he did not see the tall, solitary figure that stood in the rain awaiting him.

"Alec," the man called as the boy stepped outside.

"Dad! I thought you and Mother would be over at the barn with Henry."

"Mother's there," his father said. "She sent me with this." Casually he lifted an unopened umbrella.

Alec turned from it to the water dripping from the rim of his father's hat. "Why aren't you using it, then?" he said with a smile. "You must have been waiting a long time."

"Never did like them. Do you want it?"

Alec shook his head. "We can put it up before we get to the barn," he said.

They walked past the empty stands, and only the litter strewn about gave evidence of the thousands who had occupied the seats an hour ago. The lights gleamed fuzzily in the rain.

"I don't need to tell you that it was a great race, Alec," Mr. Ramsay said. "A truly great one. He's unbeatable." He put his arm across the boy's shoulders as he turned to him, smiling.

Alec's head was down, his eyes on the wet pavement. "Satan never makes a wrong move and will do anything you ask of him," he said in a low, even voice. "Henry has done a wonderful job training him, Dad. Satan will go for anyone now . . . anyone who will just sit there and tell him what to do. He's come a long way since . . ." Alec stopped without finishing his sentence.

Mr. Ramsay's face sobered. "You've done your part making him what he is today," he said quickly. "Don't you forget that, Alec--not for one moment. He was a pretty bad colt before you taught him to have confidence and trust in human beings. Henry's gone on from where you left off. He's made a superb racing machine of Satan, but always remember he couldn't have done it without your help."

"Sure, Dad," Alec said. "I'll remember."

They had passed the stands, and their eyes now turned to the long rows of barn sheds a short distance away. They could see the grooms walking their horses under vivid-colored cooling sheets.

"How'd Mother take the race?" Alec asked as they walked down the road.

"Fine. Just fine, except for Satan's stumble at the break. But she came out of it as well as he did. And when the race was over I heard her telling the people sitting next to us that your hands kept Satan on his feet. She's getting to be quite a racetracker, Alec," he added proudly.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Robert Black:

In this 21st century, people become competitive in each and every way. By being competitive now, people have to do something to make these individuals survive, being in the middle of the actual crowded place and notice by means of surrounding. One thing that oftentimes many people have underestimated this for a while is reading. Yep, by reading an e-book your ability to survive enhances then having a chance to endure than other is high. To suit your needs who want to start reading a book, we give you this particular Black Stallion and Satan book as beginning and daily reading e-book. Why, because this book is greater than just a book.

Gerald Magee:

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