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Silver Creek

THE BOOK

Author	A.H.Holt
Published	2003
Pages	198
ISBN-10	0-8034-9600-1
Price	$19.95

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(Review 1 - by Sukanya Datta, New Delhi, India)

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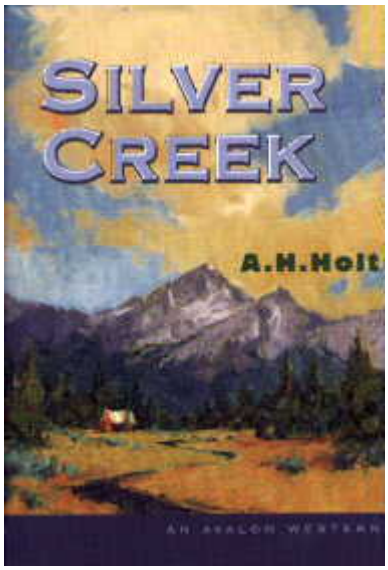
FEATURED BOOK : REVIEWS

TRUE TO ITS GENRE

Rating : 8.0

★★★★★★★★☆☆

Silver Creek *by* A.H.Holt, Hard Cover, jacket, archival paper, library binding, 5" x 8"
Avalon Books, A division of Thomas Bouregy and Co., Inc., 160 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016. E-mail:aholt@garnet.acns.fsu.edu: Publication Date 2003. 198 pages, ISBN 0-8034-9600-1. Price $19.95



Westerns, much like gothic romances are a genre apart. They have their own rules, their own codes, and their own stereotypes and of course, their very own devoted fans.

Westerns are a type of adventure novel that unfold across the wild west American frontier, usually in the second half of the 19th century. The word "westerns" conjures up certain specific settings that include ranch houses, isolated homesteads, saloons, jails, small-town main streets, thanks largely to Hollywood's interpretation of it. Other iconic elements in westerns include the hanging tree, broad-brimmed Stetsons, lassos, Colt .45's, stagecoaches, gamblers, long-horned cattle and cattle drives, not to forget the handsome (if slightly unwashed) hero complete with stubble and swagger.

Western heroes are often ranchers, cowboys, marshals, or (best of all) a renegade on the run, with a heart of gold -a skilled, gunfighter fast on the draw and a crack shot at that. They are also extremely masculine types with integrity and principle though the vicissitudes of life force them to become a little crusty at times. They are courageous and think nothing of charging in to save the situation (or the heroine) with not even a passing thought about their own safety. They have clear - cut if simplistic ideas about the moralities involved and are tough, solid, and self-sufficient. Western movies are replete with expert displays of their roping skills, gunplay and horse handling. Their horses too are special characters, loyal and large-hearted!

The heroines are as clearly etched. Usually beautiful if a dainty sparrow of a person they are all gritty to the core. Apart from keeping the homestead in working order, they sew, bake and feed their men with a smile (mostly high cholesterol stuff that many of today's guys will not touch with a barge pole). They are also sometimes extremely distressed (and this unfailingly spurs on a western hero) and occasionally one may take a gun in hand. More usually though they make the crustiest hero quake by just modulating their voices and calling one by his full name! There is always an undercurrent, a frisson of energy whenever a cowboy (apart from the man of the house) enters the lady's domain-the homestead. Then he lays down his machismo and bows with pleasure to milady's wishes-an old world touch that is charming to visualize.

> *...It is wonderful therefore to lay one's hands on Holt's maiden attempt. It is a judicious mix of fast paced action, plenty of skullduggery, lots of red herrings and even a murder and a bank robbery! The icing on the cake is a tender love story that unfolds softly in the background...*

Westerns are addictive. Those who have failed to enjoy its nuances may even call it boringly repetitive. After all how much action can one pack in, given the strict guidelines! One would be surprised at the answer and surely filled with admiration at the ingenuity of the writers who manage to provide fast paced action and limitless entertainment even though constrained by the restrictions. It is therefore unfortunate that Westerns as a genre are losing shelf space to other genres of fiction and romances.

It is wonderful therefore to lay one's hands (strictly speaking feast ones eyes) on Holt's maiden attempt. It is a judicious mix of fast paced action (including the mandatory shoot out rather early on), plenty of skullduggery, lots of red herrings and even a murder and a bank robbery! The icing on the cake is a tender love story that unfolds softly in the background. It is simply unbelievable that this is the author's first attempt at writing a novel. It is polished and the action flows smoothly with no narrative jerks. The characters are all present.. .the battle-scarred hero with a chip on his shoulder (a grouse against his bull-whip yielding father whose bones he later discovers), the horse riding, gun totting tomboy heroine who flowers into a dainty beauty in skirts but not before fending off the villains after her honour ("only two bullets left", she whispers sinking into her rescuer's arms), the crude brute of an overseer that who takes over from the long-murdered father, the bank manager who robs his own bank.but no, disclosing too much takes away the pleasure of discovery. Suffice to say the variety of well-etched characters is really extraordinary.

The language is easy on the ear-even that spoken by the cowboys rings true. The setting is authentic; one can almost see the horse's trail disappear on the pine leaves on the ground. There is an underground river, an almost abandoned secret gold mine.all the stuff that leaves one eagerly turning the pages as the action picks up breathless pace. In the end all the villains are rounded up (the jail bursts at the seams, the arch villain is murdered), old debts honoured, loyalty rewarded, stolen cattle recovered, misunderstandings sorted out, a couple of weddings (at least) and well, in short, alls well that ends well.

It is a novel of the old school-with a superb beginning, the adrenalin pumping build-up to the climax, the heart-stopping climax proper and a grand romantic finale with the hero and heroine united under the appreciative gaze of the girl's family. To sum up, Holt's first novel is so true to its genre (dying though it may be) that readers may well begin to chant, *Action, romance, guns and gore. Please let us have some more*.

-Sukanya Datta
Sukanya Datta is a prominent writer of Asia, having written several books on various subjects. She has been on the editorial panel of a leading science monthly of India. She has reviewed more than one thousand books in various newspapers, magazines and journals. She can be contacted at sukanyadatta@hotmail.com

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Interview with Anne Holt, the author of this book.

-Editor-in-Chief