



## The Dark Horse

*Craig Johnson*

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Walt doubts a confession of murder in this novel from the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Cold Dish* and *Dry Bones*, the fifth in the Longmire Series, the basis for the hit Netflix original series *LONGMIRE*

**Craig Johnson's *The Highwayman* and *An Obvious Fact*** are now available from Viking.

Fans of Ace Atkins, Nevada Barr and Robert B. Parker will love *The Dark Horse* is the fifth installment in *New York Times* bestselling author Craig Johnson's Longmire Mystery Series, the basis for *LONGMIRE*, the hit Netflix original drama series. Wade Barsad, a man with a dubious past and a gift for making enemies, burned his wife Mary's horses in their barn; in retribution, she shot him in the head six times, or so the story goes. But Sheriff Walt Longmire doesn't believe Mary's confession and is determined to dig deeper. Unpinning his star to pose as an insurance investigator, Walt visits the Barsad ranch and discovers that everyone in town--including a beautiful Guatemalan bartender and a rancher with a taste for liquor--had a reason for wanting Wade dead.

*From the Trade Paperback edition.*

## The Dark Horse Details

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## From Reader Review The Dark Horse for online ebook

### **Jeff Dickison says**

A good Longmire entry that I would have given 4.5 stars to if it hadn't bounced back and forth in time. I like my novels to unfold in linear fashion, if they can. This tale, while still quite good, could have been told that way, and would have been improved if it had been done so. Still a good read and recommended to Longmire fans.

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### **Jacqueline says**

First off let me just say I loved the dark horse's name, Wahoo Sue. Great name for a cutting horse. Well anyway another great entry in the series. Again, I listened to it on audio book. This is one of my favorite readers. Each character's voice is different and consistent and I can tell who is talking generally even without the name tags. The mystery was good. I liked the use of two different time lines. Description was good as always and as always I wanted to underline stuff. I thought I knew where the story was going but i was surprised when the villain was revealed. On to the next one!

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### **Algernon says**

*Most people go through their lives believing in things that they never have much contact with - the police, lawyers, judges, and courts. They have an unstated belief in the system; that it'll be impartial, fair and just. But then there's the moment when it comes to them that the police, the courtroom, and the laws themselves are just human, vulnerable to the same shortcomings as all of us, that they're a mirror of who we are, and that's the heartbreaking dychotomy of it all - that the more contact you have with the law, the less belief you have.*

And that's when you need somebody like 'Walt Long-arm-of-the-law, protector of lost women, lost dogs, and lost causes' Longmire. As his own Absaroka County is largely pacified, one of these lost causes is sent to his generally empty jailhouse to await trial. Mary Barsad is a self-confessed murderer, but Walt instincts tell him something is not right with her case. As his superiors probably intended all along, he takes it personally, and sets up to find out more about the woman and her crime.

In order to investigate the murder of Wade Barsad, Mary's husband, Walt must go undercover to Absalom - population 40 and all of them suspicious of strangers and authorities. The locals are giving him a real hard time, but Walt is not a quitter, and slowly he begins to gather evidence about the victim and his entourage.

The move away from Absaroka County brings a welcome change of air for the series and an occasion to steer closer to the classic western genre, not only by finally featuring horses, cowboys and Indians, sweeping vistas of Powder River and Twentymile Butte, even a barroom bare knuckles fight, but with the whole plot structure of the Lone Stranger come to bring justice to the lawless frontier town. The regulars of the series (Vic Moretti, Henry Standing Bear, etc) are all in with good scenes, but they play on the fringes of the main storyline. Dog has a much better exposure than in previous novels and he rises to the occasion admirably.

This latest book also has the bonus of offering a glimpse at Walt's childhood, as his parents farm is right here, near Powder River. Of

the new characters introduced my favorite is by far the 'miniature stagecoach robber' Benjamin - a ten years old tough man ( *In this country you don't touch a man's horse without his permission* ). I loved the way Walt handled him, never talking down or making fun of the little guy, stern and authoritative, yet open to all questions and considerate of the boy's feelings. The portraits of Mary Barsad and of Hershel, an old hand at her farm showcase why I like this series and the author so much : understated yet intensely emotional glimpses at broken, lonely people, lost in personal nightmares or in drink. Walt's empathy for their cause is explained in one passage that should be a matter of common sense to all of us:

*There was a lesson my mother had instilled in me at an early age, which had been reinforced by my experience in Vietnam and by my twenty-four years as sheriff of Absaroka County. She said I should protect and cherish the young, the old and the infirm, because at some point I would be all of these things before my own journey ended.*

A few words about the title : as with all good choices, it has multiple meanings, all of them valid :

*The origin of the phrase 'dark horse' is based on a story about a nineteenth-century breeder who would arrive in a strange town and pretend to be riding an ordinary pack animal, which was in truth a very fast black stallion. He'd enter the dark horse in a race and, when the horse would win (much to the surprise of the locals), he would pocket the prize money and more than a few bets on the side and move on to the next gullible community.*

- there's a rodeo prize horse missing (Wahoo Sue), burned in a suspect fire with all the rest of Mary Barsad's horses and insured for a hefty sum;
- Walt himself is a dark horse for the Absalom locals, an unknown entity come to their town to stir up trouble
- Wade Barsad the victim has some secrets in his past too, being either a fugitive from the East Coast Mafia or in the Witness Protection Program, or both.

- (view spoiler)

I used in the review to the first volume of the series a comparison to Dick Francis, the English crime writer who set most of his novels around the racetrack, featuring a stoic, intelligent, hardy protagonist with a passion for horses and very strong inner compass for right and wrong. **The Dark Horse** is the closest the Walt Longmire series has come to the British author style (read it and I believe you'll see why), and that's why I will close my review with one of Walt's remarks about horses:

*In my life, I have been kicked by horses and bitten by them. I've been stepped on, crushed against gates, and thrown to the ground, but I have also been nuzzled, rubbed against, carried by, nickered at, and warmed by the greta beasts. I thought of all the horses I'd known and couldn't think of a bad one.*

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## Suzy says

Classic Sheriff Walt Longmire! As with all of the mysteries in Johnson's Longmire series, this one includes a cast of vivid and interesting characters, a terrible crime that must be solved and lots of action. In The Dark Horse, Walt is taken out of Absaroka County to Absolom, Wyoming in a neighboring county along the Powder River. A man has been murdered and then incinerated in a fire that also killed several horses. The man's wife has confessed to the killing, but Longmire is certain that she did not do it. Walt goes undercover for the first time in this series as an insurance inspector to see if he can't figure out "who done it".

As always, Walt gets himself into terrible scrapes and ordeals on the way to solving the crime. Not only is he (as usual) injured during these scrapes and ordeals, but he mounts a horse (of the title) that is also injured to set chase to the suspected murderer. And, as always, Walt gets his man after much harrowing action where he and others lives are in danger. In all these books, the setting is an important part of the picture - Johnson creates wonderful visuals with his writing.

What is unusual about this book is that the usual cast of characters (Vic, Ruby, Henry Standing Bear, et al) play very background roles and there are very few red herrings. I was completely taken by surprise by the solve!

If you are an audiobook lover, these are some of the most satisfying books you can listen to. George Guidall employs his acting chops in the narration, bringing the Longmire mysteries to life in an extraordinary way. This particular audiobook includes an interview with the author. You can tell that Guidall loves narrating these books and the interview makes for a lively and informative conversation with Johnson.

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### **Carolyn F. says**

[ I thought the horse reunion would be more of a slow-motion running toward each other but it se

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### **Michael says**

An excellent entry in the series I love so much featuring Wyoming Sheriff Walt Longmire. This one is an “away game”, in which we get Walt by himself on a case without major contributions of his tough and lovely Detective Vic Moretti, bosom buddy Henry Standing Bear (“The Cheyenne Nation”), and lawyer daughter Katy. Walt has in his jail a woman who has confessed to shooting her husband Wade after he burned her beloved horses alive in their barn. He has some nagging doubts about her story, prompting him to go undercover as an insurance claims agent into the nearby county to investigate. He soon learns that Wade had some serious enemies and some characters who know more than they want to reveal, including the woman proprietor of the town’s only bar and an old cowboy that worked at Wade’s fancy ranch.

The action in the plot is a great variation on some classic Western themes. It gets Walt involved in a bar fight and in a dangerous mission alone on a horse by himself in a remote desert mesa. Of course he does have his trusty canine companion, Dog. When the bad guys put him in serious trouble, his last reserves of courage and ingenuity are called on to win the day. The safety of a young boy becomes a significant burden to his responsibilities, and he is able to draw bravery from him as if from his own self as a boy. A magnificent dark horse becomes a focal point for Walt to tame enough to use in an escape from danger. As typical, when Walt gets to the extremes of endurance, he gets hallucinatory visions that help him survive. Some pieces of the puzzle of Walt’s own origins and childhood are brought out in a satisfying way. Given how I like a good mystery and love it when the story gets me outdoors in beautiful country, this was a very satisfying tale for me.

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## **Thomas says**

This is book 5 in the Walt Longmire series. I enjoyed it and give it 4 out of 5 stars. Walt Longmire is the Sheriff of Absaroka County, Wyoming. The author says he is the Sheriff of "the least populous county in the least populous state." He accepts prisoners from other counties to help out with his budget. Mary Barsad is transferred to his jail from Campbell County. She is accused of murdering her husband. She confessed to the murder. But Walt suspects she is innocent. Her husband was accused of burning down a barn with seven of her beloved horses shortly before he was killed.

The insurance company executive doesn't want to pay if arson can be proved and asks Walt to go up to Campbell County to investigate on an undercover basis.

Walt agrees. One of the clues is the difference in the bird calls between the Eastern and Western Meadowlark. Walt and the author have way more ability than I do to differentiate bird calls. The author has written a good story, with some interesting plot twists, believable characters and some laugh out loud lines. I recently watched a video of Craig Johnson talking about his books, characters and dealing with Hollywood producers transforming his books into a TV series. If you like the books, you will like the video. I started reading these books after I started watching the TV series.

Here is a link to the video(from GR author site) <https://www.goodreads.com/videos/1984...>

If you decide to read these books, I suggest reading them in order.

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## **Bruce Snell says**

Book Number Five in the Walt Longmire series by Craig Johnson. Walt is working undercover in a neighboring county, seeking evidence that a murder suspect currently housed in his jail is not guilty of the murder to which she has confessed.

The story is told in alternating chapters with the first chapter being set in the present, and the next set several days ago when Walt first became involved with the case. The chapters continue to alternate with the "present" advancing in time as the investigation progresses, and the "past" moving forward in time towards the present.

Kate Barsad is accused of shooting her husband, Wade, six times with a rifle while he was asleep in their bed - and she allegedly shot him shortly after he set fire to their barn, burning the barn, part of the house, and all their horses. Of course Walt discovers what really happened, and solves the inevitable additional murders that happen during the investigation, but it is Wyoming and the people Walt encounters that make the story impossible to put down. Well, the characters and the humor of course. Walt has his dog, Dog, with him on this trip and that leads to some of the best dialog around.

"I locked the car, set the alarm so that it wouldn't go off with movement inside, took a deep breath, and told Dog not to play with the radio; it was our joke—he knew he could play with the radio if he wanted."

And writing like that will keep me coming back for more.

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## Carol. says

Review from <https://clsiewert.wordpress.com/2014/...>

I'm a fan of Walt Longmire (first review here), an aging sheriff who represents many solid Western values, including independence, justice and connection to land and history. This is the 5th book in the series, and for me, the weakest. Luckily, I already have the next in the series available.

The story begins with a woman named Mary Barsad who is transferred to Walt's tiny two-cell 'jail' as a means of making space—and revenue. And, just perhaps, the neighboring sheriff's sneaky way of arousing Walt's interest in the case. Mary is accused of murdering her husband Wade shortly after he burned down their barn, including her beloved horses trapped inside. Everyone agrees Wade had it coming, but since Mary confessed and has since refused to talk, a guilty sentence seems unavoidable.

Some days you are in the mood, and some you aren't, you know? Many of the ingredients I enjoyed previously are here: Walt's taciturn character, the brave Dog, the scrabble of the small town life, the rich description of the desolate setting, and the subtle humor. The narrative structure, however, was an utter fail for me—although by other reviews, I wouldn't say that's a universal opinion. It starts "October 27, 11 a.m." backtracks to "October 18: nine days earlier, morning," and then continues alternating forward through the two timelines until they dovetail. Apparently, I'm supposed to pay attention to the date in order to orient myself, but as a person that has a hard enough time remembering today's date, it didn't work. The result was a disjointed narrative that failed to achieve finesse or subtlety. Johnson used a similar technique in the prior book, *Another Man's Moccasins*, but as those stories were separated by decades as well as countries, there was a better sense of time and place.

My second issue might very well be present in all the other books, but I fancy there was a bit more subtlety in earlier books. This time, ingredients felt more boilerplate, and I have to wonder if Hollywood was showing its tendrils. Animal abuse clearly identified The Bad Guy(s). There was the single mother with Big Aspirations and her Observant and Gutsy kid. There was the Undercover Friend, sneaking into town to provide back-up. The Old Ranch Hand served as lead dog on the case. There was also the strange moment of Walt's generosity, which I realized later was a plot point to move the story to where it needed to go. It isn't that his being generous didn't make sense; it was the sheer unprecedented nature of it, in a county where most are living check to check. One of the solutions to a small mystery was telegraphed from the beginning, and there never was a good reason why Walt believed Anna was innocent.

Ending on a everything neatly tied note, I found myself wondering if it was time for a break. But the first chapter of *Junkyard Dog* was tacked on to the end of the book, and quickly found myself chuckling, so there's at least one more Walt story in my immediate future.

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## Harry says

### Update:

This is where we look at Walt's life as if in a great Western. Walt reconnects with his past and connects with

a huge, black beast: tortured, chained in place and left alone to die in the middle of the great plains, far away from civilization, in the snow, and wounded beyond belief:

*It was then that I saw something at the far edge of the circle. It was something dark and big, and it was rapidly moving my way. I thought it was the owl again, even thought it was the wrong color and didn't seem to be flying, and figured maybe he thought he'd found a culinary bonanza.*

*...Pain be damned, I yanked back and looked up at the thousand pounds of unrivaled fury. It was a horse, but only in the sense that the headless horseman's horse was a horse. I could hear the clanking of chains where the thing had come unfettered from hell, and I expected fire to blow from its nostrils at any moment.*

*...she was close enough that I could see where it had rubbed her raw and where the dried blood had stained her dark face. The harness was connected to a heavy, rusted logging chain that was in turn connected to a rock in the middle of the dark circle, and the length of links had torn and chafed the chest, barrel, and rump of the tortured animal.*

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Craig Johnson has written nine novels in his Walt Longmire series. Formerly a police officer; he has also worked as a educator, cowboy and longshoreman. Awards include Tony Hillerman Award, Wyoming Historical Society Award, Wyoming Council for the Arts Award, as well as numerous starred awards. Johnson was also a board member of the Mystery Writers' of America.

Craig Johnson as an artist, as a man who paints with words ascribes to the essential characteristic of what makes art different from anything else: only it can portray the world as the artist thinks it ought to be as opposed to how it is. *"Now a days, it's really hard to distinguish the good guys from the bad guys..."* he says in an interview. *"But Walt's a pretty good guy...the kinda guy if my car slithered off the road on I-80 in a blizzard, he's the guy I'd want to help me out."* Johnson admits to portraying Walt Longmire, the hero in this award-winning series, as *"The kinda guy my wife says I want to be in about 10 years."*

Starting from his choice of book title all the way to the final period at the end of the book Johnson's prose fills the reader's soul with a longing for the good. And where else is one to find it but in the fictional county of Absaroka, Wyoming and it's Sheriff Walt Longmire. As with the work of William Kent Krueger Johnson introduces readers to the Western concept of cowboys and indians. Growing up in the Netherlands, I read till late in the night the wildly popular series *Winnetou and Old Shatterhand* (not available in the States). When playing outside 6000 miles away from American soil, it wasn't cops and robbers we played, it was cowboys and indians. It was this image of America I held in my mind as a 12 year old boy standing on the deck of the U.S.S. Rotterdam as we sailed into New York Harbor and waited in the lines of Ellis Island to be granted access to my boyhood dreams.

Unlike older western novels, however, Johnson brings this cultural diversity into the 20th century and without delving into multi-culturalism brings us to that mystical nether region between the two where native american and white man meet each other half-way. Johnson's aim is at portraying a fictional world as it should be and this includes diversity. Henry, a native american is Walt's best friend. The indian community stands ready to aid the law, helps the white man bring justice regardless of race, color or creed. Walt Longmire, in a hallucinatory fit, dances with the Cheyenne spirits who guide him to safety in the midst of a devastating blizzard even though the unconscious man slung over his shoulders is a perpetrator against a Native American woman. Walt does not question his sanity afterwards. Craig Johnson's world is one we might all long for...and isn't that the purpose of art?

Too often I read book reviews where the reviewers seem to place verisimilitude above fiction. In my opinion, if you want reality, if you want to read about the way things are, then view a documentary, read a biography, check out reality TV. This is fiction, and if an author changes reality to suit his notion for the book, so be it...

For some, the first in the series moves along a bit slowly...but to them I would say: give this writer time to paint his world as he sees fit. Books that concentrate on rural settings often have the advantage of highlighting the human condition in startling clarity. Distractions such as are found in urban settings removed, we see good and evil and compassion in a more profound way. Wyoming's Absaroka County gives us this magnifying glass. I found the plot intriguing and the ending second-to-none. Truly, the titles are well chosen in these novels.

There's a huge fan base for Johnson's work out there. A fan base that is after values, the good kind. I'm reminded of my daughter's fascination with Taylor Swift, whose millions of fans adore her for precisely the same reason: her vision of 'the good'. There is a Renaissance occurring in a real world that at best can be portrayed as lost in the grey fog of compromised values; a Renaissance that has caught the attention of not only our youth, but all ages. And they are telling us what they want.

There's a reason A&E's *Longmire* series has been approved for Season #2. The first season sported A&E's #1 original-series premier of all time with 4.1 million total viewers. I plan to read this entire series and after that, I plan to view the A&E series (hopefully on Netflix where it is not yet available for down-streaming). Johnson, remarking on the television series agrees that he is 100% on board as the televised version is keeping very close to the books.

Unless there is a drastic divergence in subsequent *Longmire* novels, this review will be the same for all the Walt *Longmire* books.

Enjoy!

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### **Judith E says**

The writing by Craig Johnson and the Audible narration by George Guidall are as soothing as a rambling horse ride through the mountains of Wyoming. They are a perfect match.

In #5 of the *Longmire* mystery series, Sheriff Walter Longmire is unsure Mary Barsad should have been arrested for the arson of her house and the murder of her husband, even though she has confessed to the crimes. Walt goes undercover because the crime was not committed in his jurisdiction, and he discovers mob involvement with a twist at the end.

One of my favorite characteristics of Craig Johnson's writing is his humorous use of nicknames like 'Double Tuff', 'Little Outlaw', 'Man from Uncle' and 'Wa Hoo Sue'. In addition, his phrases of "Boy Howdy" and "The -Ar Saloon" make this a very fun listen. 4.5 stars.

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### **Scott says**

As I continue my *Longmire* series read, full disclosure requires that I openly admit I am a devoted fan of the

Longmire television show (on A/E and now Netflix) and have enjoyed reading the previous books in the Longmire book series that inspired that show even more. With that said, I am still doing my best to provide objective and an honest review.

“The Dark Horse” is the fifth book in the “Longmire” mystery series, continuing the fictional adventures of Walt Longmire, Sheriff of Absaroka County, Wyoming, his best friend, Henry Standing Bear, Vic Moretti, his loyal and outspoken deputy, and Dog, his faithful animal companion.

This time the story shifts back and forth between two moments in time – the beginning of a murder investigation and ten days later when Longmire goes undercover in the wild lawless town of Absalom, Wyoming. Johnson moves between the two in a seamless and smooth rhythm, keeping the reader engrossed in what happens next. While Longmire performs his covert operation as an insurance investigator, Johnson flashes back to introduce the woman arrested for killing her husband, Longmire’s lack of belief in her guilt, and his initial investigative research on the situation and suspects involved.

I personally found this approach by Johnson to be a strong way to keep the reader’s attention and build suspense. I felt like I was there with Walt every step of the way as he took on this personal crusade for justice, and especially surprised when a part of his childhood is revealed. This is the fifth book I’ve read in this series and I am impressed with how each of them had different structures and areas of focus for the characters. In addition, this outing provided one of the strongest action-oriented climaxes in the series. Johnson successfully finds different ways to tell his stories, while maintaining his own unique style and flow.

As for character development, since the emphasis is primarily on Walt’s dogged investigation, there is less interaction with Vic and Henry in this outing than in previous books. Cady is back in Philadelphia and offstage except for a phone call, but her romance with Vic’s younger brother continues to develop. Still, Longmire finds a few moments to continue his tension-filled flirting with badmouth Vic and Henry makes a strong appearance in the second half during Walt’s undercover activities.

“The Dark Horse” is a strong installment, one of the best of the first five in the series. Overall, a very worthy and enjoyable read.

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### **Nancy says**

I do not know if mildly depressed Wyoming Sheriff’s and Northern Cheyenne Indian’s are usually this funny, but I look forward to each book in the Walt Longmire series for this sole purpose. I am not going to say that Walt Longmire has a death wish, but that man sure can find himself in questionable situations. Who else in their right mind would try to go undercover in a town of forty people and not think that there might possibly be a chance of being shot at? Yeah, that should tell you a little about Walt and the sticky situations that he and his best friend Henry Standing Bear, a man who does not use contractions, usually find themselves in.

Mary Barsad is currently in Walt’s jail accused of killing her husband. Now, no one is saying that the man did not need killing; it is just that Walt does not think that Mary did it. She may have confessed, but Walt sees something in Mary and using his questionable judgment goes into the small town of Absalom, a town without pity, to pose as an insurance salesman to sort out the mess.

Walt should have known right off that he was not cutout for undercover work when a young child and his mother, a Guatemalan immigrant with a two-year college degree in criminal justice see right through his disguise. In for a penny, in for ten pounds of bad luck, Walt digs deeper into the whole Barsad story and what he finds out surprised me with a couple of twists and a whole lot of humor.

I truly wonder what dialogue goes on in the head of Craig Johnson when he is trying to figure out what Henry and Walt will say to each other. These two men have history; they have respect and somewhere in their years together, Henry learned that Walt would not always think situations through and because of this he is there with his words and stories to help Walt see the bigger picture – and to save his butt.

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### **Joel Neff says**

This was the first of the Longmire books to do less than stun me into an engrossed trance and I am hard pressed to put a finger on why. The action is good, the mystery is good, the story is, in short, good. But. There were two problems I had reading the book that are neither one a fault of the book itself and more to do with the circumstances surrounding it: the first problem is that this story was used as the basis for an episode of the television show. It was, of course, different on t.v. and not necessarily for the better, but it did put expectation in my head as to where the story was going. When the book did not meet some of those expectations, it was hard to not be a little disappointed.

The second problem, and the bigger one, in my opinion, is that a large part of the appeal of the Longmire world is the secondary characters. The book's are about Sheriff Walt Longmire, sure, but they're also about Henry Standing Bear, Vic Moretti, Cady Longmire, and Ruby. And none of those secondary characters are in this particular book save for the odd paragraph or two. None of them are central to the story, which takes place outside Durant, and, as a result, the book is lacking just a little.

Having said all that, this story is about horses and they way they can reveal peoples' character just be being the magnificent beasts that they are. And that, coupled with the usual range of interesting new characters, locations, and revelations about Walt's past, makes for a pretty good book. Recommended.

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### **Mark says**

This is Walt Longmire in western mode and at the same time him doing a PI stint in another county.

It all starts when a certain Mary Barsand get a cell in Longmire's county jail, she did confess to the murder of her husband by shooting him six times in the head. At the same time her farm and horses got burned in a great fire. When Walt gets her talking he finds himself doubting her guilt.

Walt Longmire goes undercover and he does not do a very good job as more and more people seem to know about him. Even the coming ov his best friend Cheyenne Nation in the form of Henry does not make it any easier.

Who killed the husband, why burn the house and the stables containing all horses loved by the woman who trained them. Why the heck does the federal government want Mary behind bars as quick as possible and

why are two sheriffs less convinced about her guilt.

We get to learn how Walt is around kids and horses. We get pursuits on horseback and Walt going all cowboy on his readers. And we learn a wee bit more about a Young Walt.

Of all the regular characters we only see Vic, Ruby and Henry in short moments and they are great as always.

When the smoke clears on this mystery Walt just got re-elected for another 4 year period of sheriff in his own county. And you know you want to read more about sheriff Longmire and his people.

To be honest in season 1 of the tv show "Longmire" there is an episode that is based upon this novel, truth be told while it is different and works quite well the book is easily better.

Once again well worth your reading time, but start at the beginning and go on the voyage with Walt Longmire.

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