

A SAM ACQUILLO HAMPTONS MYSTERY

CHRIS KNOPF BLACK SWAN



Black Swan

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Sailing back from Maine, Sam Acquillo, the hero of four Sam Acquillo Hamptons Mysteries from The Permanent Press, his girlfriend Amanda Anselma and screwball mutt Eddie Van Halen get blown off course by a dangerous gale. With damaged boat and frayed nerves, they limp into the closest harbor, which happens to be on Fishers Island, NY, a distant and altogether disassociated scrap of Long Island.

A summer preserve for the oldest old money in America, and defended by year-round denizens who safeguard their island's insularity with xenophobic fervor, Sam and Amanda are hardly welcomed with open arms. Unless they're the arms of the young and beautiful Anika Fey, daughter of the owner of the Black Swan, the island's only hotel, who's only too eager to fold Sam into her embrace.

But feminine wiles aren't the only hazard faced by Sam and Amanda. They're soon swept up in big-money intrigue, dark conspiracy, brutality, murder and the machinations of high-tech millionaires, to say nothing of the autumn storms that lash the island with wind and wave.

In the years since losing everything, Sam has fought his way back, to an existence that even he believes is worth preserving. And now, bad timing and a broken rudder could result in the greatest loss of all—his life.

Black Swan Details

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From Reader Review Black Swan for online ebook

Irene says

Black Swan churns with unpredictable intensity as torrential storms erratically disperse the East Coast's calm waters shortly after the newly crafted *Carpe Mañana* begins its carefully charted maiden voyage under the proficient navigation of its provisional Captain Sam Acquillo, faithful first mate Amanda Anselma and affable cur Eddie Van Halen when fulminating squalls confirm NOAA's ominous warnings and unceremoniously disrupt their Hamptons' bound nautical mission.

With a captain's stalwart determination to avoid any perilous weather that might further damage his vessel beyond the reparable faulty helm, Sam precariously moors his entire precious cargo to an asylum harbour covertly attached to the privately secluded Fishers Island an exclusive enclave restricted to generational "old money," and a minute rich summer crowd. Further proof that neither Sam, his crew nor his disabled craft are welcome appears in the form of one brutish caretaker with an unyielding warning as abysmally dismal as NOAA's impending forecast.

Chris Knopf, so richly adept in the metaphoric use of turbulent weather whips up a whirling tempest which encompasses a motley crew, most of whom noticeably belie Fishers Island's elitist prerequisites. Sam stumbles upon the island's lackluster *Black Swan* hotel's elusive new owners, aptly named Fey who obviously lack the congenial disposition necessary to succeed in the hospitality profession. Churning in Sam's inquisitive mind are the subtle cryptic secrets underlying such a radical departure for former corporate high-end computer techie Christian and his family to so drastically switch gears. Therein lays the conundrum which accelerates with the arrival of corporate villains, murder and mayhem, wandering autistic savant son Axel, deceptively alluring synesthethic bruised daughter Anika and Sam's "chronic inappropriateness" in delving into a swirling scenario in the midst of what Sam defines as "...an indiscriminate beast, blind and relentless and ultimately doomed, but impossible to ignore, foolish to deny...", in this case, a devastating October hurricane. With the exception of "...ultimately doomed...", categorically a fitting and suitable definition of Sam Acquillo, newfound fictional friend.

Allison Campbell says

BLACK SWAN comes out in May, and I'm reviewing it now so you have a chance to read the first four books in the series before picking it up.

Sam Acquillo is a rarity in series fiction: the protagonist who starts out at rock bottom and stays interesting as he gets his life together. At this stage of his development, he is marooned on an unfriendly island off the tip of Long Island with his girlfriend, Amanda and dog, Eddie. Poor Sam. All he ever really wants to do is be left alone, but his senses of justice and chivalry once again see him embroiled in a dangerous mess. With more severe weather in the forecast, he is forced to seek shelter at the island's inn, the *Black Swan*, where the owner's daughter, Anika, is a lovely young thing with an eye for Sam. When Sam suspects that a suicide at the inn is the result of foul play, his nature does not permit him to walk away, despite the danger. Sam fears for Anika's safety, and for that of her computer genius brother, who appears to be the target of some very

unsavory people.

In essence, this is a locked-room mystery, with the weather serving to keep the island relatively cut off from the mainland. The supporting characters keep secrets and tell lies, making for a mystery of satisfying complexity. This would be melodramatic if it weren't for Knopf's wicked sense of humor. He adds levity at just the right moments to alleviate the tension:

"I introduced her to Amanda, who complimented Anika on her leather choke collar. I'd lived among women long enough to know this was a peace ritual, an expressed hope for boundaries to be respected and good will shared among all. Anika responded with a demure glance toward the ground, a fondling of the observed object, and a suggestion that it would look far better on Amanda, given her long, slender neck. I wondered if I should now piss on the grass at Amanda's feet, anthropologically speaking" (pp. 35-6; uncorrected proof).

Sam is a complex fellow, a former boxer and former engineer who left corporate America for a quiet life by the water. His experience with solving complex problems, not to mention his right hook, have helped him get to the bottom of some thorny mysteries in the past. In the first book, he has hit rock bottom, but he is not indifferent. **BLACK SWAN** is the fifth book in the series. Sam has grown as a person, but Knopf has kept him complex and unpredictable. Sam is wittier than your usual hard-boiled detective, more competent than your usual amateur sleuth, and he sometimes lets his inner boxer get the better of him. He may know exactly what he ought to do, and then do the opposite. There are no ruts or predictable patterns in this series.

Knopf is equally at home describing the finer points of sailing in a storm, how to sabotage software, or the best self-defense moves in close quarters, and his clarity, wit, and precise language are the perfect backdrop for an engaging mystery. I highly recommend that you begin with **THE LAST REFUGE**.

FTC Source Disclosure: I received an ARE courtesy of The Permanent Press.

Krys Hammond says

This review is for a galley copy received through the Goodreads First Reads giveaway program.

I going to be honest. After trying for two months, I couldn't finish this book. There's nothing wrong with the writing itself--Chris Knopf does just fine with his prose. But the first third of the book is pretty slow. It takes a long time for the main thrust of the mystery to be introduced (a murder). And I just didn't connect with the characters.

Now. Keep in mind that this was my first Sam Acquillo novel. I don't think this is a good jumping-in point. If you're interested in these novels, I recommend starting at the beginning (I think book one is called **The Last Refuge**).

This book simply was not my cup of tea. There is no reason why it might not be yours, especially if you're already reading this series and enjoy these characters.

I've given this book three stars because I feel like that's the most neutral rating I can give. I don't want to hurt a good author's ratings just because the book wasn't for me. I'd be fine with trying out another book from this author, as long as it's the first book of a series or a stand-alone novel.

Jenny says

When I found out I was going to receive this book, I borrowed the first book from the library. I could not get into it so I put it down and picked up this book. I felt like this book was much more entertaining.

The book started out with action immediately. Sam and his girlfriend, Amanda, are caught in a storm while sailing. They get stranded on an island and encounter some questionable characters. Soon bodies start turning up and no one is able to get on or off the island due to the storms. Sam takes it upon himself to find out what is happening on this island.

I found the book entertaining and suspenseful. At times the descriptions became a little too technical but I did not feel it detracted from the overall feel of the book. I am sure some of those descriptions were beneficial to someone who knows more about boats but to people, like myself, who do not know much about boats it was too much to truly comprehend.

The character development was well written. Although I had not read the previous books, I did not find it made it hard to read this book. Knopf did a good job giving background on the characters so new readers would understand them but not so much detail that previous readers would be bored.

After reading this book, I am interested in picking up the first book again. I look forward to reading more Chris Knopf books in the future.

(I received this book from LibraryThing in exchange for a review.)

Erin says

October storms out on the Atlantic Ocean near the Northern states can be catastrophic to say the least. First, they come out of nowhere, making the last weather report from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration about as useful as a bag of mismatched shoes. Second, even the smallest of storms can whip up the wind to 40 knots and the gusts to 60. But, Sam Acquillo, his girlfriend Amanda, and his dog Eddie would say that the meanest hurricane of the Atlantic coast's season is nothing compared to the wrath of God, man, and beast at the Black Swan inn on Fishers Island Sound off the coast of New York!

A former engineer, Sam embraced a life of hard work after a political upheaval cost him his career and everything he ever worked for. Going with the flow, his current profession was to deliver a boat to his deep pocketed benefactor. A sudden storm and a broken rudder sweep Sam and Amanda onto the most xenophobic, blue-blood island in the free world where they are caught up in the intrigue of the oddball inn owners and the off season guests; a team of executives from a software industry giant. When one of these executives turns up dead by hanging in the shower, Sam isn't sure if it's empathy for the innkeeper's daughter, the impending hurricane, or his love of a good mystery that keeps him on the island long after the boat is fixed and his safety is non-existent.

Chris Knopf weaves an intriguing tale of adventure and mystery with a protagonist that is a cross between Steven Seagal, Sam Spade, and side characters so kooky that they would be at home in an Agatha Christie

novel. Black Swan is the 5th installment in Knopf's Sam Acquillo Hamptons Mystery series, a series that has become widely popular in the "UK, Canada, Japan, Spain, Turkey, Italy, and China" (excerpt from the inside cover). One of the books in the series was a "Recommended Summer Reading" in the New York Times Book Review while another won the 2008 Ben Franklin Award for Best Mystery.

Joanne says

Meh.

Denise says

I picked this up because the sailboat in the storm caught my attention immediately.

I am always irritated by middle age male authors writing the same age male characters that have 20 year old girls chasing them --you wish buddy!

Implausible weather adds to plot, collection of very odd characters but it all comes together in the end. I was pleased to finish it in 3 days - a good vacation read, don't think about it too hard.

Amber says

Decent enough for a distraction time audiobook. The author is reader. I got used to it, but it maybe could have been better. Definitely a "bro" mystery. No matter how much the author tries to make the lead palatable to actual women, he still comes off as pretty much an entitled douchebag. I did enjoy all the oceany stuff though.

Sheila says

Black Swan is the fifth of author Chris Knopf's Sam Acquillo Hamptons mystery series and the first where the action doesn't actually take place in the Hamptons. As a stand-alone novel it's a character-driven mystery filled with excitement, sailing, scenery and intrigue, and a great introduction to a really great character and series. Sam is piloting his friend Burton Lewis's new sailboat home from Maine and takes refuge from a dramatic storm on Fishers Island, NY—a private island whose inhabitants have no great love of intruders. Gale force winds and waves the size of houses are so convincingly portrayed I feel I might really have been on such a boat; I haven't and never will, since the ocean terrifies me, but the author brings the drama powerfully to life with storytelling as filled with poetry as with excitement. Amanda, a woman Sam has come to love in previous books, and the wonderful Eddie (his dog) share the adventure and the trip, while off-boat are "outsiders" Anika and Axel Fey who, together with their father, hope to make a go of the Black Swan hotel and restaurant despite local disapproval.

The author peoples Fishers Island with well-defined three-dimensional characters, just as surely as he's

peopled the Hamptons in previous volumes. Police procedure is simple, straightforward and dangerous. Death, murder and relationships are closely observed. Landscape and weather form a backdrop as filled with character as the story itself, and the mystery is nicely low-key, perfectly timed and tuned to the parallel mysteries of Sam's own feelings for his future and past.

Describing computer programs, ship's steering systems, people, weather and place all with the same sure confidence, Chris Knopf has written another masterful mystery with characters who continue to learn and grow, adding breadth to depth and ever moving forwards to the promise of more. There's no need to read the other books before reading this one, but if you haven't you'll find it hard to resist going out to look for them. Sam Acquillo is a complex wounded soul on a journey that's well worth following; knocked down by life's storms, he stands up and finds himself drawn into other people's fights, thereby redeeming his own.

Disclosure: I was sent a bound galley of Black Swan from the publisher, the Permanent Press, in exchange for an honest review.

Debbie Maskus says

This is my first endeavor into the world of Sam Acquillo, the fifth novel in a series centered in the Hamptons. This novel skirts from the Hamptons and has Sam and Amanda battling the elements on a sailboat journey from Maine to the Hamptons. Knopf spends over half the novel detailing all the nautical adventures, a little too much for this land lover. The characters are well described, as well as the current weather conditions. The weather and the sailboat reign as the main characters. Then the detour into the workings of software programming and of the software developers ruined any pleasure that this novel might have elicited. The weak attempt of Anika to seduce Sam unfolds like a Harlequin romance. This is not a series to garner my attention.

PaulC says

First 3 cd's were great. Really, opens strong. Enjoyed the sailing and felt like I was on board. I had trouble following who the minor characters were. The motivations and back story behind what some of the characters do is very complex and wasn't very believable. I was not happy with who the killer turned out to be and could not see that character doing something like that. Late in the book as the action is supposed to be building things felt drawn out. I will go back to David Baldacci but I've read most of his books.

J. says

First I'd like to thank Good Reads and Permanent Press for giving me the opportunity to read and review this book through the goodreads FirstReads contests.

This is my first foray into the Sam Acquillo series or anything from Chris Knopf. I had high hopes for this based on the description, and at first it looked as if I was going to suffer a major letdown, but after an amazingly overwritten and overdetailed description only a sailor could truly appreciate that initially sets up the story, we finally get to meeting our characters and the story improves dramatically from there.

Some characters lack in depth because we get far more detail about how the steerage of the *Carpe Manana* works than we get for some of the characters. These leaves you with some questions. Certain characters which Acquillo meets almost in passing are seemingly willing to help him throughout the novel, but since you do not really get enough detail on these characters, you are left wondering why they go to such great lengths to help somebody they have just met.

There are enough twists and turns in the plot to keep you guessing throughout the novel, some of which are intriguing, some are clearly telegraphed so far ahead you can see them coming, and others that are... questionable to a point of disappointment.

If you like thrillers with lots of dead ends to keep you guessing, then you will enjoy this novel. If you like a more noire type mystery and crime novel, you may find this a bit lacking in clues and details (except for the boat, which you will know more about than you will ever care to read about).

I may give another Acquillo novel a try, and hope that others don't take place on the high seas.

September says

First off, before I say anything else, I give the condition that this is the first Sam Acquillo (or Chris Knopf) book I have read. With that out of the way, I'll continue on.

I found *Black Swan* hard to get into, to say the least. Characters were either flat or plain unlikable due to a largely absent moral compass. Few to no values were stood up for, although I will give Sam a little credit for trying to be honorable, though the venture felt half-hearted. There was such a selfishness prevalent in everyone—Sam and Amanda's relationship is a good example.

As for the mystery, it took too long to initiate. After which, the majority of the story was asking people repeated questions, receiving repeated answers, and Sam's inner dialogue that rehashed the same thing over and over. I found it difficult to care about what was going on even when the “mystery” was referenced. In the end, I skimmed almost anything not dialogue and still managed to follow the climax.

The weak attempt at wit—soon replaced with profanity—was another point subtracted from the overall quality of the story. Instead of there being swearing just because it was there, it seemed to be the crutch the author leaned on when unsure of what else to do. One or two characters having the personality to swear left and right, I can understand. Every character? Now, that's just lazy.

Perhaps this was just not my type of mystery, or my type of characters. Each person likes something different, but this was definitely not my cup of tea, and I will be making an effort to avoid this author on future occasions.

Wisteria Leigh says

BLACK SWAN[return]A Sam Acquillo Hamptons Mystery [return]by Chris Knopf[return]The Permanent Press[return]May 2011[return]\$28.00, 304pages[return]978-1-57962-216-9[return][return]Synopsis from The Permanent Press[return][return]A savage storm maroons Sam Acquillo, his girlfriend Amanda and charming nut-case pooch Eddie Van Halen on a nearly-deserted island off the tip of Long Island. Not just any island, but an enclave of old money eccentrics, xenophobic natives and a family of high tech refugees threatened by vicious mercenaries and secrets of their past.[return][return]Sam just wants to fix his boat and move on, but tempests both manmade and meteorological take over, and suddenly everything is on the line, including his own life. ~The Permanent Press[return][return]My Review[return][return]It's not often I fall in love with a character in a novel, but Sam Acquillo is a viable understudy for a lead stand-in for the few who come to mind. Competition is tough, but his clever wit and boldness is reminiscent of a few, a Macguiver type comes to mind. Women can love this guy, because he is charming, yet not full of himself, an embraceable quality. He is boyishly respectful and shy around women and loves his dog, Eddie an animated little mutt. After abandoning his engineering career to become a carpenter he has appointed himself part-time crime detective. [return][return]In this his fifth novel of the series, he and his girlfriend Amanda take refuge on Fishers Island during a storm. They are on their way to deliver the newly purchased sailboat, Carpe Ma

Amy says

Chris Knopf's new mystery, Black Swan, starts out in a sailboat fighting through a life-or-death storm and ends with an exciting who-done-it conclusion, however the middle just doesn't quite live up to the promise or the finish. To be fair, I haven't read the first four Sam Acquillo novels and I think having a history with the main characters Sam and his girlfriend Amanda would have made me feel more involved with them as a reader. As it was though, Amanda fell flat - she was just the sassy boat chick the main character kept leaving behind - and Sam seemed overly obsessed with crimes that didn't involve him. The mystery was good and the storm sequences were exciting.

The book was entertaining enough for me to read the other books should I come across them but not quite interesting enough for me rave about it to my compadres.
