

***Dark Horse***

Mike Langan

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Reviewed by Richard R. Blake for Reader Views (11/07)

In his new book, "Dark Horse," Mike Langan takes the reader behind the scenes and drama of the courtroom to reveal the power, greed, selfishness, and political maneuvering that draw the reader into the intrigue which makes the genre of the legal and justice system so popular. Litigation and settlement are seen in a new light as Langan develops his characters in this fast-moving, legal mystery novel.

Nicky Rigopoulos, a personal injury lawyer, with a reputation of being slick as a result of his long history of TV advertising, is running for judge in Syracuse, N.Y. Within hours after the bludgeoning death of his campaign manager, Nicky finds himself being framed for her murder.

Nicky soon realized the only way to clear his name was to find the real killer himself. After a second murder, Nicky's wife, a zealous reporter blanketed the TV news with Nicky's picture, already recognized, by the public, from his ads and campaign activities. A witness that could vouch for Nicky's whereabouts at the time of the first murder was found shot to death. A reward is offered for information leading to Nicky's arrest. The frenzied manhunt became even more intense.

Nicky, his defense attorney Diz, a few loyal friends, and family members become amateur sleuths in the complex undercover operation that follows. Nicky shaved his head and his beard to pass himself off as a Hell's angel, a farmer, and a psychotic football fan.

Mike incorporates relevant comments on national news, current events, references songs and music and compares his characters and situations to well-known classic movies and personalities from the entertainment industry. He builds in some insights from psychology. The character flaws are obvious in the dysfunctional personalities of his characters. Langan uses parody as his characters overreact or show no reaction to situations where trauma might be a normal response.

Langan uses a character-driven plot with extensive dialog to develop both his characters and the plot. Although his characters are exaggerated composites, I felt a genuine empathy with some and disrespect for others. Langan brilliantly created feelings of emotion, attitude, anger, frustration, insecurity, loyalty, and integrity. His dialog provides insight and information regarding the legal process within the justice system. Just when you think a rambling conversation is on the edge of becoming tedious, Langan drops another unexpected critical bombshell, building even more momentum into the frame-up against his protagonist, Nicky Rigopoulos.

Numerous suspects, motives, and means are introduced throughout the complex storyline. Matching wits with detective Halliday and Nicky's attorney, Diz, became a challenge. I wonder how I could have missed the clues that pointed to the real murderer revealed in the unexpected dramatic conclusion.

Mike Langan's first novel "Dark Horse" is destined to fill a unique notch in the Legal Thriller genre. I found "Dark Horse" to be a thoroughly entertaining read. I am looking forward to Langan's next novel.