

Hoofing It

Book reviews by Baylis Greene

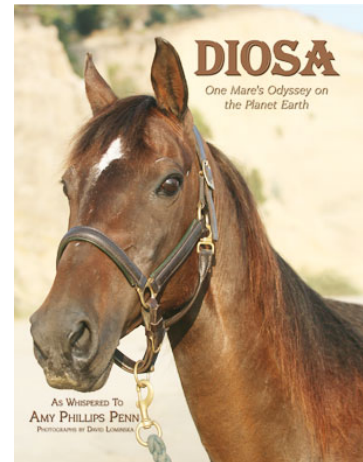
“Diosa”

Amy Phillips Penn

AuthorHouse, \$19.95

(Aug. 20, 2009) Let’s call it a bold move. In “Diosa,” Amy Phillips Penn has written a first-person account in the voice of a horse.

The book is subtitled “One Mare’s Odyssey on the Planet Earth,” and though a La-La Land “pet psychic” makes an appearance, it is largely a tale of survival and escape in which the earth isn’t something to commune with but rather a hostile force that leads people to cower in bathrooms and animals to jump out of their skins.



Ms. Penn is a former society columnist who has written for The New York Post, The Palm Beach Daily News, and Town & Country magazine. She used to live in East Hampton. Now she lives and plays polo in Indio, Calif., which Richard Mineards, another New York gossip veteran, described in The Santa Barbara News-Press recently as being “a tiara’s toss from Palm Springs.”

Diosa’s odyssey begins in Wellington, Fla. (And by the way, the story digresses to Southampton by way of its polo club as Ms. Penn visits all corners of the geographical — or golden or iron, depending on your view — triangle traveled by the horsey set.) The polo pony has seen one too many hurricanes: the roof of her barn sheared off, giant water troughs bouncing across a field like so many tumbleweeds. So as another storm bears down, she joins Max, a show jumping member of her species, Holly, a golden retriever, and her “b.p.f.” (best person forever; the book is intended for young readers) in abandoning the so-called Sunshine State for one with considerably more sunshine.

The problem is that the tinderbox that is Southern California’s chaparral and oak and pine ignites shortly after the quartet’s arrival. As the hot Santa Anas blow, birds take flight and chipmunks scatter. In Diosa’s words, “As if struck by a lightning bolt, the horse next to me became unhinged. He leapt into midair, and twisted and turned, like he was trying to get a fly off him.” Nay, it was hot embers.

Ms. Penn succeeds in getting inside a horse’s brain — a neat trick, given its size. As the smoke from the wildfires thickens and nears, Diosa thinks, “Darker, closer, darker, closer, darker, and closer.”

Things can get hairy out there in the desert. It’s not all imported palms and biblical references. And then a horse trailer arrives.