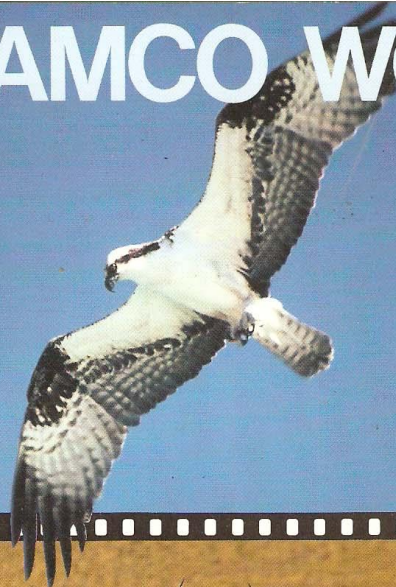


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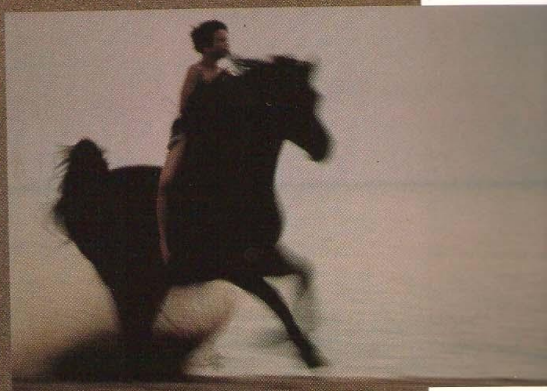
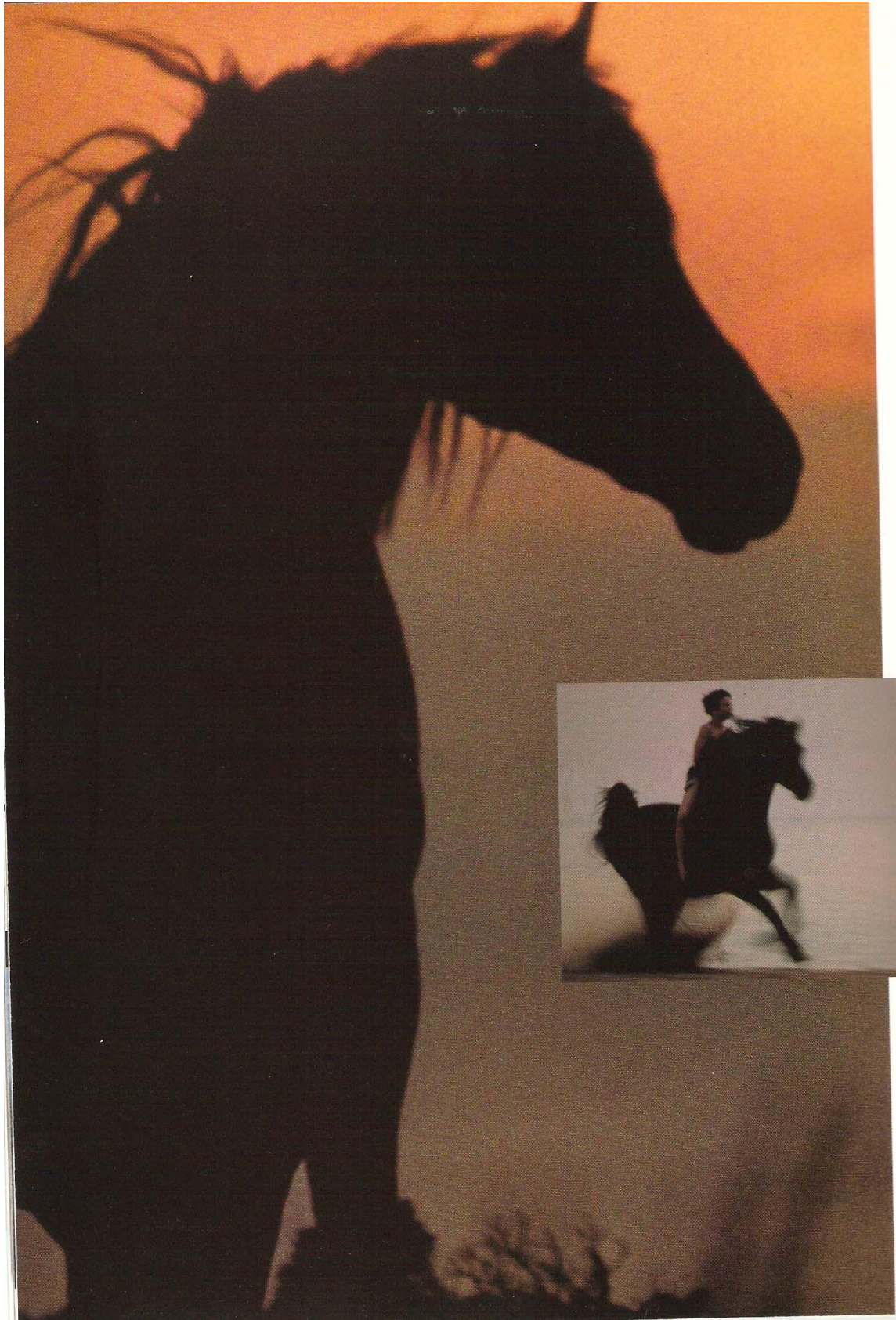


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The **BLACK** is **BACK**

WRITTEN BY BRIAN CLARK
PHOTOGRAPHED BY TIM FARLEY

And so begins *The Young Black Stallion*, the newest book in the acclaimed children's series that began with the publication of Walter Farley's original *The Black Stallion* in 1941. Farley co-authored his latest – and 21st – book with his son Steven, though he died a few months before it could be published.

Millions of children around the world have fallen asleep with visions of the Black Stallion, the most famous fictional horse of the 20th century, galloping through their minds. At least 12 million of the action-packed Black Stallion books have been sold worldwide, according to children's editor Eugenia Fanelli of Random House – including an edition published in Saudi Arabia in Arabic. Farley's Black Stallion books are considered the most successful children's horse series ever written.

***“The colt of colts has been foaled!”
Thus spoke powerful Sheikh Abu Ja
Kub ben Ishak, the noble leader of a
mountain kingdom to the east of the
Great Arabian Central Desert, and
a renowned horse breeder.***

The Black Stallion legend reached millions more fans in the late 1970's and early 1980's when the first two books were made into movies. The first, based on and named after *The Black Stallion*, was produced by Frances Ford Coppola and won praise from critics for its photography.

The Black Stallion began with the abduction of “Shetan,” as Sheikh Ishak had named the Black, from the Arabian Peninsula. It led readers young and old through a dreadful shipwreck on a desert coast and, after the horse saved, and was saved by, a young American named Alec Ramsay, depicted their life together in New York state. With Alec astride him, The Black was unbeatable in races but, unhappily, his growing fame attracted the villains who had originally stolen the horse from the sheikh.

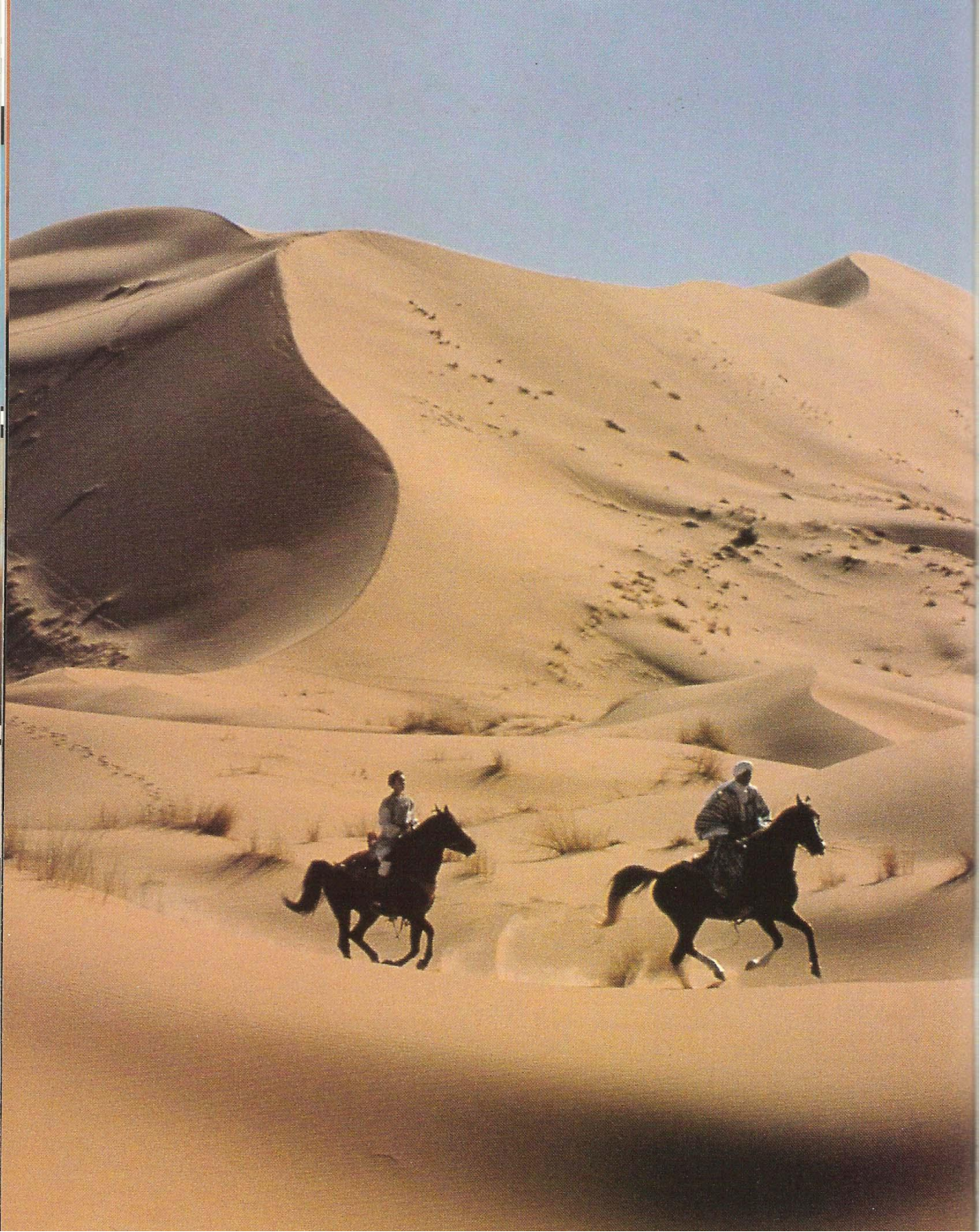
In the second novel, *The Black Stallion Returns*, Sheikh Ishak arrives in America with legal ownership papers to reclaim

Shetan. Alec must say goodbye to his beloved Black and falls into depression – until a wealthy breeder asks him to go to Arabia to look for Shetan and other fine breeding stock to improve America's Thoroughbred lines. Arriving in the fictional mountain kingdom, Alec joins forces with Sheikh Ishak to do battle with the evil horse thief – who has stolen Shetan from Sheikh Ishak once again. Alec rescues Shetan and, at Sheikh Ishak's request, rides The Black in a race matching the finest Bedouin horses. When Alec wins, the sheikh promises him the first foal sired by the Black Stallion out of his own prize mare, Johar. With that promise, Alex heads back to the United States for many more years of adventures. In only one subsequent book, *Black Stallion Mystery*, does Alex return to the sands and mountains of the Arabian Peninsula.

In the new book, published last December, followers of the Black Stallion learn what Shetan's life was like as a colt, in the years before he was stolen from his mountain home. It's a question, according to Steven Farley, that readers have been asking for 49 years.

The Young Black Stallion begins one night when an evil band raids Sheikh Ishak's mountain stronghold to capture the powerful colt, who, legend says, was sired by the dark horse that lives in the Horsehead Nebula of the constellation Orion. He is bigger and more agile than other horses in Sheikh Ishak's herd; full-grown, he will stand more than 17 hands tall – as big as a Thoroughbred. The colt escapes the raiders by heading higher and higher into the mountains, fleeing up steep canyons on trails that only the nimble ibex can scale. The horse thieves write him off for dead.

But Shetan – later to be The Black – is not alone. Rashid, the scout who had led the raiders to Sheikh Ishak's pastures and was then stripped of his gun and horse and abandoned, follows the colt in the high mountains, at one point battling a 200-pound (90-kilogram) leopard that has attacked The Black.





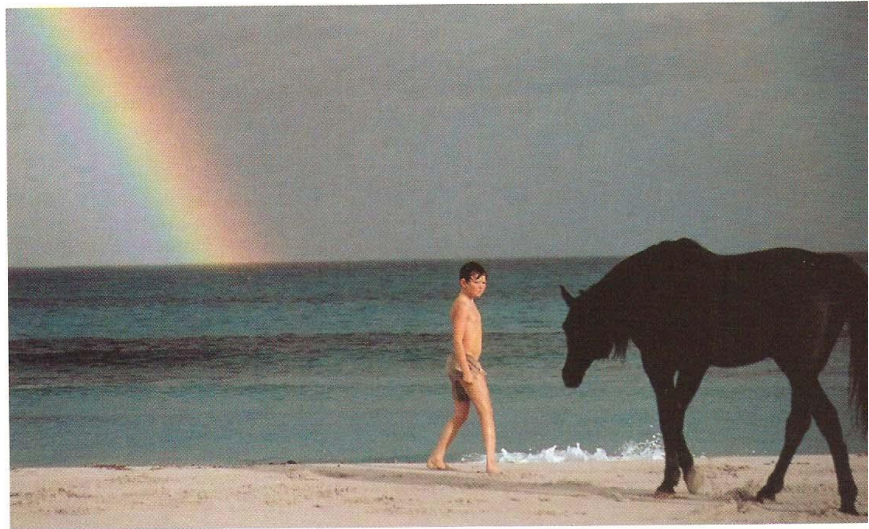
Eventually Rashid and the colt become wary friends. Rashid still wants to capture Shetan, to sell him and make his fortune. The colt trusts no man but Sheikh Ishak. When, after months of wandering, Rashid and the colt make it out of the mountains, Sheikh Ishak – whose prize falcon has tracked Rashid – is waiting with his men to reclaim his horse. Within minutes of Rashid's capture, however, Sheikh Ishak's band is attacked by another raiding party. Once again the colt is stolen, this time to be sold to an English breeder and shipped aboard the ill-fated vessel that will sink in the early pages of *The Black Stallion*.

Like *The Black Stallion* and *The Black Stallion Returns*, the new book is filled with abundant facts about horses. It is also laced

“Dad's genuine love of horses shines through in all his books,” says Steven. Walter Farley suffered a stroke in 1988 and died at his home in Florida last year, but Steven knows well how the Black Stallion series came about: He grew up with it.

“In my father's mind, this was an imaginary, make-believe land and it was an imaginary horse. He was just spinning a good yarn. There are no political boundaries in his books. He wanted a faraway location and he picked the Arabian Peninsula because it was the source of Arabian horses. He wove in a lot of background, as we did in the newest book, but nothing is based on real, hard facts except the information about horses,” says Steven.

The younger Farley is 35 and lives in Manhattan. He has written for children's



with information about the clothing, food and culture of the Arabian Peninsula, and with Arabic words – though their transliterations are sometimes imaginative. *The Young Black Stallion* avoids ethnic stereotypes, with plenty of white hats and black hats on both sides of every encounter. There is no question, however, that the leader of the horse thieves wears the blackest hat of all.

One could assume that Walter Farley had spent time on the Arabian Peninsula, or worked or studied somewhere in the Arab world to research his books. In fact, according to his son Steven, his information about the Arabian Peninsula for the first two novels came entirely from the New York Public Library. Farley did come by his horse information firsthand, though, having spent countless days as a youth with an uncle who was a horse trainer in upstate New York.

magazines and, earlier in his career, was a long-haul truck driver, taking loads between Europe and the Middle East, traveling extensively in Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Morocco when he was in his 20's, looking for adventure. He also worked on the production of the Black Stallion movies, as did his brother, Tim, a Los Angeles photographer who produced a coffee-table book from each of the films.

According to Steven, his father “fell in love with the romantic image of the Arabian horse as a child. I think it totally captured him,” he says. “Today, the Arabian is a well-known and highly valued breed in the United States, but 40 or 50 years ago, that wasn't so. Arabians were fairly rare and Dad had to rely on a few books for reference. He had always been a reader.

“Dad learned about the customs of the Bedouins and came to love the way they treated their horses and even kept them in



their tents. He admired their traditions of honor and their ethics," Steven says.

Walter Farley conceived and began to write the first *Black Stallion* book while he was still in high school. The novel, published when he was in college, struck a chord with boys and girls and became a quick success. When Farley got his first royalty check, he hopped in his old Model-A Ford and headed west to see some real Arabian horses in the flesh. Unfortunately, according to Steven, few of the horses he saw there matched the ones in his dreams.

Today there are many fine examples of Arabian horses in America – ones which meet the senior Farley's standards (See *Aramco World*, March-April 1986). "Some of the credit for popularizing the Arabian must be given to the man who wrote the classic story of the *Black Stallion* nearly 50 years ago," Steven maintains. "In fact, Pop received an award from the National Arabian Horse Association for his contributions to the breed."

Steven says his father tried to keep in close contact with Arabian horse buyers and breeders till his last illness. "He'd been an active horseman all his life and over the past half-century had built up an enormous reservoir of experience and personal friendships with owners, trainers, sports reporters, jockeys and grooms. Their remembrances echo through his stories of people and horses. When I was a boy, Pop would go to races or sales and go out back to the stables, and I'd get dragged with him," he says.

The second *Black Stallion* book was written during World War II when Steven's father was in the US Army. He was a writer for *Yank* magazine, stationed in the Aleutian Islands – a cold and snowy world where Walter Farley had a lot of time on his hands.

"Using notes and information he gathered in the library, he let his imagination carry him from that frozen wasteland to the hot sands of the distant Arabian desert. Most of his later books were about race tracks and stables, but *The Black Stallion Returns* took place in the fictional Arabian kingdom. It was a New York City boy's love story about a fantasy horse in a land suggested only by his romantic notions of distant Arabia," Steven says.

The fantasy of the book blended with reality during the filming of *The Black Stallion Returns* in Morocco. As Steven tells it, "On location near the town of Zagora, the Arabian horse that played the part of the *Black Stallion* escaped from the set one night and was lost in the desert. He just disappeared into the blackness like a ghost. The movie could have been in real trouble. The crew had to wait until sunrise to search for the missing stallion, but fortunately they found him once it was light."

The film makers recruited 400 extras for the film's race scenes, as well as 60 of Morocco's most skilled horsemen. Seven Moroccan tribes, including Tuaregs from the deep desert and Berbers from the High Atlas mountains, were represented in the movie. Steven says they set up camp near the sets and staged their own festivals when they weren't working in front of the



cameras. "And for one scene, the Moroccan royal family graciously lent seven of the prize colts from their stables in Rabat." Other locations used in the movie include Tafraout and the port city of El Jadida in Morocco and Djanet in Algeria.

Steven says his father was aware that his books were popular and influential in schools, even with children who knew little about horses. "He recognized his responsibility and effect on kids. He encouraged them to use their imagination. One of Dad's favorite sayings was 'Do not take lightly what comes easy to you.' He meant, if you are good at math, go with it. The same with reading or writing. He had encouragement from his teachers when he was a boy; without that encouragement, he probably wouldn't have started writing *The Black Stallion* when he was only in high school," says Steven.

Steven and his father tried working together on and off over the past decade, but couldn't agree on a project. Though *The Young Black Stallion* was their first major collaboration, Steven as a child helped his father with one of his beginning-reader books, *The Little Black Pony*.

"We'd tried before, but my ideas didn't get off the ground. This one was his idea, so maybe that's why it worked better," Steven chuckles. The project started three years ago and continued even after his father's stroke.

"It was easier than I thought it would be, though there were times when Dad was very sick when we didn't do much. Writing fiction is often a lengthy process. We didn't have an outline when we started,

just a general idea. We knew where it was going to end up, but we had to create what we were doing as we went along. We had to hash out the details. And while I had to try to remain faithful to his style, I also wanted to bring my own imagination and spirit to the partnership. I think it worked out well," he says.

Retracing his father's footsteps, Steven spent a good deal of time in the New York Public Library and the New York University library doing his own research for the new book. "If I had to pick one reference that fascinates me more than any other I used, it's *Arabian Sands* by Wilfred Thesiger, one of the last great English explorers, who crossed the Rub' al-Khali by camel 50-some years ago," says Steven (See *Aramco World*, July-August 1981). "That book is still in print," he adds.

"My favorite books as a kid were in the *Island Stallion* series because we spent a lot of time in Florida and I identified with the ocean and the palm trees. But all the books were 'required reading.' It was great working on this project and adding to what is acknowledged to be one of the best children's yarns going.

"People had been asking Dad for years about the early life of the horse that grew up to be the Black Stallion. It was the obvious book for us to write, about the youth of the horse destined for greatness with a young boy in a land far away." 🌐

Brian Clark, a free-lance writer based in Olympia, Washington, has four horses of his own – one of them an Arabian.

