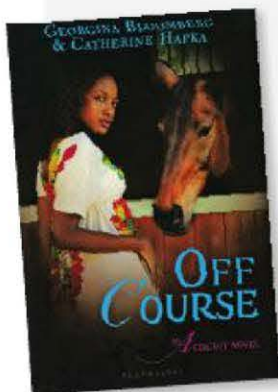


► **Off Course**

GEORGINA BLOOMBERG AND CATHERINE HAPKA

Bloomsbury, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010. 2012. WWW.BLOOMSBURY.COM. 247 PAGES. \$9.99.



If you're a fan of the first two A Circuit novels by Georgina Bloomberg and Catherine Hapka, you have a pretty good idea what you're in for with the latest

edition. *Off Course* picks up right where *My Favorite Mistake* left off, chronicling life on the show circuit with a pack of top teenage riders.

The Pelham Lane crew includes Kate, the working student with a rough home life; Zara, the daughter of celebrities who can't stay out of trouble; and Tommi, the budding horse dealer trying to keep her focus at the barn while distractions loom. They're preparing for the elite Washington Crossing competition, one of the last major shows of the season. Even more so than its predecessors, *Off Course* is a teen novel set in an equestrian environment, not the other way around.

The occasionally fantastic situations (have you ever met a 17-year-old who bought his girlfriend a horse?) are balanced out by relatable struggles all teenagers face. The characters may be stereotypes, but they're never one-dimensional or oversimplified, which sets this series apart.

Both authors' experience in the horse world, especially Bloomberg's extensive experience at the top of the A circuit, means that there's just the right amount of horsey detail to make the setting for *Off Course* sound authentic to an equestrian. That's a rare feat and explains why someone like me, who's progressed well past the intended target audience, keeps picking up A Circuit novels to happily escape for an afternoon.

MOLLIE BAILEY

► **To Carry The Horn: The Hounds Of Annwn**

KAREN MYERS

Perkunas Press, 12142 Crest Hill Rd., Hume, VA 22639. 2012. PERKUNASPRESS.COM. 427 PAGES. \$17.99.



My co-workers at the *Chronicle* tend to mock my love for science fiction and fantasy, but that's OK, because it meant I got first crack at Karen Myers' *To Carry The*

Horn: The Hounds Of Annwn when it arrived at the office.

As an avid consumer of anything to do with magic, myth, dragons and other fantastical beasts, I was intrigued by the idea of a fantasy novel set around the Hounds of Hell and the Wild Hunt. I know Myers as an excellent photographer and follower of foxhunts, so I was curious how she'd blend the—dare I say stodgy?—traditions

of hunting with the anything-can-happen spirit of a fantasy tale.

The result is a novel both educational and gripping, filled with rich detail, intrigue and adventure.

What would you do if, in the act of jumping a fallen tree aboard a trusted steed, you found yourself in another world, one similar in geography but different in almost every other detail from the acres you'd ridden across for years?

This is the predicament our hero George Talbot faces as he literally jumps from the 21st century into a hidden place outside the progression of time and lands in the middle of a murder mystery.

However, Talbot is more suited to life in a place where electricity and gunpowder don't work than most. His knowledge of the traditions that might seem archaic in modern-day hunting have prepared him—he knows how to hunt, dress and behave without coming across as impolite or terribly foreign. He's experienced in killing and quartering game, and he'd even had some fencing lessons in college.

While this is a fantasy novel first and foremost, I appreciated the in-depth information about houndwork and hunting. My foxhunting experience is limited to running and jumping with the field, so I enjoyed the behind-the-scenes details of the kennels and hound care. At times there is almost too much detail—Myers takes every opportunity to describe the meals, clothing and landscape of Llys y Lon Las, the manor of the Prince of Annwn, Gwyn ap Nudd. But as I progressed through the book, I found it harder and harder to put down. And as I turned the last few pages, I was sorry it had to end. Fortunately, the sequel, *The Ways Of Winter*, will be available this month.

SARA LIESER

