

affiliations

Shagya



North American Shagya Arabian Society

How to Create a Great 'Fantasy Horse'

by C.S. Marks

First, a bit of background: I am the author of the Elfhunter trilogy (Elfhunter; Fire-heart; Ravenshade). This series has done well so far, garnering a few awards and entertaining readers from age eight to ninety-something. The books have been praised for (among other things) the depth of character development and, in particular, the marvelous equines that are such an important part of the story. This is a long tale dealing with subject matter that is sometimes dark and foreboding; the horses provide entertainment, amusement, and those unforgettable poignant moments that even non-horselovers can appreciate. It's obvious that this author has spent much of her life with horses, and when writers write in a realm they know and understand, the result is usually positive.

It's not always easy to create wonderful characters – one must have the right inspiration. Nearly all the equines in the world of Alterra are based on horses I have owned or currently own, and they have provided a wealth of 'raw material,' but I would like to focus on one in particular. He's featured on the front cover of the third book in the series, Ravenshade. His name is Marton, he's a Shagya, and he's one of the best role models for a 'heroic fantasy horse' that anyone could ask for.

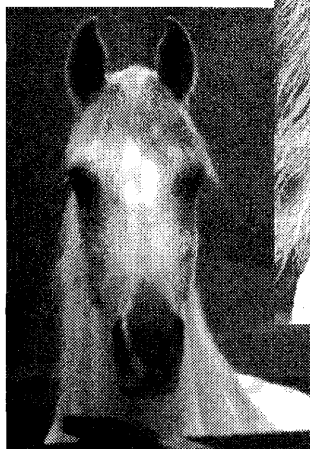
An ad for the part might read like this: 'Athletic, tall, noble, beautiful, graceful-yet-powerful equine to play role of noble steed for leading heroine in fantasy novel. (Here's the challenge.) Must be interesting.' Not just a mindless 'pretty boy'

here! I needed a character with...character! I was lucky. I didn't have to look any farther than my own backyard.

Marton is one of the most athletic horses I have ever had the pleasure to view (and that is saying something). He's also very hard to fault in terms of structure. His bones and feet are made of titanium. He thrives on air! He's proud and noble of bearing, a silver-grey in color, and he moves like a ballet dancer (with just a tiny hint of sumo wrestler). But that's not what makes him a wonderful character.

Shagyas were bred as warhorses; it stands to reason that all the physical attributes would be there. 'Toran' would need to be fast, tough, strong, and enduring. He'd need to be smart and obedient to be a good warhorse, but still be capable of independent thought and action. Shagyas possess all those qualities – no problem. More than that, they are real characters.

'Toran' is a frustrating horse at first. Our heroine (a Wood-elf named Gaelen) is accustomed to a rather dour-yet-doughty Arabian, and she must now replace her beloved mount with another. Who among us cannot empathize with her? 'Toran' (Marton) follows her around, snatches her things, tips over the full manure cart, is young and foolish and silly – get the picture? When he embarks on the long journey, he's the first to ask, 'Are we there yet?' But he proves himself as he matures, and Gaelen comes to love him. His attributes are different, but they are impressive! He becomes a faithful, steadfast and reliable mount, yet he never loses his good humor. He 'works and



plays well with others.' He's all Shagya – intelligent (sometimes to a fault), good-natured, expressive, and brave. He loves and craves the companionship of his 'people,' and he gives excellent back rubs.

The temperament of Shagyas (especially those I have known from Marton's line) is pure sterling. I only wish I could have met Marton's grandsire, the mighty Shandor. That was one cool fantasy horse! I did steal his name for another character in the series – if you ever read the books, you'll have fun discovering that.

There are other memorable horse characters in the series. Eros, another favorite of the readers, is based on a Morab I once owned (who was a National Top Ten CTR horse). Finan is an Arabian, as is Siva. I have owned many wonderful horses, but when the time came for the ultimate battle-mount for my favorite heroine, I chose the Shagya. Big, impressive, and interesting...the readers love him, and so do I.

Chris Marks is a Professor of Equine Science at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College, an award-winning fantasy author and illustrator, and a 'temporarily retired' endurance rider. For more information concerning the Elfhunter trilogy, go to www.elfhunter.net. Readers may also contact the author through the site. Cover art and photograph by C.S. Marks.

For more information on the Shagya-Arabian breed contact the North American Shagya-Arabian Society at www.Shagya.net. ■