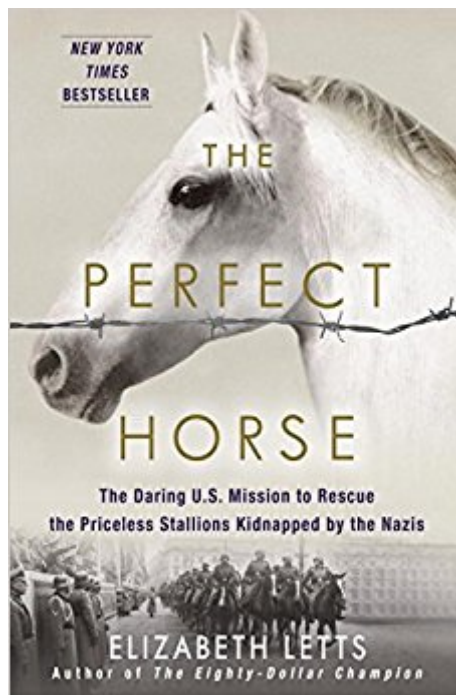




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The Perfect Horse: The Daring U.S. Mission To Rescue The Priceless Stallions Kidnapped By The Nazis



Synopsis

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

From the author of *The Eighty-Dollar Champion*, the remarkable story of the heroic rescue of priceless horses in the closing days of World War II. In the chaotic last days of the war, a small troop of battle-weary American soldiers captures a German spy and makes an astonishing find—his briefcase is empty but for photos of beautiful white horses that have been stolen and kept on a secret farm behind enemy lines. Hitler has stockpiled the world's finest purebreds in order to breed the perfect military machine—an equine master race. But with the starving Russian army closing in, the animals are in imminent danger of being slaughtered for food. With only hours to spare, one of the U.S. Army's last great cavalymen, Colonel Hank Reed, makes a bold decision—with General George Patton's blessing—to mount a covert rescue operation. Racing against time, Reed's small but determined force of soldiers, aided by several turncoat Germans, steals across enemy lines in a last-ditch effort to save the horses. Pulling together this multistranded story, Elizabeth Letts introduces us to an unforgettable cast of characters: Alois Podhajsky, director of the famed Spanish Riding School of Vienna, a former Olympic medalist who is forced to flee the bomb-ravaged Austrian capital with his entire stable in tow; Gustav Rau, Hitler's imperious chief of horse breeding, a proponent of eugenics who dreams of genetically engineering the perfect warhorse for Germany; and Tom Stewart, a senator's son who makes a daring moonlight ride on a white stallion to secure the farm's surrender. A compelling account for animal lovers and World War II buffs alike, *The Perfect Horse* tells for the first time the full story of these events. Elizabeth Letts's exhilarating tale of behind-enemy-lines adventure, courage, and sacrifice brings to life one of the most inspiring chapters in the annals of human valor. Praise for *The Perfect Horse*

“Winningly readable . . . Letts captures both the personalities and the stakes of this daring mission with such a sharp ear for drama that the whole second half of the book reads like a WWII thriller dreamed up by Alan Furst or Len Deighton. . . . The right director could make a Hollywood classic out of this fairy tale.”

—The Christian Science Monitor

“Letts, a lifelong equestrienne, eloquently brings together the many facets of this unlikely, poignant story underscoring the love and respect of man for horses.”

—Kirkus Reviews

“The Perfect Horse raises the narrative bar. Applying her skills as a researcher, storyteller and horsewoman, Letts provides context that makes this account spellbinding.”

—Culturess

“The Perfect Horse is an enthralling and moving story that I could not put down. This is a riveting and unique perspective on World War II.”

—Molly Guptill Manning, author of *When Books Went to*

War“Passionately told and dazzling in scope, The Perfect Horse charges headlong into an unforgettable tale of World War II, when good men were given a final mission to save beloved horses at an hour when no one wanted to die. In Elizabeth Letts, the saga of World War II’s white stallions has found its perfect guardian. Adam Makos, author of A Higher Call“Elizabeth Letts’s beautiful prose, woven together with meticulous research, takes you for a ride that will keep you on the edge of your seat until the end. Adam Robin Hutton, author of Sgt. Reckless

Book Information

Hardcover: 400 pages

Publisher: Ballantine Books (August 23, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0345544803

ISBN-13: 978-0345544803

Product Dimensions: 6.5 x 1.3 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 497 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #9,138 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #1 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Animals > Horses #2 in Books > Science & Math > Agricultural Sciences > Animal Husbandry #22 in Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Fauna

Customer Reviews

An Best Book of August 2016: Many of us have heard the heroic story of the “Monuments Men” Allied troops tasked with retrieving iconic artworks stolen by the Nazis during WWII. In The Perfect Horse, Elizabeth Letts sheds light on another of Hitler’s infamous heists, that of prized stallions from Hungary, Poland, Yugoslavia, and other parts of Europe, with the aim of employing eugenics to breed the consummate war horse (of course, of course). The harrowing mission to save these magnificent creatures, not just from the clutches of the Nazis, but the advancing--and very hungry Russian army, was approved by General George S. Patton, evidently no slouch on the polo field. But consent came with a worrying caveat: if things went south, the ragtag band of rescuers were on their own. So why, in the midst of so much human suffering, did these men willingly risk their lives in this equine endeavor? The answers to this question lend Lett’s narrative its emotional power, and are just as relevant today as they were then. Whether you’re a history buff, a horse fan, or can appreciate how doing one

positive thing can have enormous impact, *The Perfect Horse* is the perfect read for you. --Erin Kodicek, *The Book Review*

“Winningly readable . . . Letts captures both the personalities and the stakes of this daring mission with such a sharp ear for drama that the whole second half of the book reads like a WWII thriller dreamed up by Alan Furst or Len Deighton. . . . The right director could make a Hollywood classic out of this fairy tale.”
•The Christian Science Monitor
“Hard to put down . . . One need not be an equestrian or horse lover in order to appreciate this story.”
•New York Journal of Books
“The Perfect Horse raises the narrative bar. Applying her skills as a researcher, storyteller and horsewoman, Letts provides context that makes this account spellbinding.”
•Culturess
“A wholly original, illuminating perspective on the war *The Perfect Horse* tells a fascinating story of bravery and benevolence that has gone far too long without reaching an audience. Full of action, heartbreak and well-developed characters, it has everything needed to be adapted into an outstanding war movie. To anyone with a love of horses or other animals, Letts’ fantastic, almost humanizing characterizations of some of the horses will make this book an instant favorite. And to history buffs, *The Perfect Horse* provides a totally fresh look at WWII that can’t be found anywhere else.”
•Bookreporter
“An absorbing history of an unusual rescue mission in the closing days of the war in Europe . . . Letts does an excellent job of bringing the various players to life.”
•BookPage
“A truly fascinating chronicle of a dedicated group of horsemen and the risks they were willing to take to preserve the equine icon that is the Lipizzaner. . . . I was hooked from start to finish by Letts’ incredible attention to detail and her gripping account of the events surrounding and leading up to the rescue mission.”
•Horse Nation
“A brilliantly written story about Hitler’s effort to build an equine master race with the finest horses in Europe gathered in one place. As the end neared, these beautiful animals were within days of being slaughtered when a controversial covert mission was planned to rescue the horses and smuggle them to safety.”
•PineStraw Magazine
“A riveting and touching piece of equestrian history beautifully told . . . [Letts makes] long dead characters come alive, revealing their passions and fears and flashes of uncommon valor for the sake of horses whose fate lay in their hands. The horses, too, are vivid and unforgettable. . . . Don’t miss it.”
•EquiSearch
“[Elizabeth] Letts, a lifelong equestrienne, eloquently brings together the many facets of this unlikely, poignant story underscoring the love and respect of man for horses. . . . The author’s elegant narrative

conveys how the love for these amazing creatures transcends national animosities.

—Kirkus Reviews—
“Straight out of the cauldron of Nazi brutality and war, Elizabeth Letts weaves not just a page-turner but an achingly glorious story of grace and redemption. She embeds us with an international ensemble cast of battle-toughened soldiers. It is through their eyes, and through Letts’s nearly supernatural horse sense, that we fall in love with sensitive Lipizzaner and fine-boned Arabians—the rescued animals who inspired men to reclaim their humanity.”

—Vicki Constantine Croke, author of *Elephant Company*—
“In the early years of World War II, the finest purebred horses in Nazi-occupied Europe were stolen by the Germans for experiments to develop the perfect horse. In this spellbinding, heart-stopping book, Elizabeth Letts does full justice to the extraordinary drama of the horses’ rescue in the war’s chaotic final days.”

—Lynne Olson, author of *Citizens of London*—
“The Perfect Horse is an enthralling and moving story that I could not put down. This is a riveting and unique perspective on World War II. History buffs and horse lovers will enjoy this amazing tale.”

—Molly Guptill Manning, author of *When Books Went to War*—
“Passionately told and dazzling in scope, *The Perfect Horse* charges headlong into an unforgettable tale of World War II, when good men were given a final mission—to save beloved horses—at an hour when no one wanted to die. In Elizabeth Letts, the saga of World War II’s white stallions has found its perfect guardian.”

—Adam Makos, author of *A Higher Call*—
“Elizabeth Letts’s beautiful prose, woven together with meticulous research, takes you for a ride that will keep you on the edge of your seat until the end.”

—Robin Hutton, author of *Sgt. Reckless*—
“Letts deftly tells the harrowing tale of a little-known wartime mission and its unlikely heroes, who understood that the treasures they risked their lives for—some of the world’s finest-bred horses—were a keystone of civilization during a time of perilous threat. This is the best kind of storytelling.”

—Joe Drape, author of *American Pharoah*—
“In Elizabeth Letts’s engrossing, richly researched book—a story of horses and heroism during the final days of World War II—we learn that our human instinct to protect our equine friends can cause us to risk even our own lives for their sake. This relatively unknown episode is as moving as it is dramatic.”

—Wendy Williams, author of *The Horse*

I really struggled with this book on two fronts 1) Incredible story / 2) bit disjointed writing at times. Overall, it is a fascinating story spanning decades with an impressive amount of research backing it

up. The author does a good job of building up the backstory and approaches the story as a historical account, with included photographs, which I appreciate. In some places, she breaks from the story and gives long historical accounts splashed in with some storytelling that seems flat. These instances for me were difficult to read. I keep flashing to the Cruellest Miles where Salisbury stays in the tale while remaining historically accurate. For the Perfect Horse, I feel like Letts focuses on being historically accurate and then weaving a tale around it. However I think historical nonfiction is one of the most difficult types of writing. I felt had this book been a bit more focused it would have been better, but it was still very interesting if not gripping.

If you liked *Unbroken* and *War Horse*, you will like this book. The writing and research in this book are excellent. I can't imagine how the author found all the details she did about the characters and horses, who are long gone. The facts read like a story and the book is both interesting and extremely moving. However, keep in mind that it is a WWII book and some of the scenes are perfectly horrible. I would not recommend this book for kids or sensitive animal lovers. The descriptions of the horses dying of slaughter, exhaustion, injury, and starvation are gut-wrenching and I wasn't even sure I could continue reading it at some points. The author follows the characters and the horses throughout their lives and at the end, I cried all the way through the last few chapters. That said, the whole tale is amazing and a testament to the horrors of war and the incredible courage and perseverance of these dedicated horse lovers. Have Kleenex nearby!

I'll admit it: I don't know if I'm 5-star rating this because the book is great or because the overall story is fascinating and engaging. But it gets the five anyway. First of all, the story is well-told. Letts relies on the reader's general knowledge of World War 2 without expecting an in-depth understanding. Second, she engages with the various individuals--after all, history is about what groups of individuals do, but we are better able to identify with one or two people. Third, Letts works non-horse people through some of the horsemanship discussions without being condescending. After all, some of us just know that you put on the saddle and ride--but if you don't know "dressage" from "dressing," this book will guide you through what you need. All in all, this has been read by myself and 2 of my teenagers. We all loved it, for the history, the horses, and the heroism.

If you can picture a book which covers "two continents and more than eight decades", as author Elizabeth Letts puts it in her acknowledgements, you will begin to get an idea of how remarkable a story *The Perfect Horse* is. Letts weaves an intricate tapestry which eloquently tells the story of how

the American military manages to rescue priceless horses from imminent death at the end of World War II. These horses include the extraordinary, balletic Lipizzaner, the breathtakingly beautiful Arabians, and the powerful, stocky Russian horses. All would have died if this daring mission had not occurred. Why was this mission undertaken? No one really knows, but all the people who participated were dedicated to the horses. Possibly it was message of hope after all the horrors the world had been through. A large and varied assortment of courageous men from Europe and the US fell into place, almost haphazardly, to accomplish this rescue. You will read about each of them in this book, and love them all. They manage to trick the Nazis into releasing these precious horses, which they had been hiding in order to breed them eugenically. What united these men on this mission? The answer to that one is easy. They all loved horses. Each of these men is presented to the reader as a full character. The horses are beautifully depicted as well. When the author writes about them, the love she has for them is so powerful and passionate, yet so honest and true, the reader cannot help but understand what it is that drew her to such a massive undertaking. This chronicle of a barely known story which is a part of World War II, the most horrible war we have ever known, sends us messages from the past which restore our hope for the future. The redeeming actions powerfully illustrate the love of the horses which was evidenced by these allied men. From different countries they joined together on this mission to save these beautiful animals who could not speak for themselves. And save them they did. This is the most uplifting book about WWII I can possibly imagine. You don't have to be a horse lover or a War buff to be mesmerized by The Perfect Horse. You simply have to pick it up and read the first page. You will understand immediately.

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