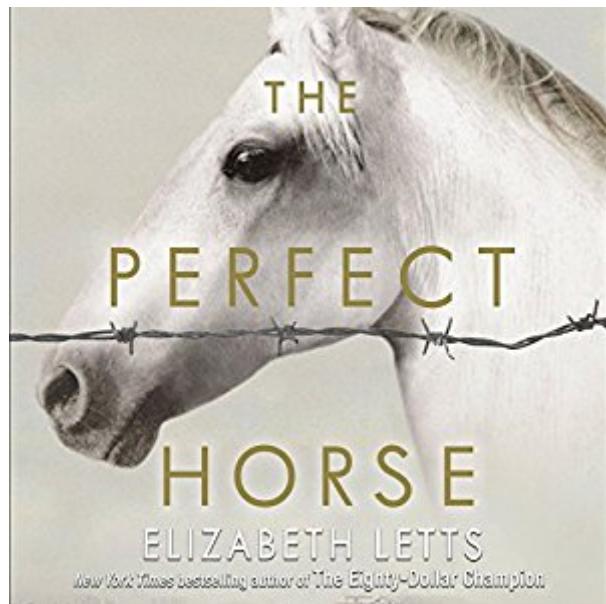


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# The Perfect Horse



## Synopsis

From the number-one New York Times best-selling 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 army's last great cavalrymen, American 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' 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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 *Cruelest 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 a 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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