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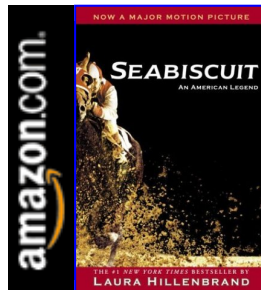
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## Seabiscuit - Laura Hillenbrand

[Timothy Nunes](#)



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I put off reading *Seabiscuit: An American Legend* for almost two years after receiving it as a gift from my mother. After all, I figured, the book was just about a racehorse. But I later discovered that I couldn't have been more wrong.

It's true that Seabiscuit was a racehorse, quite possibly the greatest racehorse of all time. During a career that spanned some five years,

Seabiscuit won thirty-three races and set a number of records, including winning his last race just shy of the ripe old age of seven. All amazing achievements. And yet, the story that author Laura Hillenbrand weaves—straight from the pages of 1930s-era newsreels, magazines, newspapers, and interviews with the people who actually lived the tale—isn't just about a horse. This is the story of a country in the depths of depression, desperately in need of a distraction from the unemployment and abject poverty of the time. Of a horseracing industry quickly dying under the weight of a depressed economy and prohibition. And of three men with practically nothing in common who, because of a single odd-looking, bay-colored horse with stubby legs and a body shaped like a cinder block, would join together to provide 1930s America with what it so deeply needed: a hero.

Hillenbrand first introduces the reader to Charles Howard, a man with a cavalry background, whose business career made him the least likely person to own a legendary racehorse. Howard was one of the first men in the country to make millions off the automobile, having built the largest Buick franchise in the country. Yet he felt the need for something else to focus his energies on.

Tom Smith was one of the last cowhands left on the American range. The arrival of cars, which Howard's entrepreneurial spirit so effectively spearheaded, certainly didn't help the circumstances of America's few remaining horsemen. After training horses from Tijuana to Wyoming, Smith would eventually meet up with Howard after being convinced that owning racehorses was a worthwhile pursuit. The two men began what would be a long, successful, and often tumultuous relationship. With extra money in his pocket for the first time in years, Smith was ready to train Howard's horses and find him something special—a champion.

Johnny "Red" Pollard was arguably one of the least successful jockeys of the early 1930s. By 1932, Red had over seven years of racing experience under his belt, but, with more losers than winners, was rated in the lower echelons of racing. But Tom Smith saw



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in Pollard a special affinity for horses—for their quirks, desires, and behaviors. Smith saw something special in Red Pollard, just as he'd seen something special in an unsurprising looking horse named Seabiscuit.

By introducing these and other characters in an insightful fashion—with colorful and engaging descriptions of their loves, heartaches, and achievements—Hillenbrand captures readers' hearts early on. Taking a story from the pages of American history, Hillenbrand's book far surpasses the history itself, allowing us to share in the experiences and the passions of all involved. Whether on the racetrack, smelling the turf below and the sweat above, or in grandstands with those wringing their hands, shedding tears, or shouting for joy, Hillenbrand allows the reader to experience the story of Seabiscuit in a very intimate and fascinating way—perhaps even better than those who were there.

The year was 1938. Amidst the worst depression in US history came the story of Seabiscuit, a horse who became more popular than Hollywood movie stars—more popular than the president himself. And author Laura Hillenbrand tells the story in such a way that you'll feel that you were there with the rest of America, cheering 'the biscuit' on next to the family radio or in the stands—and guaranteeing you will never, ever forget the name Seabiscuit.



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