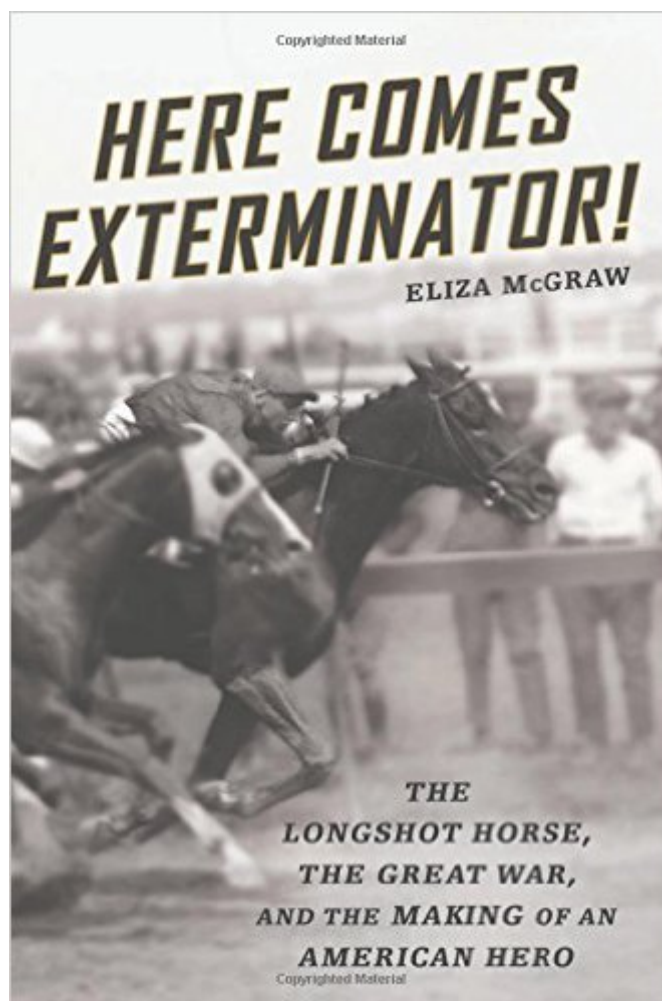


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Here Comes Exterminator!: The Longshot Horse, The Great War, And The Making Of An American Hero



Synopsis

The father of the Kentucky Derby called him "the greatest all-around Thoroughbred in American racing history." Sportswriter Grantland Rice simply called him "the greatest racehorse." Now Eliza McGraw tells the story of how a gangling, long-shot Kentucky Derby winner named Exterminator became one of the most beloved racehorses of all time. Here Comes Exterminator! draws readers into the golden age of racing, with all its ups and downs, the ever-involving interplay of horses and people, and the beauty, grace, fear, and hope that are a daily part of life at the track. Caught between his hotheaded millionaire owner and his knowledgeable trainer, Exterminator captured fans' affection with his personality, consistency, athleticism, and heart. Exterminator's staggering success would dramatically change the world of horse-racing. He challenged the notion that American horses would never live up to Europe's meticulously charted bloodlines and became a patriotic icon of the country after World War I. And his longevity established him as one of the public's most beloved athletes, paving the way for equine celebrities like Seabiscuit and showing Americans they could claim—and love—a famous racehorse as their own.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As a youngster I devoured books about horses, whether fiction (Walter Farley) or books about Man O'War, Citation, you name it. I was excited to learn about this book about Exterminator, one of the truly great horses of the 20th century. This is a well-drawn account of Exterminator's racing career, putting it in context with his times. The author has obviously done a lot of research into her subject

and has done an excellent job of describing Exterminator's charisma and how fans loved this horse much in the way they later loved Man O'War, Seabiscuit and, later, Secretariat. This is a highly enjoyable read, I love finding someone that has the ability to make history--particularly sports and racing history--come alive. Would highly recommend this one.

As a child, I read and reread Mildred Masten Pace's true story of Exterminator, Old Bones the Wonder Horse. Eliza McGraw's "Here Comes Exterminator!" is not an adult version of that child's book. However, it is an excellent and well-researched documentary style narrative. A total of 87 pages contain "Notes" and "Works Cited" - discussing the history, following the Civil War and into the early 20th century, of thoroughbred racing, and the owners, trainers, and horses that maintained and promoted the "Sport of Kings". Following the Civil War, the influence of the South on the racing and breeding of thoroughbreds and the idea that race horses required "blood" that "will tell" continued. Training techniques evolved from bronco busting to a more gentle method of familiarizing horses with equipment and humans before attempting to ride them. Great trainers "David McDaniel and his son Henry, who trained Exterminator" are given credit for their role in racing. Racing rules "the declaration to win" are discussed as is the role racing stables played in providing horses to the cavalry. "Racing is no longer a mere sport. It must be regarded as an essential factor in national defense." The title highlights Exterminator, but in fact this book focuses primarily on racing and the individuals involved in the sport. Both the importance of horses during World War I and the dependence of the Army on racing stables and their horses is stressed throughout the narrative. Mentioning Exterminator in conjunction with these segments of the book does not make this a biography of that horse. Black and white photographs are scattered through the book. They provide a portrait of the individuals and horses about which Eliza McGraw writes. Additional photographs would increase the appeal of this book for a broader reading group. History buffs, horse lovers, and racing fans will find "Here Comes Exterminator!" not only interesting and informative, but also worthy of a five-star rating. It is well written and filled with insight into racing and the history of that sport. The book provides a factual, even-handed narrative that is neither exciting nor compelling. Readers who have little interest in the history of racing and the influence of horses on life in America may be disappointed in this scholarly work.

As a child, I read and loved *Old Bones the Wonder Horse Kentucky Derby Champion*, which is all about the horse Exterminator (and even written from the horse's viewpoint!). This is why I wanted to read a biography of the famous Kentucky Derby winner that was written for adults. However, I was disappointed by *HERE COMES EXTERMINATOR!*, which doesn't really focus on Exterminator, and which glosses over most of the gelding's specific races without giving any detail other than that the horse lost or won. *HERE COMES EXTERMINATOR!* is actually a recounting of the early history of American thoroughbred racing--before, during, and after World War I. During the war, there was a lot of political emphasis on developing strong thoroughbred bloodlines for the "remount" program--which involved breeding and supplying horses to the U.S. and other nations' military cavalry divisions. After the war, the emphasis shifted, more to racing for racing's sake, because horses were no longer needed to fight wars, pull trams and milk trucks, etc. The book contains a great deal of biographical information about Exterminator's trainer (Henry McDaniel) and his owner (Willis Sharpe Kilmer). Kilmer was a man made rich by marketing his family's patent medicine (Swamp Root), and was an extremely difficult person who had more money than he knew what to do with. The horse that is really featured in this book is Exterminator's stablemate, Sun Briar, who was Kilmer's great favorite. McDaniel acquired Exterminator as a workout horse to challenge Sun Briar, and ended up running Exterminator rather than Sun Briar in the Kentucky Derby. It was a surprise to everyone when Exterminator won the Derby. In fact, Sun Briar was another great racehorse (who happened to have a bad year as a 3-year-old). Modern-day thoroughbreds that trace their lineage back to Sun Briar include Secretariat, Native Dancer, Seattle Slew, Funny Cide, California Chrome, and American Pharoah. This is a well-researched, readable, history of early thoroughbred racing in America, with decent biographies of the people surrounding Exterminator. However, because I was looking for a book with more about the particular horse, I rate it at 3 stars ("It's okay" on the official scale).

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