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Laura Hillenbrand

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Contact:
Chris Henry
217 LW Chase Hall
University of NE
Lincoln, NE 68583
(402) 472-6529
chenry@unl.edu

Excerpt from Seabiscuit

The following is taken from Laura Hillenbrand's
"Seabiscuit" page 88, Random House, New York

The halcyon days at the Tijuana track came to a spectacular end. On the backstretch early each morning men guided teams of horses on circuits of the barns, shoveling the mucked-out manure into wagons and driving the teams up the hill behind the backstretch, where they would dump it. The pile had been accumulating since 1917, and because the city received little rain to wash it down, it was enormous. "Oh my gosh." Remembered trainer Jimmy Jones. "It was as big as the grandstand." Inside its depths, the manure fermented, generating scalding heat.

To the locals, the mountain of manure was a steaming eyesore. To the jockeys, it was prime sauna country. Every day riders dug holes in the surface and burrowed in, Pollard and Woolf probably included. A few took the precaution of zipping into rubber suits before wiggling in, but most just wore street clothes. It was almost too hot to take, but Mother Nature's hotbox proved unbeatable for sweating off weight.

The mountain was not long for this world. Sometime in the late 1920's after extraordinarily heavy rains, swollen streams running off the nearby mountains backed up into the ravine, then exploded over the banks. Howling through Tijuana, the wall of water crashed into the racetrack, hurling houses, barns, and bridges along with it. Grooms ran down the backstretch before the onrushing water, throwing open stall doors and chasing out the horses, who scattered in all directions.

Behind them, the irresistible force of the flood met the immovable objects of the manure pile. The water won. The mound, a marvel of solidity for a decade, was uprooted whole and began to shudder along in one murderous mass. It rolled over the San Diego and Arizona railroad tracks that fed the racetrack, tearing them out. Moving as if animated with destructive desire, it gurgled down the backstretch, banked around the far turn, bore out in the homestretch, and mowed down the entire grandstand. It made a beeline for the Monte Carlo Casino, crashing straight through its walls and cracking it wide open. Then, like a mighty Godzilla, it slid out to sea and vanished.

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