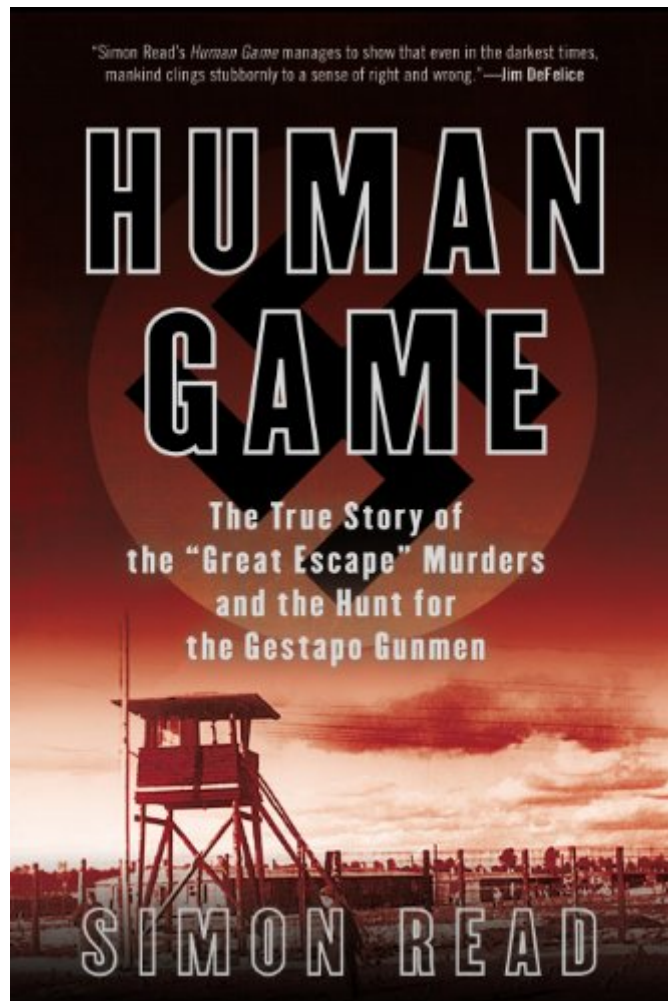


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Human Game: The True Story Of The 'Great Escape' Murders And The Hunt For The Gestapo Gunmen



Synopsis

In March and April of 1944, Gestapo gunmen killed fifty POWs—a brutal act in defiance of international law and the Geneva Convention. This is the true story of the men who hunted them down. The mass breakout of seventy-six Allied airmen from the infamous Stalag Luft III became one of the greatest tales of World War II, immortalized in the film *The Great Escape*. But where Hollywood's depiction fades to black, another incredible story begins. Not long after the escape, fifty of the recaptured airmen were taken to desolate killing fields throughout Germany and shot on the direct orders of Hitler. When the nature of these killings came to light, Churchill's government swore to pursue justice at any cost. A revolving team of military police, led by squadron leader Francis P. McKenna, was dispatched to Germany seventeen months after the killings to pick up a trail long gone cold. Amid the chaos of postwar Germany, divided between American, British, French, and Russian occupiers, McKenna and his men brought twenty-one Gestapo killers to justice in a hunt that spanned three years and took them into the darkest realms of Nazi fanaticism. In *Human Game*, Simon Read tells this harrowing story as never before. Beginning inside Stalag Luft III and the Nazi High Command, through the grueling three-year manhunt, and into the final close of the case more than two decades later, Read delivers a clear-eyed and meticulously researched account of this often-overlooked saga of hard-won justice.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In the early to mid-1970s American Midwest, there was a certain type of motion picture that was bound to appeal to young males such as myself: the Big War Movie. Just like my friends, I never missed the chance to see TV replays of Kelly's Heroes, The Dirty Dozen, The Longest Day, The Guns of Navarone or -- perhaps the greatest of them all -- The Great Escape. So fascinated was I by the World War II story of the escape of seventy-six Allied prisoners of war from a German camp, I also read Paul Brickhill's classic book with the same title. I recall it was the first time I ever experienced the disappointment of seeing some of what made a book so great lost in the translation to the big screen (key point: Steve McQueen's ultra-hip Cooler Kid character was totally fabricated; there were no American airmen in the North Compound at Stalag Luft III where the tunnels were dug). The movie had big name stars like McQueen, stirring music, epic visuals, and memorable set pieces (such as the Fourth of July celebration that ends in tragedy, yet another complete fabrication), but after reading the book for me it lacked...something. Perhaps it was the grittiness and black humor of camp life as described by Brickhill, the amazing scope of the camp escape committee's efforts -- hundreds of false documents, maps, compasses and sets of civilian clothes were created by men barely surviving on watery soup and ersatz coffee -- or the ultimate triumph when three, just three, of the escapees make it to freedom while fifty were summarily executed. When I saw the full title of Simon Read's Human Game: The True Story of the "Great Escape" Murders and the Hunt for the Gestapo Gunmen, there was no question I would read the book.

It was the movie, "The Great Escape" that probably brings most readers to Simon Read's "Human Game." At least, that was the case for me. "The Great Escape" is the famous WWII movie drama in which captured British RAF airmen contrive a mass escape from Stalag Luft III, a prisoner-of-war camp located in what was then eastern Germany, today's western Poland. "Human Game" is author Simon Read's book version that explains how 76 men escaped via a tunnel. Actually, there were three tunnels, the famously named "Tom, Dick and Harry." Read narrates the escape, the preparation for it and most of all, explains the aftermath of what happened to the escapees and the quest to identify, capture and bring to justice their Gestapo killers. The Gestapo was issued a secret order that came from the very top--Hitler himself. Hitler's order was to summarily punish the RAF airmen who escaped, to make them pay with their lives. Under international law, escaped prisoners

were supposed to be returned to prison, not executed and certainly not killed in cold blood. The Fuhrer was absolutely infuriated by this mass escape. Stalag Luft III was a prisoner-of-war camp built to the highest standards, supposedly escape-proof. After the escape, Hitler authorized the capture and murder of all the escaped RAF prisoners. However, his high henchmen felt the International Red Cross and foreign governments might get wind of this clearly illegal order. By consensus decision, the top Nazis decided instead to execute the arbitrary number of "fifty." Fifty of the escapees would be killed, allowing the remaining 26 men if captured, to be returned to camp. That would provide a measure of cover for execution of the fifty. The biographies and backgrounds of each of the RAF escapees were examined.

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