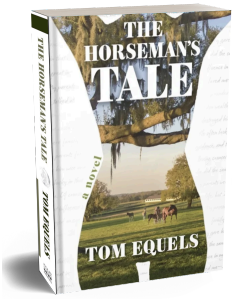


The Horseman's Tale

Book Club Discussion Guide

ABOUT THE BOOK

The Horseman's Tale is a sweeping, emotionally resonant novel that follows the life of Jake Montgomery— whose connection to horses anchors him through extraordinary chapters of adventure, love, and loss.

From a childhood on a racing farm in Ocala, Florida, to the top jump racing stables of Ireland, to brutal combat and intelligence missions as a Marine Recon officer, to a career as a world-class race horse trainer, Jake's epic journey is as breathtaking as the horses who share it. His life is filled with dramatic twists and turns—from aristocratic romance to covert intelligence operations—but it's the horses in his life who are the stepping stones offering him purpose, peace and direction through every upheaval.

Told with elegance and depth by a champion equestrian and highly decorated combat veteran, Tom Equels, this debut novel captures the raw beauty of horsemanship and the emotional bond between man and horse. For anyone who has ever felt understood by a horse— for anyone ever touched by the spirit of the horse—The Horseman's Tale will feel like coming home.

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Below are ten discussion questions to spark meaningful conversation about Tom Equels' novel, *The Horseman's Tale*. These prompts are designed for general readers and literary fiction fans, exploring the book's themes of trauma, healing, identity, and transformation.

1. **The book opens with Jake confronting both physical and emotional scars from the Vietnam War.**
   How does the trauma of war shape his choices throughout the novel? What do you think the story is saying about the long tail of combat trauma?

2. **Horses play a symbolic and literal role in Jake's healing.**
   What do you think the horses represent to him? Why do you think Tom Equels chose this particular metaphor?

3. **Jake struggles with the legacy of his father and the burdens of Southern family history.**
   How does his relationship with his father influence his moral compass and sense of self?

4. **Racism, classism, and generational prejudice are woven into the novel's Southern setting.**
   Did anything about Jake's environment surprise or resonate with you? How do the social dynamics of the 1960s still echo today?

5. **The book moves through vastly different time periods and places — from Ocala to Vietnam to Ireland.**
   How do these shifting settings reflect Jake's internal journey? Which part of his journey stood out most to you?

6. **Forgiveness is a recurring theme — both of others and of self.**
   Do you think Jake truly forgives himself by the end? What does the novel suggest about the process of making peace with the past?

7. **Many of the characters live with secrets, grief, or regret.**
   How do different characters, people and horses, handle pain? Whose coping strategy felt most honest — or heartbreaking — to you?

8. **How would you describe Tom Equels' writing style?**
   Was there a particular passage or moment that stuck with you because of how it was written?

9. **Jake's story blends deeply personal experience with broader historical events.**
   Did the book change the way you think about Vietnam veterans, PTSD, or American history?

10. **The Horseman's Tale has been compared to *The Odyssey* — an epic story of return from war, reflection on the damage done, and the fight to return home to a state of innocence and grace.**
    In what ways does Jake's journey mirror that of Odysseus? How do war, identity, and homecoming shape the narrative? And what do you think the "Ithaca" is for Jake?

AUTHOR Q&A WITH TOM EQUELS

What inspired you to write *The Horseman's Tale*?
I've lived many lives—combat pilot, family man, trial lawyer, and CEO—but my truest identity, from the age of four, has always been that of a horseman. Horses have grounded me through joy, loss, war, and those challenging twists and turns life throws at each of us. Through it all, the unconditional love of certain horses in my life had a profound impact. I wanted to write a story that both captured the spirit of the horse and shared the importance of that connection for riders of all ages and disciplines. This book is fiction, but a few of the horses in it are more than just characters, they are based on my equine partners who over seventy years have been stepping stones along my journey to find bliss: from long trail rides through the magnificent forests of Ocala, to the exaltation of victories at the racetrack and the deep sense of accomplishment as a rider winning numerous championships as an equestrian. It was these same horses that taught me lessons of unconditional love, acceptance, forgiveness, and redemption.

How much of Jake's story is autobiographical?
While Jake isn't me, he walks through many of the same landscapes I've known—Ocala's flat-race training tracks, Irish jump racing stables, top racing venues in the U.S. and Europe, the stress induced scars of combat in Vietnam and during the Cold War. His emotional journey draws from real moments, real love, and very real pain. Like Jake, I've seen how horses can carry us when nothing else can. My horses have been there for me at times when, without them, I'd have been lost.

Why was it important to explore themes like trauma, discrimination, and healing?
Because they're part of life. I've seen how trauma—especially combat trauma—lives in the body for decades. I've also seen how the bonds we form, particularly with animals, can help us reclaim ourselves. As to discrimination, I've seen first-hand the damage done from unchecked bigotry and institutionalized prejudice. I didn't want to shy away from the hard stuff. I wanted to honor the fight to move away from it. As a society we can descend into darkness or move to the light …The Light!

You've spent decades working with horses. How did that experience shape the novel?
Immensely. The feel of being 'one' with a horse gliding through the forest, the discipline of training as a rider, not just athletically but also spiritually, the empathy it takes to truly connect with an animal—these things are hard to fake. I hope my readers who've loved horses will recognize the truth in those pages and, for the uninitiated, perhaps a few of those readers will embark on the journey of a lifetime, the way of the horse.

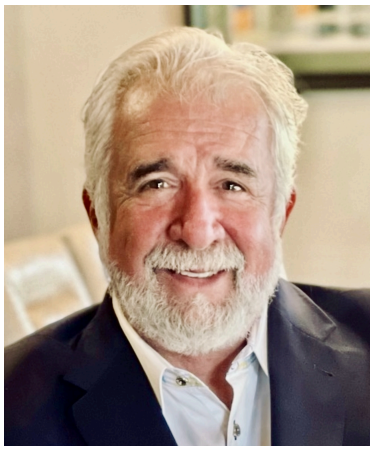
What do you hope book clubs take away from this story?

I hope they walk away reminded that even after immense loss, and deep personal failures, love and redemption are still possible. Sometimes the most unexpected companions—four-legged or otherwise—can be the ones that help us find our way home.

What's next for you?

More writing, I hope. I've spent much of my life dedicated to my roles as a father, a warrior, a lawyer and a scientist. These last stages of my life and the writing of The Horseman's Tale, gave me the space to reflect. I think I have another 'Tale' or two left in me.

INVITE THE AUTHOR TO YOUR BOOK CLUB



Want to take your book club experience even deeper?

Tom Equels is occasionally available for **virtual discussions via Zoom** to talk about *The Horseman's Tale*, share behind-the-scenes insights, and answer reader questions.

To inquire about a possible author visit, please contact:

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