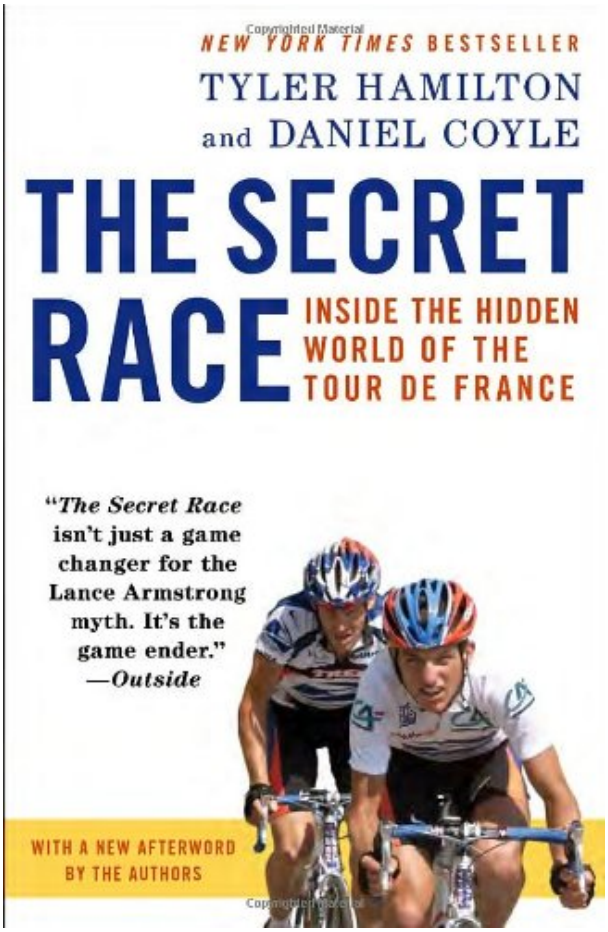
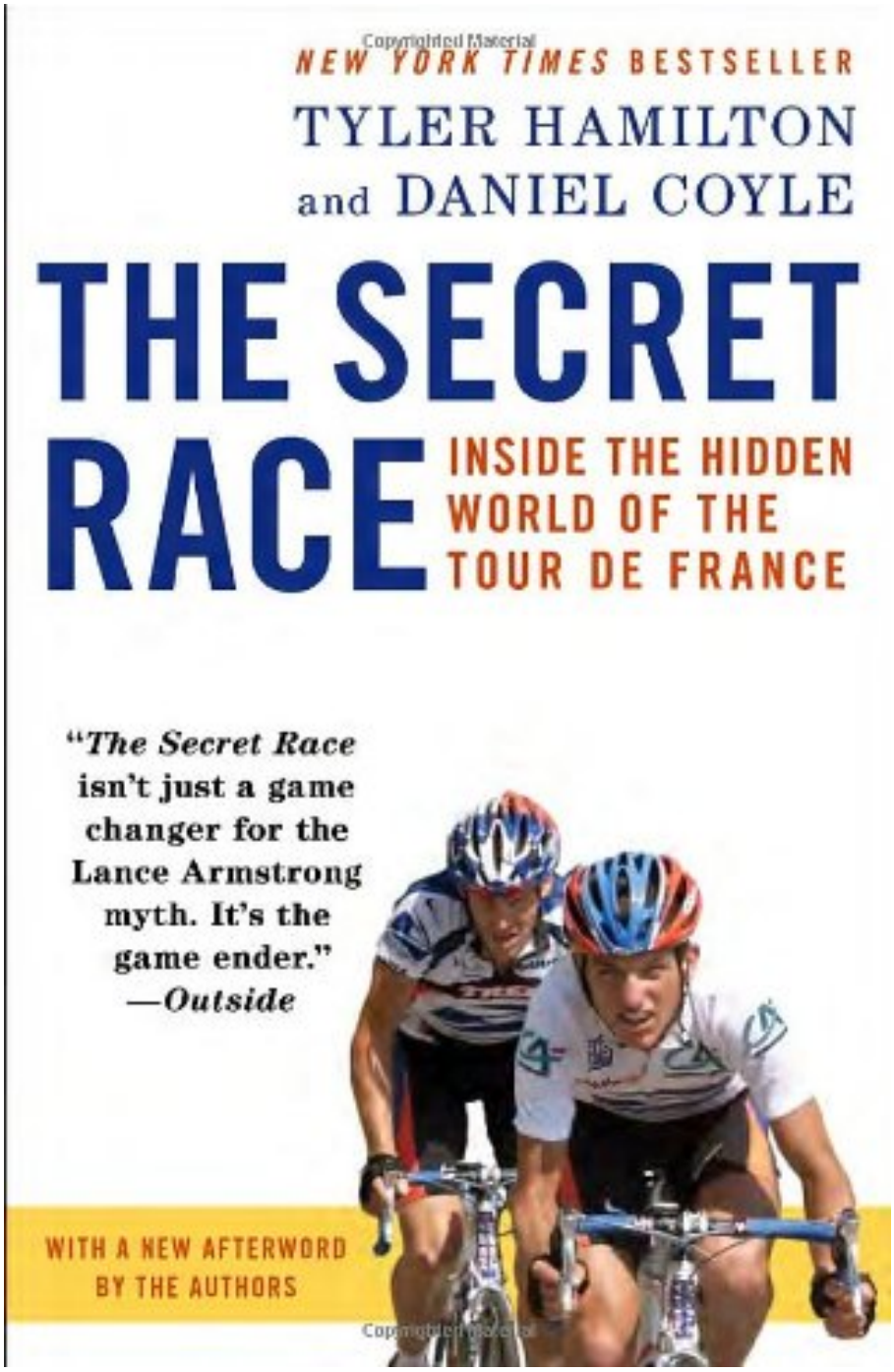
THE SECRET RACE: INSIDE THE HIDDEN WORLD OF THE TOUR DE FRANCE BY TYLER HAMILTON, DANIEL COYLE





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Review
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NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • WINNER OF THE WILLIAM HILL SPORTS BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARD

The Secret Race is the book that rocked the world of professional cycling—and exposed, at long last, the doping culture surrounding the sport and its most iconic rider, Lance Armstrong. Former Olympic gold medalist Tyler Hamilton was once one of the world’s top-ranked cyclists—and a member of Lance Armstrong’s inner circle. Over the course of two years, New York Times bestselling author Daniel Coyle conducted more than two hundred hours of interviews with Hamilton and spoke with numerous teammates, rivals, and friends. The result is an explosive page-turner of a book that takes us deep inside a shadowy, fascinating, and surreal world of unscrupulous doctors, anything-goes team directors, and athletes so relentlessly driven to win that they would do almost anything to gain an edge. For the first time, Hamilton recounts his own battle with depression and tells the story of his complicated relationship with Lance Armstrong. This edition features a new Afterword, in which the authors reflect on the developments within the sport, and involving Armstrong, over the past year. The Secret Race is a courageous, groundbreaking act of witness from a man who is as determined to reveal the hard truth about his sport as he once was to win the Tour de France.

With a new Afterword by the authors

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Most helpful customer reviews

222 of 228 people found the following review helpful.
Powerful, credible, and depressing chronicle of the doping era
By Steve Frazier
This is the most devastating chronicle yet of the recent history of pro bike racing, for several reasons:

- First, the co-author, Daniel Coyle, knows his way around pro bike racing. He wrote Lance Armstrong's War: One Man's Battle Against Fate, Fame, Love, Death, Scandal, and a Few Other Rivals on the Road to the Tour de France, and his experience shows. More than just a story about Hamilton, "The Secret Race" weaves in all the significant doping scandals of the past 15 years. Although the publicity surrounding this book is driven by the interest in Lance Armstrong, the book exposes a sport-wide culture where doping was expected and the infrastructure to support it was easily accessible to the best riders.

- Second, the level of prosaic detail adds credibility. It's more than just a chronicle of what drugs were taken -- but also detail on how they worked; how they were concealed; how tests were beaten; the logistics of getting to and from the doping doctors; and the strategy of timing blood doping sessions to correspond with key stages of big races. Hamilton even details the bonus schedule he paid to his doping doctors for each major victory. Although I've read previous books on the topic, I was still surprised by the intensity of doping activities outlined here. It's the difference between having the story told by "outsiders" (investigators, journalists, team assistants) vs. "insiders" (someone like Hamilton who is finally willing to tell the story).

- Third, Hamilton's own personal story is believable. He helps explain why bike racers decide to dope, why lying about it becomes so central to their day to day lives, and what it takes to turn the corner and start telling the truth. The co-author's key challenge in this book is to make the reader accept the story of someone who lied for so long, and inevitably we have to wonder, "He lied then, is he telling the truth now?" The context provided here allows the reader to make that leap.

Two other individuals are worth mentioning. The first is David Walsh, the London Times journalist who wrote, From Lance to Landis: Inside the American Doping Controversy at the Tour de France, which outlined way back in 2007 what was happening inside pro racing during the "Lance Armstrong era." None of the recent doping scandals has been a real surprise to anyone who read Walsh's book. "The Secret Race" has a lot more detail, since it's told by a true insider, but without David Walsh, Paul Kimmage and a few others continuing to tell this story the facts likely would have never come out (One thing that's clear from "The Secret Race" is that the sport's governing body, the UCI, was never going to blow the whistle on itself).
[Nov. 2012 update: David Walsh's stories that laid out the original allegations against Lance Armstrong have just been released in a Kindle edition, Lanced: The shaming of Lance Armstrong, and coming soon is his new e-book, Seven Deadly Sins]

The second person to mention is Andy Hampsten, another American cycling hero whose 1988 ride in the Tour of Italy is still legendary. Hampsten was competing at the top level of international cycling before the EPO era but then found himself out-muscled by back-of-the-pack competitors who suddenly transformed themselves, turbocharged by EPO and blood transfusions. For anyone who thinks that it's OK to excuse continuing coverups because "it was a level playing field; they all doped," it's worth reading Andy Hampsten's quotes:

"In the mid eighties, when I came up, riders were doping but it was still possible to compete with them...bottom line, a clean rider could compete in the big three-week races. EPO changed everything...all of a sudden whole teams were ragingly fast, all of a sudden I was struggling to make time limits. By 1994, I'd be on climbs, working as hard as I've ever worked, producing exactly the same power, at the same weight, and right alongside me would be these big-assed guys, and they'd be chatting like were were on the flats! It was completely crazy. As the 1996 season went by...everybody knew what was up, everybody was talking about EPO, everybody could see the writing on the wall."

Hampsten retired from pro bike racing at that time. Other racers made a different decision, and signed up for in-depth doping regimes; their story is told here. To believe that anyone raced clean and then won the Tour de France 7 times in a row at the height of the doping era seems to defy reality. To use a term repeated often in "The Secret Race," it would have to be "extraterrestrial."

120 of 124 people found the following review helpful.
redemption
By Jiyang Chen
Normally I don't write these reviews, but this was such a compelling read in light of the events that have been unfolding. Tyler Hamilton, who I admired for his ability to push through pain. Tyler Hamilton, who I lost every ounce of respect for after he lied about doping and then admitted to it. Tyler Hamilton, who I started to see not as an athlete who cheated, but as a human being who I eventually began to understand and sympathize, and a newfound sympathy for his plight and struggle. Here is a man who I no longer see as a "bad person", but someone who came to a series of life changing decisions and forks in the path, and were I to be put in his shoes, I would probably have done exactly the same things. Looking back at the many years of cycling, I realized I blindly refused to believe that the greatest hero in sports would ever guilty of a crime, and that the world was simply trying to bring him down for his successes, and I, like many others, grouped the LeMonde, Le Mondes, Ballasters, and the Andreaus as bitter people trying to destroy a great champion. This book reveals so much detail to a point where you kick yourself for being so oblivious and ignorant of the existence of such a massive, organized underworld. This book will be a game changer.

130 of 140 people found the following review helpful.
Compelling & Credible
By Whatever

I was eager to read this book after all the drama over the past several years. The story is well written and compelling for anyone who followed professional cycling during the Armstrong era. I encourage anyone with questions about who is telling the truth in the Greek Tragedy that is Lance Armstrong's life to read this book and draw your own conclusions.
I was a fan of Lance's since he won the World Championship in 1993. I was in Paris when he won in 1999 and when he finished 3rd in 2009. I believed in Lance and his inspirational story for years and thought all the critics were simply "haters". This book convinces me that the story of Lance Armstrong is as believable as a children's fairy tale.
Tyler does not come across as vindictive, angry, or irrational. Rather, he strikes me as a regular guy who played the game by the rules in place at the time. Tyler did what almost everyone else was doing -- transfusions, testosterone, EPO -- but ended up getting caught when his doping sources screwed up and mixed up his blood bags with those of other riders.
Lance was not physiologically better than anyone else - his claim to genetic physical superiority was part of a well crafted myth. The difference is Lance had a story-book narrative that appealed to the general public and therefore sponsors and industry hacks. Protection from within the UCI sounds ridiculous - which is what Lance counted on - people would never believe such a thing and anyone who said so must be crazy/drunk/angry. Read the book and then decide.

See all 1194 customer reviews...

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Tyler Hamilton is a former professional bike racer, Olympic gold medalist, and NCAA champion. He raced professionally from 1995 to 2008 and now runs his own company, Tyler Hamilton Training LLC, in Boulder, Colorado. He lives in Missoula, Montana, with his wife, Lindsay, and his dog, Tanker.

Daniel Coyle is the New York Times bestselling author of Lance Armstrong’s War and The Talent Code. He lives with his wife and four children in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, and Homer, Alaska.

As a bike racer, over time you develop the skill of keeping a poker face. No matter how extreme a sensation you feel—no matter how close you are to cracking—you do everything in your power to mask it. This matters in racing, when hiding your true condition from your opponents is a key to success, since it discourages them from attacking. Feel paralyzing pain? Look relaxed, even bored. Can’t breathe? Close your mouth. About to die? Smile.

I’ve got a pretty good poker face; Lance has a great one. But there’s one guy who’s better than either of us: Johan Bruyneel. And it was never so well used as that night at the end of the 2000 Dauphiné, when he told me about the plans for the blood transfusion. I’d heard about transfusions before, but it was always

theoretical and distant—as in, can you believe that some guys actually bank their blood, then put it back in before a race? It seemed weird, Frankenstein- ish, something for Iron Curtain Olympic androids in the eighties. But Johan, when he explained the plan during the Dauphiné, made it sound normal, even boring. He's good at making the outrageous sound normal—it might be his greatest skill. It's something in his expression, in the certainty of his big Belgian voice, in the supremely casual way he shrugs while laying out the details of the plan. Whenever I watch the likable gangsters on The Sopranos, I think of Johan.

As Johan explained it, Lance, Kevin, and I would fly to Valencia. We would donate a bag of blood, which would be stored, and we'd fl y home the next day. Then, at a key point during the Tour, we'd put the bag back in, and we'd get a boost. It would be like taking EPO, except better: there were rumors of an EPO test being developed for the 2000 Olympics, and word was, they might be using the test during the Tour. I listened to Johan, nodded, gave him my poker face. When I told Haven about it, she gave me the poker face right back (wives get good at it, too). But part of me was thinking, What the hell?

Maybe that's why I was late the Tuesday morning we left for Valencia. There was no reason to be late—everybody knew Lance despised lateness above all things—but on that crucial morning we were running late by a full ten minutes. I raced our little Fiat through the narrow streets of Villefranche; Haven was hanging on to the oh-shit bars, asking me to slow down. I kept speeding up. It was eight miles to the airport in Nice. During the trip, my cell phone rang three times. Lance.

Dude, where are you?
What's going on? We're about to take off.
How fast can that fucking car of yours go? Come on!

We screeched into the airport parking lot; I walked through the security area and onto the runway. I'd never been on a private jet before, so I took in the scene: the leather seats, the television, the little fridge, the steward asking me if I would like anything to drink.

Lance acted casual, as if private jets were routine—which for him, they were. He'd been riding them fairly constantly since the previous July, courtesy of Nike, Oakley, Bristol-Myers Squibb, and the other corporations who were competing for the privilege of ferrying him around. The numbers were unbelievable. USA Today estimated Lance's income at $7.5 million, he was getting paid $100,000 per speech, and his new memoir, It's Not About the Bike, was an instant best seller. You could feel the flow of money, the new possibilities it opened. Now we didn't have to drive to Valencia. We didn't have to worry about customs or airport security. The jet, like everything else, was now part of our tool box.

The engines revved, the wheels went up, and we were airborne. Below, we could see the Côte d'Azur, the mansions, the yachts; it felt surreal, like a fantasy world. In the plane, my lateness was forgiven. Lance was confident, happy, excited, and it was contagious. The confident feeling increased when we landed in Valencia and were met on the runway by the Postal team: Johan, Pepe Martí, and del Moral. They showed up with sandwiches, bocadillos—it was important to have a little something in our stomachs beforehand.

From the airport, we drove south for half an hour through a marshland as Johan and del Moral talked about the transfusion. It would be so simple, they said. So easy. Extremely safe, nothing at all to worry about. I noticed Johan talked more to Kevin and me than to Lance, and that Lance didn't seem to pay attention; I got the feeling this wasn't Lance's first transfusion.

We pulled up near the village of Les Gavines at a beached whale of a hotel called the Sidi Saler, luxurious and quiet, free of the tourists who'd be arriving later in summer. We'd already been checked in; we took the

elevator up to the fifth floor, moving through the deserted hallways. Kevin and I were directed into one room facing the parking lot; Lance got his own room next door.

I had expected to see a sophisticated medical setup, but this looked more like a junior- high science experiment: a blue soft- sided cooler, a few clear plastic IV bags, cotton balls, some clear tubing, and a sleek digital scale. Del Moral took over.

Lie on the bed, roll up your sleeve, give me your arm. Relax.

He tied a blue elastic band below my biceps, set an empty transfusion bag on a white towel on the floor next to the bed, and wiped the inside of my elbow with an alcohol swab. Then the needle. I'd seen a lot of needles, but this one was huge—about the size and shape of a coffee stirrer. It was attached to a syringe that was in turn attached to clear tubing that led to the waiting bag, with a small white thumb wheel to control flow. I looked away; felt the needle go in. When I looked again, my blood was pumping steadily into the bag on the floor.

You often hear "blood transfusion" tossed around in the same breath as "EPO" or "testosterone," as if it's all equivalent. Well, it's not. With the other stuff, you swallow a pill or put on a patch or get a tiny injection. But here you're watching a big clear plastic bag slowly fill up with your warm dark red blood. You never forget it.

I looked over to see Kevin hooked up in the same way. We could see our reflections on the closet-door mirror. We tried to cut the tension by comparing the speed with which our respective bags were filling: Why are you going so slow? I'm dropping you, dude. Johan shuttled between the rooms, checking on us, making small talk.

Every so often Pepe or del Moral would kneel down and take the bag in their hands, tilting it gently back and forth, mixing it with anticoagulant. They were gentle because, as they explained, the red blood cells were alive. If the blood was mishandled— shaken or heated, or left in a refrigerator beyond four weeks or so—the cells would die.

Filling the bags took about fifteen or twenty minutes. The bags plumped up until the scale showed we were done: one pint, 500 milliliters. Then, unhook: needle out. Cotton ball, pressure. Bags taped closed, labeled, and tucked into the blue cooler. Del Moral and Pepe headed out; they didn't say where, but we guessed it was to the clinic in Valencia and the refrigerator there, where the bags would be stored until we needed them three weeks later at the Tour.