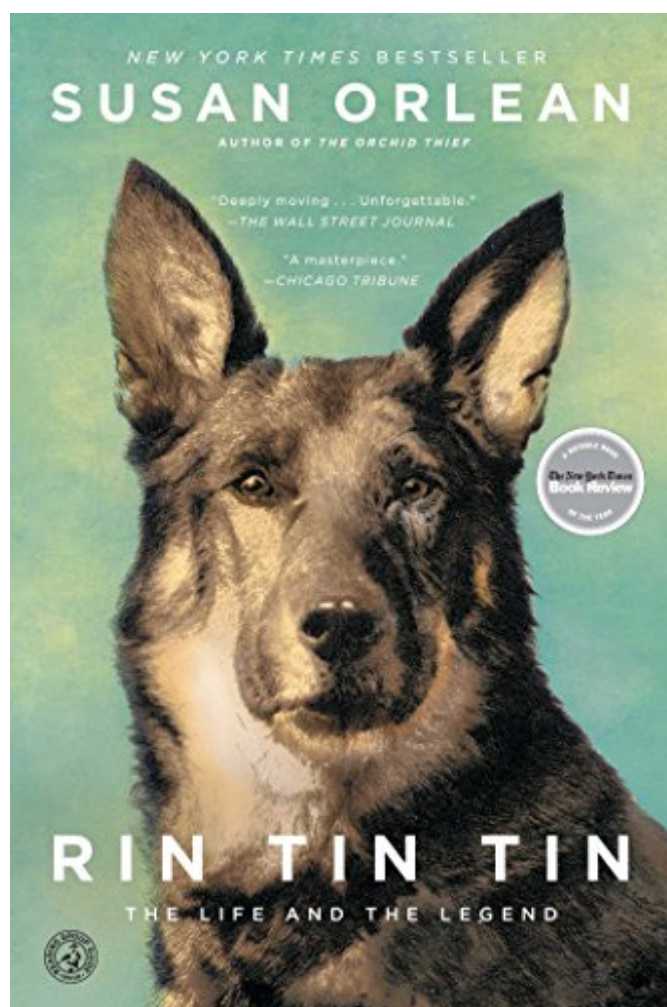


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Rin Tin Tin: The Life And The Legend



Synopsis

He believed the dog was immortal. So begins Susan Orlean's sweeping, powerfully moving account of Rin Tin Tin's journey from abandoned puppy to movie star and international icon. Spanning almost one hundred years of history, from the dog's improbable discovery on a battlefield in 1918 to his tumultuous rise through Hollywood and beyond, Rin Tin Tin is a love story about the mutual devotion between one man and one dog • (The Wall Street Journal) that is also a quintessentially American story of reinvention, a captivating exploration of our spiritual bond with animals, and a stirring meditation on mortality and immortality.

Book Information

File Size: 6398 KB

Print Length: 354 pages

Publisher: Simon & Schuster; Reprint edition (September 27, 2011)

Publication Date: September 27, 2011

Sold by: Simon and Schuster Digital Sales Inc

Language: English

ASIN: B004T4KRVK

Text-to-Speech: Not enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #203,744 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #93

in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Movies > Industry #110 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks >

Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Animal Care & Pets > Essays #292 in Books > Crafts, Hobbies &

Home > Pets & Animal Care > Essays

Customer Reviews

The first one-third of this book is the tale (a remarkable story well-told, and the only reason that two stars were given) of the wartime discovery, adoption, bonding, training and eventual life and career of the original movie-star dog and his owner/trainer Lee Duncan. If only the tale had stopped here, however brief, it would have been time well-spent. Unfortunately, the next large chunk is the pathetic tale of Duncan's attempt to keep the Rin Tin Tin brand alive via a series of unworthy successors, who were at least linked by bloodline to the original marvel. The remainder is an

ever-more pathetic and rambling discourse on the evolution of America's relationships with companion animals, related to the previous tale by the far-less interesting story of the hugely successful 1950's television show that had little to do with the original dog (Duncan's latest "successor" may not have been related to the original at all, and was so ineptly trained/capable that another trainer's dog was finally used in the show and Duncan sidelined altogether). From here, the story meanders endlessly from boring tales of the career decline of the television series' producer to a obsessed breeder's attempt to claim the franchise by dint of having inherited her grandmother's breeding business based upon the purchase of one of Rin Tin Tin's descendents. Through all of this morass, the author keeps inserting her own "journey" and what it meant to her by way of (it seems) justification for why she kept writing after the basic story had long since been concluded. I honestly don't know how I managed to get through to the end. Perhaps I just wanted to see how far the author would drift from any coherent thesis or point.

Rin Tin Tin was a dog but his name came to be more than a dog. The original dog had the name and carried it into a series of silent movies where the name metamorphosed into a legend due to a bond formed between the dog and a soldier who found and adopted him over in France during World War I. The author did a beautiful job of telling this part of the story despite the loss of most of the dog's film stories; she had to use newspaper reviews and other second hand accounts to describe the reception accorded these films but there were a few films available for first hand viewing and the dog's ability could be seen. but there is a problem, as in all life. Times bring change; standards change and what is new and absorbing when first seen pales and even falls into disfavor with these changes. In Rin Tin Tin's case, however, his acting soared beyond this normal occurrence; his fame never failed. New dogs took the place of the original; intercourse between the film characters became normal and the mute animals fell out of their high regard. To overcome this the stories associated with the animals changed, Rin Tin Tin made the change successfully according to the author. Here is the beginning of the book's decline. Orlean kept my interest up to this point, despite her failure to bring Duncan to life. She stressed his bond with his dog, she made a point of this bond accounting for Rinty's success in his feature films but with the talkies this bond was stretched, the owner could no longer give the dog voice commands and hand signals did not get the response movie goers had been expecting. Trainers were used with the new dogs; different writers were used to come up with the new type stories and only the name remained.

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