Scribblings and Screenings for the Animal Set

Bond—Wayne’s Bond
If one person can make a difference, how much influence can the whole lot of us have on creating a more humane society? Plenty, says HSUS president and CEO Wayne Pacelle, whose New York Times best-seller The Bond: Our Kinship with Animals, Our Call to Defend Them, demonstrates the power of the human spirit in repairing systems that have betrayed our natural connection with animals. As Pacelle takes readers on a journey from the nation’s great open spaces to its crowded factory farms, he illuminates the stark dichotomy we face in an age when animals are more beloved yet more abused than during any period in history. There is a better way, Pacelle argues, making the case for a humane economy based on ecotourism, fur-free fashion, improved farming systems, and other innovative models. It’s a message of hope and an inspiring call to action for all—and it’s now available in paperback!

A Famous Dog’s Tale
Sure, everybody knows Lassie, but if we’re talking about dogs as 20th-century American pop culture icons, the conversation begins with Rin Tin Tin.

He was a real dog—a German shepherd rescued by an American soldier named Lee Duncan from the ruins of a French dog kennel during World War I. Duncan, an orphan himself, bonded with “Rinty,” brought him home to California, and thought the dog’s athleticism and charisma could make him a movie star. He was right: Rin Tin Tin became a top box-office draw in silent films. The dog’s star faded when “talkies” came in, but after his death in 1932, his descendants carried on in movies, radio shows, personal appearances, and eventually a hugely popular TV show.

Longtime New Yorker staff writer Susan Orlean recounts these ups and downs in Rin Tin Tin: The Life and the Legend. She found many stories within the iconic dog’s: Rin Tin Tin explores how dogs have evolved from farmhands to companion animals, the development of obedience training and dog breeding, and the strength of the human-animal bond. “It was a story of war as well as a story of amusement. It was an account of how we create heroes and what we want from them,” Orlean writes.

A Horse to Bet On
If you’ve always seen yourself as more of a cat or dog person than an equine lover, War Horse may well expand your horizons. The Steven Spielberg-directed film, which received a host of award nominations and won the American Film Institute’s award for Film of the Year (2011), is based on British writer Michael Morpurgo’s novel and long-running stage productions in London and New York. It tells the story of Joey, a thoroughbred raised by Albert, a farmer’s son, in the pre-World War I English countryside. After his family’s crops fail, Albert’s father is forced to sell Joey to the British cavalry at the outbreak of war. Ownership of Joey changes hands several times, as Albert enlists in hopes of reuniting with his beloved horse. Realistic shots of trench warfare, and one particularly ghastly scene of Joey trapped in barb wire between the lines, are painful to watch, but animal lovers will come away deeply moved by the beauty of these creatures, and the incredible gift of the human-animal bond.

Rocky Mountain Rescue
In the winter of 2008, two snowmobilers who’d gone out into the Canadian Rocky Mountains to assist stranded sledders came upon a pair they’d never expected to rescue. Spotting what they initially thought were moose, they went closer to find two exhausted and emaciated horses, so hungry they had gnawed into the flesh of each other’s tails in a desperate attempt to stay alive. The horses had flattened the deep snow around them, creating an enclosure with snow for walls, and were stranded there, more than 7,800 feet up in difficult terrain. What followed was an attempt—documented in The Rescue of Belle & Sundance—by a group of dedicated volunteers who tried to figure out a way to save the animals’ lives, a way that involved digging a kilometer-long trench and then trying to lead the starved animals another 18 miles through temperatures low enough to be lethal. Authors Birgit Stutz and Lawrence Scanlan present a harrowing but ultimately inspiring tale about the good that can be done when compassionate people come together to help animals.

Mouthing Off
Pity the chew toys: No sooner are they loved by pets than they are decimated by that love, losing ears, eyeballs, entire limbs to our dogs’ and cats’ less than tender affections. Individually, scattered and slobbery around the floors of our houses, they may not look like much. But in Arne Svenson and Ron Warren’s oddly beautiful coffee table book Chewed, a photo collection of pets’ previously used toys, these adored diversions take on the iconic status of ruins. From the Frisbee teethed to the texture of Swiss cheese, to the gnawed-on sock monkey, to the poor headless stuffed rabbit (we think?) that graces the cover, Chewed presents a funny and fascinating gallery of the toys our pets have loved and lost.