ForeWord Reviews

SPORTS & RECREATION

Eclipse: The Horse That Changed Racing History Forever
Nicholas Clee
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Eclipse was the greatest racing thoroughbred of eighteenth-century England, having never been defeated in any of his races and raising the bar for the horseracing industry. The horse enjoyed a second career as a much-sought-after stud.

His legacy lives on to this day, for a vast majority of all male-line racehorses can trace their blood lineage back to this marvel, including Secretariat and all but three of the Kentucky Derby winners of the past fifty years. “He is the icon of the sport, its unquestionable symbol of greatness,” the author, a journalist and racing enthusiast, writes.

The narrative gives a thorough account of Eclipse’s upbringing, ownership, and training, while describing the often tawdry and scheming world of which racing and breeding were intimately linked. Eclipse’s owner, with prison behind him, is a gambler and adventurer who hustles for a living, using Eclipse as his source of revenue and his portal to England’s more exclusive circles and spheres of influence. He is also the close companion and business partner of London’s most ambitious brothel madam. (The author’s highly detailed accounts of the back alleys of London and the career paths of the ambitious women plying their trade may be more information than some purists of horseracing history can appreciate.)

The book includes a chapter on Eclipse’s heirs, leading into the twenty-first century, and a section on the author’s detective work tracking down and studying what is accepted as the actual skeleton of Eclipse, now on display in England’s Royal Veterinary College. There, it is still studied by the academic and veterinary communities for clues to this horse’s astounding track record. Photos in the book show how Eclipse himself, following his death, was dispersed to his admirers and collectors: a riding crop containing hair from his tail and mane, a framed portion of his chestnut hide, and a decorative award made from one of his hooves.

The book offers keen historical insights into the worlds of horseracing, breeding, and betting in eighteenth-century Georgian England, as well as the complex and ambiguous world of social morés and business arrangements of the time. Knowing that descendants of Eclipse li

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