

Hockey Card Price Guide 1995 (The Confident Collector series, Avon Books)

By Allan Kaye and Michael McKeever

What with the ongoing National Hockey League lockout, one of the only places you can see NHL stars these days is in their trading cards-- and if that interests you, the 1995 edition of the *Hockey Card Price Guide* may be what you're looking for.

This 492-page bilingual (English/French) paperback is a nice little pocket guide to the business of hockey card collecting-- and like too many things connected to sports these days, card collecting *is* a business. Millions of cards are sold every year, and some of these go on to become valuable "collector's items." This book provides a comprehensive list of cards produced by major companies from 1951 to 1994, with a corresponding price listing for each card in each series. A basic description of each card series and its significance is included, as are pictures of various individual cards. It's a visually boring and textually spartan mass of text in comparison to flashier entries in the "Confident Collector" series (notably the venerable *Overstreet* guides to comics) but it's not meant to entertain-- it's a reference book, and a comprehensive one at that.

Helpful extras include a card-collecting glossary (defining everything from action cards to the World Hockey Association) and a guide to grading the condition of your cards (a very complex value system ranging from mint condition to poor). With features like these, the *Hockey Card Price Guide* seems a handy companion for both neophytes and card sharks.

As a footnote, the book has two little bonuses to boost sales. One is an exclusive interview with NHL star Mario Lemieux at the front of the book; the other (and somewhat more dubious) addition is an embossed, painted, cut-out trading card (Brett Hull on my copy-- I don't know if that's the same throughout the print run). While the trading card is a fun bonus (and especially appropriate for the collectors audience this book is meant for), it seems kind of silly to stick it on the cover-- to get the card, you have to gouge a gaping hole in the cover of your book. It might have made more sense to include it as a bound-in trading card (as many other collectors' books and comics do), but I suppose its presence on the cover is somewhat more eye-catching. Ah, well, it's a minor quibble and the card is, from a collector's standpoint, rather neat-- a novel addition to a useful reference book.

-- Sean McQuaid

Web of Smoke (Avon)

By Erin Grady

Web of Smoke is a suspense story with a difference. The plot is interesting and not a bad read, but the "difference" is that it's so poorly written that the suspense is all but lost.

Web of Smoke focuses on the interactions between three characters and the people around them. The dialogue, however, is stilted and phoney, with nary a sign of reality to be found. Another problem is the constant switching of character focus. Grady simply isn't capable of being inside all her characters' heads. The story goes fairly quickly, though, and if you get past the bad writing, it is actually not bad.

-- C.A. Schneider

A Tidewater Morning (Random House)

By William Styron

This book is not worth the paper it is printed on. I feel bad for the poor trees that had to give up their lives for the publication of this drivel. I wanted to review this book because I've heard wonderful things about the author's other works, and decided to give him a try. Unfortunately, either people lied to me when they told me he could write, or else this just isn't up to his usual standards.

The writing style is overly descriptive, and ridiculously wordy. He babbles on and on about useless things that have nothing to do with the story line. At one point he spends two pages talking about Karl Marx in the middle of a story about a false raid on Japan. It's pointless. This book will now go into the pile I use to keep the air pump on my fish tank from making noise.

-- Cate Hanus

SO YOU WANT SOMETHING TO READ...



This Fierce-Loving (Avon Books)

By Judith E. French

This romance novel is set in the Maryland Frontier in the 1750's. A woman is married to a baby-bashing, woman-raping, Indian-killing, mean, nasty white man, and gets kidnapped by his mortal enemy, the Shawnee war chief Fire Talon. After some burning houses, bear attacks, mountain lions, and lots of fighting, she falls in love with the courageous Indian and they live happily ever after. Oh, I hope I didn't ruin the ending.

The cliches in this book were kept to a minimum, the love-making was not totally ridiculous, and I sometimes wanted to keep reading to see what happened. The writing skills were quite good for this type of romance novel. I would read it again. I don't think I would pay six dollars for it, but for a couple of loonies at a flea market you have some nice, light reading.

-- Colleen Easter

Homicidal Psycho Jungle Cat (Andrews & McMeel)

By Bill Watterson

Homicidal Psycho Jungle Cat is the latest collection of Bill Watterson's syndicated *Calvin & Hobbes* comic strip. Watterson's brainchild is an oddity in the world of newspaper funnies: a thinking person's comic strip. Watterson's work has more depth, wit, irony and complexity than a lot of things you had to read in high school English class-- and it's a heck of a lot more fun.

For those poor unfortunates unfamiliar with the strip, Calvin is a little boy--at least, that's what he looks like. Wildly imaginative, strangely eloquent and bad as all-get-out, Calvin comes across as a strange mixture of philosophical dreamer and demonic bad seed. The sometimes sinister Calvin is balanced by his stuffed tiger, Hobbes, who is very much alive in Calvin's dream world. Quiet, kind and logical, the thoroughly sensible Hobbes is an effective counterpoint to the rash, self-absorbed and frequently out-to-lunch Calvin.

They're a strangely cerebral pair by times-- you can often find them debating such intellectual chestnuts as the nature of evil whilst walking through the woods or sledding down insanely steep slopes at near-light speed. And Calvin has an imagination like Bosch, Dali and the Marquis De Sade all rolled into one deceptively cherubic package (he belts people with consecrated snowballs, for instance, and claims to possess a severed head that functions as an oracle).

Some of the best moments in the strip come when Calvin slips into his fantasy alter-egos-- like interstellar adventurer "Spaceman Spiff" and masked crimefighter "Stupendous Man." In his imagination anything can happen, and Watterson depicts Calvin's limitless fantasy world with innovative visuals and more than a little humour.

And of course, Calvin and his striped accomplice are no strangers to mischief-- heck, they make *Dennis the Menace* look like an amateur. Whether their victims are parents, teachers, girls or each other, they have no end of cruel and unusual tricks up their sleeves.

With a repertoire ranging from slapstick to nostalgic slices of childhood and genuinely deep philosophical discussions, *Calvin & Hobbes* has something for almost everyone. Watterson is one of the most literarily and visually imaginative cartoonists of his generation, and *Homicidal Psycho Jungle Cat* is a worthy addition to the hilarious and thought-provoking *Calvin & Hobbes* library.

-- Sean McQuaid

Some Days You Get The Bear (Avon)

By Lawrence Block

There is one great short story in this compilation: "The Burglar Who Dropped In On Elvis". The rest aren't bad, just unremarkable. Most of the stories could be classified as murder mysteries. Some of them have good premises, like viewing a story through the eyes of the "bad guys". Others are just plain cliches. Most of them tend to fall short because the characters just aren't interesting. These stories are samples of some of Block's earlier works; he has gone on to write several successful novels (according to his publisher). If you are a fan, you might enjoy a look at his beginnings. Otherwise, this is a good novel to read on a car trip or other occasion where you want to kill some time.

-- Aldera Chisholm

At the Hand of Man (Vintage Books)

By Raymond Bonner

This book is about everything from politics to economics, with history, crime, social problems and a bit of conservation thrown in. The elephant conservation movement is fully explained, and ideas that aren't generally thought of are brought out. Westerners see Africa as raw and beautiful, but all Africans want to do is make a living. Where we see wonderful wild creatures wandering across big open spaces, African people see crop trampers. There's a delicate balance between wilderness and urbanism. This book should be listed as supplemental reading for Ecology 301-- seriously. I learned as much from it as I did from the course.

-- K. Giesbrecht