

BOOK REVIEWS

Around the World in 45 Years

By Charles M. Schulz
(Andrews and McMeel)

For a longtime *Peanuts* fan who has lost touch with the strip in recent years, this book was like coming home. Schulz is getting a bit more lax with his drawing as time goes on, and his recent strips often exhibit a subdued or in-joke style of humour that smacks of complacency (especially in some of the one-panel jokes); but the *Peanuts* cast is still an endearing and sometimes philosophical bunch with timeless character interplay. Snoopy is still wonderfully weird, Peppermint Patty and Marcie are still the Odd Couple of the comic strip scene, and Charlie Brown's the same lovable loser he always was (I got a particular kick out of his first-ever home runs and the resolution thereof). The best moments, though, belong to that perennial scene-stealer Snoopy: his World War I Flying Ace fantasies resonate with absurd humour and a strange poignancy, while sometimes incorporating enough detail to verge on historical (hysterical?) fiction. All that being said, it's also pretty darn impressive that Schulz is still writing and drawing the whole strip by himself after all these years. At a time when many old-time and even relatively recent strips have passed out of their creators' hands, it's comforting to see the godfather of comic strips at the helm of his baby; and after softly chuckling and occasionally cackling my way through this book, I can safely say that there's a lot of life-- and laughs-- left in *Peanuts*.

-- Sean McQuaid

Disney's Magic Eye

By N. E. Thing Enterprises
(Andrews and McMeel)

Yes, yet another one of those bizarre Magic Eye books (for recently retrieved Russian cosmonauts and the other half-dozen or so people who don't know what I'm talking about, Magic Eye pictures are optical illusions wherein 3-D images emerge from special patterns if you stare at them long enough). As a diehard Disney devotee, I'm dejectedly deeming this darling a dud. It's not a complete write-off: I do get a charge out of seeing those 3-D pics of Mickey and Donald, and some of the other images like Jafar and Captain Hook's pirate ship are nicely detailed, but a lot of the pictures are boring and unimaginative (like Robin Hood's arrow, Belle's book and so on). On top of that, a few of the images (like the Cave of Wonder, the mushroom dancers, and young Simba) are almost completely unintelligible, and some (like Pluto and Goofy) make use of distracting solid-coloured shapes incorporated into the picture. There's some nice images, and the book still makes a pleasant keepsake (especially good for children), but this is definitely not one of the more impressive Magic Eye books.

-- Sean McQuaid

Modern, Caring, Sensitive Guy

By Joe Soucheray
(Andrews and McMeel)

Joe Soucheray is a columnist for a St. Paul, Minnesota newspaper. Subtitled *A curmudgeon columnist looks at life*, this book is a collection of columns about just about everything. Soucheray often hits the nail right on the head; "always favour the groups that at least play their own instruments" and his mistrust of music clubs, for example. At other times I either lost him completely because of my ignorance of St. Paul politics and Minnesota in general, or occasionally skipped to the next column because I found his wit a bit too barbed.

None of Soucheray's columns are longer than 3 pages, so the chuckles come at a great pace. With the range of Soucheray's topic, this book contains an essay for every opinion. I am afraid only that if one reads Soucheray on too few sittings one will become a curmudgeon. On the other hand, the mid-1990's have many trends to feel curmudgeonly about and Soucheray shows that if you keep a sense of humour, all will be fine.

-- Shannon Younker

Parisian Encounters By Charles Hobson (Chronicle Books)

Paris is well known as the city of love and passion. Along its streets and boulevards many romance has sparked-- some catch fire forever while others fade away. *Parisian Encounters* tells the tales of lovers in Paris; from Napoleon and Josephine to Marie and Peter Curie. Several couples are featured, all of whom are well known, and come from all walks of life. It is more of a collage than a book -- it is full of handwritten letters, maps, and photographs. An intriguing feature is a double spine so that you may compare side-by-side the short write-ups and pictures. This is a chronicle to flip through on a quiet evening, there is no need to read cover to cover, simply open up and engross yourself in the magic of romance. A perfect valentine gift for the one you love. Or for yourself. A word of caution -- my copy had one page placed upside down in the introduction, so you might want to flip through it before you purchase it.

-- Aldera Chisholm

A Sense of Values: American Marines in an Uncertain World

By David Bowne Wood
Photographs by Bob Mahoney
(Andrews and McMeel)

This book isn't what I thought it would be. Upon picking it up, it looked like it could either have been a promotional book put out by the Marines or a book written by someone in an attempt to slander the Marines and their entire lifestyle. It was neither. The book was written by a veteran journalist who has covered stories all over the world, over the last twenty years. He was granted unlimited access to every part of the Marine Corps to show the readers what it is like at all levels. In return for this freedom, he had to partake in every part of Marine life from the daily five mile run (before breakfast) to flying over hostile territory in a helicopter built in 1969. (And you thought that driving your '85 Chevette was dangerous.) Wood traveled with the Marines around the world, taking notes and telling the bare truth. Nothing is glorified. As a bonus he explains in detail the entire Somali ordeal that so few of us know about. The pictures are somewhat less than I thought they would be. I was half expecting glossy action shots and people being killed, but for the most part, the pictures were pretty boring. This introduced me to my first lesson in the Marines: much of the time they sit around and do nothing. These pictures tell it like it is.

This book dispels many myths associated with the Marines, such as high pay (the average Private makes just over \$9000 per year) and good times, (there are very few.) The book also serves to exemplify others: the Marines do NOT want gays in the military. This book features sections of the families that Marines have left behind and is dotted with insightful quotes taken from various Marines. For example, "What single reason would cause you to leave the Marine Corps?" and the reply "If I died." Yes, the marines truly are dedicated and are known for being a group of raving fanatics, but for the first time, everything is put into context and you can get a clear picture about what the Marines are really like. They are a distinct set of people who live by the rules, place their lives in someone else's hands and really do have a different sense of values.

The book reads fast. It comes with a nice glossy dust jacket, but unfortunately, inside the dust jacket is the printed \$34.95 price tag which puts the book into the "nice to read but nicer to leave on the shelf" department in my budget. However, if you get the chance, read it and watch your opinion of the Marines change almost instantly.

-- Sean Steele

The Simple Pleasures, A Bulletin Board Collection Edited by Daniel Kelly (Andrews and MacMeel)

The Simple Pleasures is a collection of bits of rural wisdom from contributors to the St. Paul Pioneer Press. Like Julie Andrews, hundreds of people have decided to share with the press some of their favourite things. Some of these contributors, intentionally or not, end up adding a giggle or a groan to your day (someone actually admitted that their "simple pleasure" was the sucking sound that Spam makes when it fall out of the can, for example.) If you appreciate "thoughts of the day" or a book where the opinions are simple, old-fashioned and good-hearted, this might be the book for you. *The Simple Pleasures* is one of those collections that remind me of rice cakes: light and fluffy, but good for you.

-- Shannon Younker