

Out of Bounds

■ SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

calvin and hobbes



My first time was Oct. 6, 1986. For weeks, though, my gangly, overly sensitive 16-year-old self puzzled over exactly what it all meant. Could one insanely quick action on a Monday morning transmute me forever?

The answer, filthy-minded reader, remains an ecstatic "yes." For on that October morning, I first met a boy and his tiger in the pages of *The Salina Journal*. Lo! I was smitten, and for nearly 10 years the responsibility-laden throws of adulthood were routinely stiff-armed in hopes of a raucous return to the innocence and injustice of being 6 years old.

The man responsible for these paroxysms of pleasure was Bill Watterson, the achingly reclusive wonder behind the most consistently entertaining and lively written syndicated comic strip in history — Calvin and Hobbes.

Fans of all stripes can now enjoy "The Complete Calvin and Hobbes," a monster of a compendium that traces 3,160 strips from Nov. 18, 1985, through Dec. 31, 1995. The slip-cased set, printed on thick stock, contains three volumes, 1,440 pages and the heft of a steroid-laced bowling ball (23 pounds). The publisher claims it will be the heaviest, most expensive (\$150) book ever on the

WHAT BETTER HOLIDAY GIFT THAN THE COLLECTIVE MAGIC OF A BOY AND HIS TIGER?

BY MARK LUCE

best-seller list. However, that emphasis on size neglects the inherent lightness and joy of the precocious Calvin and his trusty, sometimes impish pal Hobbes.

Thumbing through the strips again reminds one of skipping down the lane of nostalgia, as the characters and situations ring with the charms of the familiar, the safe and the creative. Calvin gets clocked by Hobbes as he gets home from school; Mrs. Wormwood, Calvin's teacher, transforms into a hostile alien that must be zapped; Susie Derkins dons the "cute" moniker on Hobbes, much to Calvin's chagrin; Calvin cautions his father on his low poll numbers; babysitter Rosalyn terrorizes Calvin and plays fiscal hardball with his parents; and of course, Hobbes takes the occasional spin through the washer and a tumble through the dryer.

There's more, of course: the duo's secret society G.R.O.S.S.; their careening down hills and ramps in a wagon; countless snowmen sculpted with an

eye toward Edvard Munch angst; monsters under the bed; splash-filled baths; ruinous family camping trips; fearsome dinosaurs; snowball fights; and the rapidly escalating fights that can only happen between a boy and his tiger.

The foundational appeal of Calvin and Hobbes rests solely in the imaginative disconnect between the "real" world of adults and the "real" world of Calvin. To Calvin, Hobbes lives and breathes, complete with razor-sharp teeth and claws. He's a comrade, a sounding board and, at times, simultaneously a conscience and a rascally rival. To everyone else, Hobbes is merely a stuffed tiger. But to claim the adult world as "more real" misses Watterson's entire point and robs the strip of its energy and enchantment — for Hobbes, you see, is real.

In Watterson's final strip, Dec. 31, 1995, his intrepid partners go sledding on virgin snow, with Hobbes claiming, "It's like having a big white sheet of paper to draw on." Calvin responds, "It's a magical world, Hobbes ol' buddy..."

For 10 years, Watterson transformed that blank paper into a marvelous, magical world. And for that, this kid remains eternally thankful.

Mark Luce lives in Kansas City, Mo. His son, Miles, talks about his "doggie" in a way eerily like Calvin chats to Hobbes.

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