



40: A Doonesbury Retrospective

G.B. Trudeau

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Long regarded as THE political touchstone cartoon of its era, Garry Trudeau's Doonesbury celebrates its fortieth anniversary in this beautifully produced retrospective. On October 26, 1970, the first Doonesbury comic strip appeared, as college jock B.D. met his inept and geeky roommate, Mike Doonesbury. Over the months that followed, they were joined by campus radical "Megaphone Mark," Boopsie, Zonker, and on and on. Fourteen thousand strips later, the world of Doonesbury has become a unique and remarkable creation, sustained by a vast and intricately woven web of relationships among 40 major characters, spanning three generations. While chronicling his characters' entanglements and intimacies, G. B. Trudeau developed a keen satirical commentary that has ambitiously and relentlessly carved out an indelible record of four decades of American social and political history. The comic strip, like jazz and rock and roll, is an American form, and Trudeau has expanded it boldly and fearlessly, taking it into new realms. An epic unfolding, the Doonesbury saga constantly entices readers to keep up with its ever-evolving cast and endlessly inventive story lines. Trudeau remains fully engaged in the creation of his far-from-complete magnum opus. This massive yet elegant anniversary volume marks the strip's fourth decade by examining in depth the characters and relationships that have given Doonesbury such vitality and resilience, and allowed it to constantly reinvigorate itself. The book opens with an in-depth introductory essay by G. B. Trudeau in which he surveys his sprawling creation as only he could, followed by brief word-and-picture portraits of all the principle players. The collection's core consists of more than 1,800 beautifully displayed strips—"dailies and Sundays"—that chart key adventures and cast connections over the last four decades. Dropped in throughout this rolling narrative are 20 detailed essays in which Trudeau contemplates individual characters or bonded groups of characters, including portraits of ur-folk such as Duke and Honey, Zonker, Joanie, and Rev. Sloan, as well as those who have joined the cast more recently, such as Zipper, Alex, and Toggle. The centerpiece of the volume is a four-page foldout diagram that maps in great and annotated colorful detail the mind-boggling matrix of character relationships. A feast of storytelling and a clarifying overview, this celebratory tome offers a unique way to experience one of the greatest comic strips ever.

Created by the team that brought you *The Complete Far Side* and *The Complete Calvin and Hobbes*, this massive-yet-elegant celebratory anthology marks *Doonesbury's* 40th anniversary by examining in depth the characters that have given the strip such vitality.

On October 26, 1970, college jock B.D. met his inept and geeky roommate, Mike. Fourteen thousand strips later, the world of *Doonesbury* has grown uniquely vast, sustained by an intricately woven web of relationships--over 40 major characters spanning three generations. This book opens with an in-depth essay in which G. B. Trudeau surveys his sprawling creation as only he could. The volume's 1,800 beautifully displayed strips chronicle the key adventures and path crossings of the ever-evolving cast, from ur-characters such as Zonker, Joanie, Duke, and Honey, to relative newcomers such as Zipper, Alex, and Toggle. Dropped in throughout are 18 detailed essays in which Trudeau contemplates individual characters and groups of characters.

The book's literal centerpiece is a four-page foldout that maps in annotated detail the mind-boggling matrix of relationships. A feast of storytelling and a clarifying overview, *40: A Doonesbury Retrospective* offers a unique way to experience one of the greatest comic strips ever.

40: A Doonesbury Retrospective Details

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Dan says

The 18,000 strips in this book (making up only 17% of total Doonesbury strips) is quite a slice of Americana.

Trudeau skipped the strips focusing entirely on politics (like Roland's search for Reagan's brain) and instead chose strips that showed his characters living their lives through the ups and downs of the last 40 years. Some of them have been around since the 70s, representing baby boomers in their prime, while others have come and gone. Births, deaths, marriages, divorces. Everything is covered and experienced in lighthearted punchlines.

I really love the pages where Trudeau wrote about what inspired the characters and how they've evolved. His efforts to stay honest to the characters is refreshing and really shows what makes Doonesbury such an enjoyable read each morning.

Bruce says

Per the introduction, Trudeau's retrospective contains slightly less than 13% of what's been published in newsprint. This is fine since the work nonetheless comes across as a comprehensive selection of the comic strip, adds insightful commentary, and allows readers to pick up on narrative patterns otherwise invisible from a daily read. So this book is terrific. Too bad it was published as a doorstep.

I can't think of any good reason for blowing up four dailies against one Sunday onto individual pages the size of a school desk, the thickness of glossy cardstock, the whole slid into a gratuitous cardboard box unless your readership consists of nearsighted weightlifters. A taste of G.B. Trudeau's sharp, smart, satire can be found all over the internet, so I won't bother to add anything other than: (which, when you consider it dates to September 24, 1976, nicely demonstrates how static American politics has been) and (which, for a strip published September 11, 2005, says everything about how advanced the art, layout, and "camera selection" are these days).

As contemporary satire, Trudeau's work is a marvel of observation and empathy. Sure, his Dickensian cast of characters (who don't begin to age through the real world until 1984) constantly riff on current events, but this cross-section of Trudeau's opus also reveals a staggering continuity. Take J.J., Mike Doonesbury's first wife, who Trudeau relies on primarily as a vehicle for mocking conceptual and performance artists. Trudeau had J.J. finally desert staid, dependable Mike for cowboy-hatted, pickup truck phony Zeke in an explicit spoof off the then popular middle-age romance fantasy "Bridges of Madison County," ...Except that it turns out J.J. and Zeke had actually already been a comic strip couple a decade before, and before Mike and J.J. ever met. So from J.J.'s standpoint, Mike was the relationship disruption, and not Zeke. Of course, today's readers know how layered a character B.D. has become since the removal of his helmet (along with some of his arrogance), but similar sophistication plays out in the interrelationships of Boopsie, Duke, Honey, Kim, Joanie Caucus, et al. that render real gravitas to the ensemble.

Trudeau confesses on page 662 that he does little visual or topical research for the strip (some Googling of late), excepting only for coordination with the Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs hospital to offer

as accurate a portrayal of injury and post-traumatic stress recovery as he could. “The reason for proceeding with care is obvious;” he writes, adding, “the last thing I wanted to do was contribute to the suffering I was trying to describe.”

So Doonesbury has to be taken seriously as a literary monument. And if this essential volume weren’t such a brick, it’d be a real page-turner. I’m a longtime fan of Trudeau’s strip, and much of what’s published here was already familiar to me. Still, I think I would have devoured this cover to cover in about two weeks even if its contents were wholly new.

Oh, and one last thing that I find pretty eerie. The life of this strip runs more or less contemporaneous to my own. Sure, that’s impressive in terms of artistic and commercial longevity -- how many other people do you know who’ve held the same job for 40 years? However, if you’re my age-peer, you can’t read this without it hitting you that you’re reading a cartoon-retrospective of your entire life. To channel dude Zonker Harris, maybe that’s why this book’s so heavy.

Thaths says

While I'm excited about having select bits from 40 years of Doonesbury in my hand, I am looking forward to the Compleat Doonesbury.

This particular collection is good at covering the important moments in the character's lives. But it does not cover much politics. For example, only one President (Dubya) makes an appearance. No Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, etc.).

Andrew Holmes says

An absolute pleasure. I've been reading Doonesbury for 30 years and it's like spending time with old friends.

David says

The 4th full read through Doonesbury. Superb.

Brian Hutzell says

This is a HUGE book, but it still doesn’t pretend to be complete. According to the Introduction, only about 13 percent of the total published strips are gathered here; just enough to cover most of the major story lines. Because Doonesbury roughly follows a real-world timeline, reading through forty years of it makes for a great trip down memory lane on both personal and global paths. (It’s also a bit of a wake-up call, as I’m seeing more of myself than I care to in Zonker.) I highly recommend this collection for both old and new fans.

Mary Bloodworth says

Is it fair to "review" a comic strip compilation book? Does anyone make rules for these things? Given that this book covers strips over 40 years, has almost 700 pages, and weighs over 10 pounds I think it counts. (10 pounds! Did he stop to think about the average age of the average back that would have to pick up this behemoth??!)

This was a great way for me to learn much of the back story to the characters I read about, given that I didn't really tune in to Doonesbury until the mid-80s or so. It is also often a funny look at issues and fads of the eras (tanning = good, then later tanning = bad). Trudeau focuses mostly on his characters in this collection and leaves out the politics, save for a few appearances by Mr. Butts and Mr. Jay. There are a lot of later references to the Iraq war, but that's largely because the characters in the military have become such an important part of the strip.

All in all a great fun compilation, worth the aching back to heave onto your lap!

Howard White says

I grew up on Doonesbury. Mike, Zonker, Duke and the gang helped me make it through 'Nam, Nixon and Watergate, Jimmy Carter and the OPEC oil embargo, eight years of an increasingly senile Ronald Reagan, Bush I, Clinton's shenanigans, and the Bush-Cheney Administration--a period far darker and more dangerous to the United States than even Nixon's America. And, like me, the Doonesbury bunch went from counterculture beginnings (Ah, Walden...) to a more settled (if somewhat less satisfying) middle age in middle America. The '60s are gone, but Doonesbury continues to amuse with subtle irony and poignant contrasts.

Brendan Detzner says

Starting on Doonesbury with an understanding of what you're getting into is not the preferred method. it's better to read a few funny strips, realize that some of the characters appear again and are more subtly drawn than they might originally appear, and only slowly realize that every strip is part of an inimitable decades-long comic epic. But for the indoctrinated, there's not much question that Doonesbury deserves a bookshelf monument like this one. It may never be possible to own the truly complete story in print, but this is still an amazingly cool reflection of a unique and monumental work of art.

Amy says

I'm a huge Doonesbury fan and this is a massive Doonesbury book, covering the cartoon from 1970 through 2010. Obviously, it's not comprehensive, but it's great to watch the characters evolve and deal with the various politicians and issues of the day.

It's big enough to stop a bullet, so don't plan on carrying it anywhere. But if you're a Doonesbury fan, get someone to buy it for you. Or just buy it for yourself. It's worth it.

Vivian Valvano says

Thank the muses for G. B. Trudeau and "Doonesbury" and all of its characters - from the totally whacky to the winsome, from the bad guys to all of those who try to be at least pretty good and only sometimes succeed. I have always especially respected Trudeau for his utter fearlessness in his satire. Reading every single strip in this huge (9 X 12 inch, almost 700 pages) hardcover (and I DID read every single strip), which only represents 13% of all the strips from 1970 - June 2010, I was more than ever impressed with Trudeau's satiric mastery. He has taken on everyone and everything that has impacted on American life - the good, but more importantly, the (very) bad and the (very) ugly. No sacred cows anywhere. At all! Thank you, and may you keep Doonesburying for many, many, many years to come, Mr. Trudeau! (And I am not just lost in the past with the oldies and originals; I LOVE Mike's daughter, Alex.)

P. S. I haven't read the strip in a daily newspaper for quite some time b/c the local paper that it's printed in is one which I don't read. But another wonder of cyberspace: I read it daily on the Doonesbury comic site. It's part of my early morning ritual.

Scott says

finished this last night - great stuff.

Wow, this book is huge. I didnt realize that when I ordered it via the library.

I think i'll get bicep muscles just from reading it.

I'm a long time doonesbury fan and read all of his books up until about a few years ago. I did an interview here with an author who wrote a book about Doonesbury style of satire
http://sbutki.newsvine.com/_news/2010...-

Melissa says

This is an awful lot of Doonesbury.

Rory says

If this book had just been a bit smaller and, you know, ACTUALLY PHYSICALLY COMFORTABLE TO READ, I would have given it four stars. Of course I would have--I adore Doonesbury and have read every single panel since the beginning (obviously, I had to do some catching up, since it got started ten years before I was born). I was maybe hoping for some more juicy extras, too.

James says

I was aware of Doonesbury growing up, but never really read it. So I'm glad that this 40-year retrospect exists to satisfy my curiosity.

While I don't agree with every political stance Trudeau takes through his characters, I really admire and respect what he created with this strip. He made it seem cool to be aware of what was going on in the world and to have opinions about it. And it was fun to see a consistent cast of fictional characters respond to those real world events.

It's a shame he's only drawing Sunday strips now, because I'll likely become a regular reader now that I've read this book.

Michele says

Garry Trudeau: awesome for forty years. Hard to top that. Such fun to revisit the high (and low) points of American history since 1970. And the giant fold-out character relationship map is a lovely bonus :)

Karen says

Superb, an absolute must for all Doonsbury fans.

Kathi Samec says

It's amazing how old things become new again. The political stories of old doonesbury are as timely today. My only complaint with this book is that it isn't complete. I'm sure the book would have been much too big to make like that though.

Mahan Nouri says

An adequate book which reflects the political perspectives of average american lives. Trudeau draws the strip over thirty years, which in my opinion increases the credibility of the account of events, since the writer pens down the political arguments and atmosphere of the time as he lives through them, however the major downside in the retrospective edition is that it weighs heavier on the humour rather than the political side.

Gpickle says

How can you not give a book like this 5 stars? I would give it 6, especially if it were longer. I was sad to miss some of my favorite Doones moments like Zonker pondering his role in the American obesity epidemic while eating donuts at 3 in the morning because he is stoned. Or Zonker being questioned on whether he was a hippie or not. Maybe I just need to get the Big Book of Zonker again. Having been a pre-born person when the strip began, and missing much of the early content due to my inability to read or understand while I was growing up, it is nice to fill in some of the holes from what I missed. Reading so many years condensed gives a very clear view of the idea that history does not repeat itself but rhymes, thanks to Trudeau for helping us laugh through it.

One warning, the book is huge. And heavy, reportedly pushing 10 pounds. When I saw it at the library my backpack was already full, but I had to have it so I crammed it in and rode my bike home. It almost broke me. Returning it I used an Xtracycle and it filled one side.

Here is to another 40 years of Doonesbury!
