Good grief! The Complete Peanuts 1950-1952 launches the most ambitious and most important project in the comics and cartooning genre: over a period of 12 years, Fantagraphics Books will release every daily and Sunday strip of Charles M. Schulz’s Peanuts, the best-known and best-loved series in the world. Most everyone with an interest in its history has seen the very first strip (Good ol’ Charlie Brown... How I hate him!), but this first volume follows it up with 287 pages (three daily strips or one Sunday per page) of vintage material in chronological order. Peanuts was unique at the time for portraying kids who seemed like real kids, but they also had a wisdom beyond their years, embodied especially by the lovable loser, Charlie Brown, who even in these early years has lost 4000 checker games in a row. We see him don his familiar jagged-stripe shirt for the first time (December 1950) and, at the age of 4, at his peak as a babe magnet. Shermy is the other significant boy, and the girls in their lives are Patty (not to be confused with Peppermint Patty) and Violet. Schroeder is an infant who has learned to sit up in order to play Beethoven on his toy piano. Snoopy is an anthropomorphic dog who plays baseball (April 1952) and has his own thoughts (October 1952). In March 1952 we meet a bug-eyed Lucy, who by November has been designated Miss Fuss-Budget of 1952.
and is pulling the football away from Charlie Brown (Violet had done it a year earlier). Her baby brother Linus arrives in July 1952. The book itself is beautifully packaged, the strips printed large and clear on high-quality paper and accompanied by an in-depth essay by David Michaelis, a 1987 interview with Schulz, an introduction by Garrison Keillor, and even an index of characters and subjects. Its so well-done that any reader will be impatient for the rest of the series, but in the meantime this is a book to savor. --David Horiuchi

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Calvin and Hobbes was my comic strip growing up. I received books of the strip for my birthdays, and I treated them like gold. To me, I was as excited about getting a Calvin and Hobbes book as my peers were about video games. It was a huge deal.

I remember reading some Peanuts strips early in life, but, since I was already prone to liking nothing that didn't have a stuffed tiger, I dismissed Schulz's works with a humph. Now, at a much more mature age, I decided to see just what made Charlie Brown and gang so special. That, coupled with the determination to read the three comics Watterson gained inspiration from: Krazy Kat, Pogo, and Peanuts.

Boy, did I miss out on a lot.

Charles M. Schulz's masterpiece strip deserves, even after reading just the first few weeks' worth of funnies, every credit and praise given it--and then some. I found myself tearing page after page, laughing out loudly (yes, I actually "lol"ed), at times feeling sorry for Charlie Brown in the first panels of a daily, but, after reading the punchline at the end, couldn't help but laugh at the irony. The author's life growing up has been bittersweet, but all of it has truly helped him dish out the addition to American culture that we all now know as the household name of Peanuts.

His characters (well, the later ones, really) are well rounded and developed, and contain as much life and individuality of their own as any regular, living human being. Sure, the first years of Peanuts are a bit rough 'round the edges, particularly in the drawing style and some of the humor, but watching these early years is like watching an artist sculpt a marble statue: the beginning process is immensely enjoyable, albeit the fact that we don't get to see the big picture when the artist's marble is nothing more than chunky, nonsensical blocks and chippings. But once the real statue emerges forth, we stand back in awe, reflecting on the
finished work as well as the entire process beginning to end, and we start to marvel at the beautiful artwork created before our very eyes.

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