

# Douglas Coupland's 10 Recommended Books

*From Jane Magazine (September 1998)*

by Douglas Coupland

Often when I read a stranger's list of favorite books, it seems geared only to impress an English lit. teacher- rarely will the person name actual books that gave her or him endless hours of reading and re-reading pleasure. This is awfully annoying. So I made a list here of 10 books I love- not my Top 10, because that's impossible. Just books that I truly love and which Jane readers might love, too.

**THE ANDY WARHOL DIARIES** Andy Warhol with Pat Hackett (Warner Books) Warhol has influenced my life more than any other artist. I was reading his books at the age of 9 and have never stopped re-reading them since. He is a genius and a god, and I can't conceive of a 20th century without him.

**PLAY IT AS IT LAYS** Joan Didion (Noonday Press) Glamourously bleak. Reading Joan Didion makes you feel like somebody's smashing windows inside your head. In a good way.

**ANSWERED PRAYERS** Truman Capote (Vintage International) This book is the book he never finished. It's corrosive, decadent, wistful and large.

**THE ICE AGE** Margaret Drabble (NAL/Dutton) Elegant British writing set in the 1970s. Rainy-day reading.

**THE MOE CHRONICLES: TALES OF A YOUNG URBAN FAILURE** Erik Moe (Chornicle Books) Set in the extreme present tense, which I like in books. Wonderfully funny and severely illustrated with good wit.

**THE BIG LAUGH** John O'Hara (Ecco Press) The best dialogue of any American writer of this century.

**BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS** Kurt Vonnegut (Bantam Books) I went through a Kurt phase at 20, and recently again as an adult. He's held his own and only gets more relevant with the years.

**SCOOP** Evelyn Waugh (Little Brown and Co.) A jolly good read and frightfully funny in that cheeky British way. Pip pip.

**THE PURSUIT OF LOVE** and **LOVE IN A COLD CLIMATE** Nancy Mitford (Modern Library) The Pursuit of Love is possibly the most charming and amusing novel ever written. Love in a Cold Climate is the companion book. Just get them both.

# Drawing on confessions of a slacker

By James S. Howard  
The Fresno Bee

Erik Moe is the voice of his generation.

Actually, he's the voice of the Bud Ice penguin.

But, then again, for a generation that grew up on television, maybe that *is* their voice.

In addition to providing voices and writing copy for a San Francisco advertising firm, Moe has written a book that captures the essence of the twenty-somethings.

Fittingly enough, it's a cartoon book.

Describing his people as

## BOOK REVIEW

**THE MOE CHRONICLES:  
TALES OF A YOUNG  
URBAN FAILURE**

By Erik Moe  
Chronicle Books,  
143 pages, \$14.95

"couch-ridden, microbrew-swilling, glued-to-the-boob-tube masses," the book spares nobody, including Moe himself, in its portrayal of a lost generation that just doesn't have the energy to be found. At least not when there's a rerun of "Family Ties" on the television.

The book follows Moe and his friends as they search for romance, fulfillment and careers as rock 'n' roll stars. After losing his job, Moe eventually finds a new one, only to hit bigger concerns when he realizes he hasn't had a date in 237 days.

With dry wit and simple drawings, the book focuses on "the unemployed, underemployed, and unwillingly employed" and finds humor in even the most depressing lives.

Older readers will chuckle over this self-deprecating look at young urban failures, but for the slacker generation, Moe's a god.

## Reviews

They gave him a window office.  
I couldn't believe it.



### The Moe Chronicles: Tales of a Young Urban Failure

By Erik Moe. Chronicle Books, \$14.95.

Two often comic strips aimed for cute instead of funny. *Family Circus* has milked those semiretarded kids' adorable little malapropisms for a fortune, while *Zaggy* still clogs up a corner in everyone's Sunday paper. But Erik Moe, who boldly debuts with a 143-page graphic novel, refuses to draw a panel without a zinger.

Moe's story happens to be cute, but it's also a bitingly accurate look at the world of a single 30-year-old. In just 274 panels, the nameless main character, an advertising executive in San Francisco (and, to judge from the title, presumably based on Moe himself), covers more generational ground than *Singles* and *Reality Bites* put together. He also works in a lot more jokes—not the cheap, pop-culture-reference kind, or the sarcastic, Chanderlesque variety, but a more organic type. (The doctor who diagnoses our hero as having kidney stones keeps calling him "Ace," as in

"Drop your pants and bend over, Ace.")

After being laid off, Moe goes through a mild depression, staying home alone but eager to answer calls from solicitors ("Phil, tell me more about how you can offer such an exciting credit package"). Eventually, he gets a job, starts working out, has a failed date with a coworker, plays a lot of Sega hockey, watches all his college friends get married and boring, and becomes the butt of an office joke, chronicling via e-mail, how many days it's been since he got laid.

*The Moe Chronicles* does get a little hokey at the end, when our hero's high-school girlfriend moves across the country to live with him. But, hey, daily newspaper strips don't have to come up with endings. Maybe, we'll be lucky enough to have Moe's characters come back every day.—Joel Stein

ices." Despite this, many black dough-boys, who met with a warm reception wherever they marched, elected to stay behind and make a life away from the implacable racism of America.

Stovall monitors cultural and political currents in the U.S., recounting the responses of the expatriate community as the country moved from the euphoria of the Jazz Age through the violence of the civil rights movement and the denouement of the Watergate years. Many in Paris felt they must return home to join the struggle, as did writer James Baldwin in 1957 and, briefly, William Gardner Smith, as a correspondent for Agence France-Presse in 1967. Donald Byrd, a musician who spent four years in Paris, also felt drawn back to the States: "That's where I'm supposed to be fighting. What should I do, hide in Paris?... The ones who did not come back, they kept themselves away from a refreshing period of hope here."

Despite Stovall's firsthand observations of French racism ("I noticed the Arabs and Africans sweeping the [Paris] streets, and I remember being searched... by police who were convinced that I fit the profile of an international terrorist"), he himself concludes that "the album of the

### With William Burroughs: A Report From The Bunker

By Victor Bockris. St. Martin's Griffin, \$13.95.

The St. Louis-born aristocrat and addict who became the eminence grise of the Beats, William S. Burroughs has enjoyed something of a comeback in recent years. He appeared in Gus Van Sant's film *Drugstore Cowboy*, did advertisements for Nike, recorded an album with Kurt Cobain. Now, St. Martin's has seen fit to issue a revised edition of Victor Bockris's *With William Burroughs*, first published in 1981. Uneven, rambling, even ramshackle, this collection of interviews, conversational transcripts and Burroughs' reminiscences demonstrates how a Bill becomes a legend.

Long a fixture on the downtown/punk scene, Bockris has turned out biographies of several of its players—including Andy Warhol and Lou Reed—and there's a Bockris bio of Parti Smith coming next year. *With William Burroughs* presents Bill as the subject of an oral history that quotes such scenesters as Gerard Malanga, Marcia Resnick and Terry Southern, not to mention Reed and Warhol. The book focuses primarily on Burroughs' life from 1974 to 1980, when he inhabited a Bowery apartment known as "The Bunker." Bockris, a close friend of the writer's during this period, has helpfully divided his book by topic—chapters include "On Writing," "On Dreams" and, of course, "On Drugs"—but the divisions are more playful than accurate. The revisions to this 1996 edition amount to a new introduction, two of the author's post-1981 encounters with Burroughs and some references to Jean-Michel Basquiat (whose name is consistently misspelled as either "Jean Michael Basquiat," "Jean-

Michel Basquiat" or "Michael Basquiat").

Ultimately, Burroughs' equal parts curiosity—probing curiosity—Burroughs shines, when on punk music ("I did a lot of support in the released 'God Save Me I've always said that stand a chance unless ple saying, SUGGER discussing his avers tipedes frighten me this is not an actual are incapacitated by tided. I simply look a with which to combat votaries looking for a of interviews won't fit Burroughs, but Bur certainly get their fix.

### Parties: A Literary Companion

Edited by Susanna Joinston.

Overlook, \$24.95.

I'm hungover from a holiday party and in no condition to write. Luckily, by quoting from this new compendium of writing about soirees, I can give you a taste of the book and, at the same time, try to reconstruct the hazy events of last night.

When I arrived, "There were clerks, pimps and tarts—tarts of every sort.... There were men of the world in evening dress prowling about in the sweating crowd, in search of young flesh..." (Guy De Maupassant, 1890). I tried talking to a "rather untidy-looking creature.... She evidently hadn't settled on her pose, always a disastrous moment for a natural woman who wishes to be artificial" (Ada Loverson, 1911).

But then it was on to dinner: "While a

hidden orchestra played, the guests were wearing [servants] wearing stockings in cloth of with tears" (Joris K... "Luscious fruits were open baskets. The feathers on them" (1857). "The pudding whites overcooked a yellow custard, can pause; it was unexerated rather grand" (B...

Afterward, we praised the gods of g brass, of iron, of w (The Bible). "Someon banjo... and three on (Rudyard Kipling, 1 fied woman "danced the debris of the mea [her] Dior dress, tear that she was naked Wesley, 1992). "Over my glass be filled up, been more malicious (Jilly Cooper, 1977).

Unfortunately, I the salvation of the



### Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light

By Tyler Stovall. Houghton Mifflin, \$24.95.

In *Paris Noir*, Tyler Stovall comprehensively chronicles the emigration of American blacks to the City of Light after World War I and their subsequent contributions to French culture. He attempts to show that the silver lining of the life abroad wasn't necessarily there: At the height of 1920s primitivism,