

Beware the Ides of January

Okay, it's a new year, so what do we all run out and buy? You guessed it, calendars (there'll be a hot time in the old student newspaper tonight). So to kick off the year, the X-Press brings you a look at some of the wilder and wackier date-minders on the market.....

Deep Thoughts 1995 Calendar

Saturday Night Live's deep thinker, Jack Handey, was one of the funniest things on that bounding program the last time I looked through that isn't saying much these days). This page-a-day calendar (one page per week-end) collects 312 of Handey's trademark musings, like "I hope life isn't a big joke, because I don't get it." Hmmm. Well, they aren't all winners (in fact, their success rate seems to run about fifty-fifty as I see 'em), but they are unique, and a few of them are streamingly funny. So, if you'd like to start off each day with a smidgen of warped humour, this may be the calendar for you.

Far Side 1995 Desk Calendar

And speaking of warped humour, it doesn't come much more bent than Gary Larson's *Far Side* cartoons, immortalized in yet another calendar (this one being one of those spiral-bound, weekly calendars that are so handy as day planners and such). Each week gives you another one of Larson's weird cartoon panels in full colour, including some real gems like "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Ed" and "Professor Armond, the epitome of evil amongst butterfly collectors."

Macintosh Secrets Calendar

From the folks at Macworld comes this handy, page-a-day guide to little-known facts about your Macintosh computer. Actually, some of the pages (according to a Mac veteran and my acquaintance) are obvious or redundant, but there's also a few useful tips, and for a Mac nut like myself it's a welcome supplement to my ongoing Mac assimilation.

Magic Eye 1995 Desk Calendar

Love 'em or hate 'em, these "Magic Eye" images are everywhere! In case you've been hanging in a cave or something, Magic Eye pictures are optical illusions wherein 3-D images emerge from a multi-coloured picture when you stare at them the right way. If you love the Magic Eye, then this is the calendar/planner for you. The pictures (one per week), are pretty innocuous fare, but fun for the 3-D effect itself. Be forewarned, though: not all folks are able to see these things (especially if your eyes have unequal vision), and even though most people can see them, it often takes a bit of practice to get the hang of it.

Marvel Comics 1995 Calendar

For any comic book fan, this calendar is a thing of beauty and a joy forever (well, for the next 365 days at the very least). It's so darn purty, I can't bring myself to tear off the pages (though I have been flipping ahead dutifully to absorb each day's slice of comic book history). Don't get me wrong-- I'm not some drooling Marvel zombie who mutters that "Wolverine rules" as I fall asleep in my X-Men jammies or something-- but I am a fan of good comic books and the history thereof, and this calendar, surprisingly, gives us just that instead of a mercenary sampling of Marvel's modern, mass-marketed cash cows like Spider-Man, Wolverine, Punisher, Ghost Rider, X-Men and so on. Those characters all appear herein, but so do zillions of more obscure Marvel characters like Jack of Hearts, Banshee, and even the Two-Gun Kid (that last one really floored me). Each page is a full-colour reproduction of a scene from a Marvel comic, and the selection covers a pleasantly wide range of arts styles and comic book eras-- ranging from Hank Pym's 1962 trip down the anthill to 1994's latest X-Men adventures. This calendar is a great little multi-faceted time capsule of comics history.

Star Wars 1995 3-D Calendar

Ah, nostalgia. As a kid from a generation weaned on the immortal *Star Wars* trilogy and its merchandising (loved those action figures), I eagerly snapped up this latest "Magic Eye" wall calendar. I was, however, somewhat disappointed. The whole point of a wall calendar (as opposed to the desk calendars and page-a-day varieties) is big, impressive visuals. We do get 12 *Star Wars*-related 3-D images, but some are rather unimpressive, like the big "May the Force be with you" slogan (whoop-tee-doo). And the biggest disappointment is the calendar's depiction of Darth Vader; I'm not sure if it's the limitations of the Magic Eye medium or what seemed like an oversimplified geometric rendering, but this calendar makes one of fiction's most impressive bad guys look-- well, silly (and nigh-unrecognizable). Wait for the next movie.

Windows Secrets Calendar

Another computer calendar, with useful page-a-day hints on this Windows stuff we IBM types seem to cling to.

All calendars reviewed by Sean MacQuaid, and all are from Andrews and McMeel publishing

BOOK REVIEWS

A Strangers Kiss

Shelly Thacker

(Avon Books)

Marie Nicole LeBon, the heroine, invents a new fertilizer to help the French people grow better crops. However, it has a second unexpected purpose-- the "fertilizer" is highly explosive. While running from people who want her invention for its second purpose, she is knocked unconscious by an explosion. When she awakes, she has no memory of her experience and works to remember her past. She also meets a handsome man named Max D'Avenant, who is madly in love with her. But he, however, is a British spy who has been sent to discover the ingredients of her invention. I'll leave you to find out what he decides to do. This is not your average grocery store romance. Read it.

-- Kathy Giesbrecht

Edie: American Girl

Jean Stein

Edited with George Plimpton
(Grove Press)

This book was first released in the early '80s and immediately became a best seller. I can see why. My copy from the first soft cover release will be treasured for years to come. I was not alive in the '60s and this novel gives me a vivid image of the real '60s. It's not just from one person's point of view, but from the experiences of the 250 people interviewed. Their quotes are printed verbatim (or close to) throughout the book. The book also includes the genealogy of Edie Sedgwick-Post and tons of pictures that illustrate her life. Her life is an amazing story in itself, but I should warn you-- it's not for the faint of heart.

-- Kathy Giesbrecht

Roger Ebert's Video Companion (1995 edition)

(Andrews and McMeel)

Boy, is my face red. In a previous review (for Leonard Maltin's own video guide) I made the statement that Siskel and Ebert's video companion books were pointlessly hostile. Now I find myself feasting on *Pied Dans Ma Bouche*, a rare delicacy only enjoyed by critic who have made sweeping generalizations about things they know nothing about. Oops.

If you're not familiar with Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert, you really ought to get your pulse checked. They're the archetypical movie critics, with their own syndicated TV show and a nasty (but oh, so amusing) habit of getting into verbal fisticuffs every time they 'discuss' a recent film. Whether these fights are part of a serious rivalry or just two intelligent men who just enjoy arguing has been a topic of much debate over the years. This interesting but useless tidbit of popular culture is, however, important to understanding the idea behind *Roger Ebert's Video Companion*.

That idea, simply stated, is that to understand a critic, you first have to find out if that critic's opinions reflect your own. Thus, Ebert has collected his reviews of his favourite movies, thrown in as many recent releases as possible, added interviews and memorials for famous stars, and his favourite questions people ask.

The bulk of the book is full length movie reviews, as opposed to the *TV Guide*-style capsulized reviews most video guides employ. My feelings on this method of reviewing videos is mixed (or, to take a swipe at S&E's television show, thumbs up/thumbs down). At first, it seems like a great idea: no more squinting at tiny type, no more wondering exactly what the critic means when he writes "pointless and boring" or "well worth

seeing". On the other thumb, longer reviews means fewer films reviewed, which leaves you standing in the video store in an indecisive haze. The idea here is that this is a book for true connoisseurs of cinemas, and if Johnny Ignorant can't find a feature review of *Nazi Swimsuit Babes With Chainsaws*, it probably ain't worth watching.

Another slight problem is the style of Roger Ebert himself. He's literate, intelligent and usually at least halfway witty, but he falls into a seductive trap right from the word go-- he has no discernable logic. He gives bad movies high praise. He drags good ones through the mud. Examples? He thought that Robin William's *Popeye* was a brilliantly conceived movie. A horrible political mess like *The Pelican Brief* gets high marks. *Point Break* is somehow worth three and a half stars. He mystifies. He boggles. The only way to know if the movies he reviews are any good is to watch them yourself. In short, he's an academic who's lost sight of the people he's writing his reviews for. He wants you to be on his level.

On the other hand, the book contains wonderful essays on going to films, which are terrifically funny. Read the part entitled "How To Watch a Movie" for helpful advice on where to sit and how to behave. And if you find a copy on the bookrack, be sure to read the review for *Infra-Man*. You'll laugh so hard you'll wake up wearing a straightjacket with a Prozac intravenous drip.

In short: Less of a video guide than an academic exercise. A book like this should be like one of those little native guides in every jungle movie, saying, "No Sahib, best you no step there!". Instead it's like a fat white English professor on safari saying, "and here we have a fine example of native forest-weave... oh my, a tiger pit (shluck!)."

-- Trent Drake