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Retro Hell: Life In The `70s And `80s, From Afros To Zotz



Synopsis

Valley Girls, Quaaludes, Howard Cosell, K-Tel Records. In today's pop-culture spin-cycle the 1970s and 1980s rule. "Retro Hell" provides a travelogue through the best and worst of these unforgettable decades. Orchestrated by the editor of the "Ben Is Dead" magazine, the book both sends up and celebrates the cultural landscape of our misspent youth. Thirty "Ben Is Dead" writers and hundreds of their readers helped assemble the nearly 1000 sharply opinionated alphabetical entries and sidebars. The icons, the eccentricities, the excesses, the kitsch - from alligator shirts, breakdancing, Earth Shoes and Farrah Fawcett to bumper stickers, eight-tracks, Schoolhouse Rock and John Travolta. Illustrated throughout with 100 black-and-white photographs and illustrations, the book offers a compendium of recent pop-culture arcana - a look back for everyone who survived the 70s and 80s.

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Customer Reviews

These two books guide the user through the cultural trivia of the last two decades with surprisingly little duplication. Both have plenty of See references to lead readers from "Erasure" to "Synth-Pop" to "Aerobics" to "Leg Warmers." Contributors to the long-running Ben Is Dead, a Los Angeles-based alternative culture magazine, have compiled their favorite memories of the Seventies and early Eighties. The signed entries include more general trends ("Orange: Important color when we grew up") as well as the expected "Jonathan Livingston Seagull," and often two or more people contribute annotations for the same entry. This format works well because the writing has a distinctly personal touch; the essay on PBS's Electric Company has as much to do with the impression the show had

on one viewer as with the facts of the show's production. Journalists Gaslin and Porter offer a more factual?and more boring?take on the people, TV shows, and hit songs of the 1980s. Their short entries occasionally take a stab at humor or remind us of some forgotten connection but mostly list a singer's top hits or an actor's most memorable parts. As reference sources, both these books are comprehensive and well organized enough to answer the basic questions about one-hit wonders and sitcom stars and would do well in medium and large public libraries. Retro Hell also has some value as a cultural history and should be in public and academic circulating collections.?Eric Bryant, "Library Journal"Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

These aren't just photos of old toys with witty banter. Each author has a personal story in connection with said toy or time.

All the fun stuff from the 60's through the 80's is included here: Crazy Straws, scarf dresses, toe socks, even The Schick Electric Hot Lather Dispenser! It's all here, and best of all alphabetically arranged which makes finding a specific item a snap!One of the best things about this book is the inclusion of several contributors first hand experiences with some items. Their detailed descriptions might help jog some fun memories of your own.Unfortunately, a few of their stories contain profanity, so you may not be able to share those passages with the entire family. But if you don't have a problem with an occasional curse word in the text you'll LOVE this book!

Good service...nice product. Highly recommended.

Really good encyclopedic coverage

Flat, boring, tries to be funny and fun but comes off very bland.

Perfectly suited to its target audience both in subject matter and in presentation, this little encyclopedia is guaranteed to be incomprehensible to anyone who was not a small child during the Ford and Carter administrations. It is an exhaustive laundry list of toys, television shows, and other products marketed to children mostly in the 1970's and early 1980's. Said children grew up, went to college, and spent many a late-night dorm room session processing their mixed amusement and time-gilded fondness for these products. Generation X's strangely premature nostalgia was in the mid-'90's documented and catalogued by the staffers of a 'zine called Ben Is Dead, and

subsequently released as a book, published with a silver cover, adorned with a flaming disco ball and digito-futuro typeface, called "Retro Hell". As with any encyclopedia, this book is not to be read cover to cover. Unlike with an encyclopedia, the entries will not strain the most fragile of attention spans, as they are brief and anecdotal. Some merely invoke the commercial slogan attached to the toy in order to clarify the meaning of the item. Chances are good that if you, a friend or a sibling had a particular game, toy, or favorite TV actor in 1976, it will merit an entry in this book, presumably to your surprise and affectionate delight. OK, let's face it. We GenX'ers (my DOB: 12/20/69) had discussions about these silly things with our friends as far back as 1986, and it all began with our laughter at the memory of the Brady Bunch, with its plaid polyester and relentless good cheer. (Surprisingly no one has ever called attention in print to the sublime musical score of the Brady Bunch.) By the mid-1990's, most of us were a bit burnt out on that sort of discussion. And yet, the sheer inclusiveness of this book guarantees that the late-night discussions will continue for at least as long as it takes to comb through it, as the diligent editors of BiD have dredged up for us memories of long-forgotten things like Wacky Packages, checkered Vans, and Operation!. One can imagine that this catalogue was generated with competitive passion, as the youthful 'zinesters engaged in that most cherished of all verbal sports, "Obscurity One-Upmanship", or "Who can recall the most marginal bit of shameless pop culture detritus from the furthest corners of their memory?" Their effort is worthwhile, despite its novelty. It is as ironic as the generation it was written for, as it is in fact useful trash. It is the narrowest history of minutiae you can possibly find, and therefore the most telling. As might once have been said on a nighttime infomercial somewhere around 1980, "It makes a great gift ! "

If you were born between 1965 to 1979, this book is aimed at you. You may end up disagreeing with many of the entries, but not because they're wrong- just because it can be so embarrassing to see your past held up in a modern light. This is an encyclopaedic recounting of pop-culture memories of many authors, and was originally published in 3 consecutive issues of Darby's magazine "Ben is Dead". One of the unfortunate side-effects of the translation from magazine to book has been the loss of a bit of material. Most/all of the supplementary articles and sidebars have been lost; a lot of pictures have been dropped (possibly from copyright or trademark infringement?); individual entries have been changed, either to remove possibly inflammatory material, or for some judicious editing. Some entries are gone all-together. But, after 5+ years, my copies of BiD are brown and curling from acidic decay, water damage, constant re-reading. This book is a more durable, more easily transportable, more easily read and shared compendium of what is undoubtedly the best part of the

original 3 issues. For most entries, there are comments from multiple authors- if you don't like what someone wrote about your favorite subject, there's someone else right after them that wrote exactly what you wish you could say. You'll have old dusty memories jarred- both pleasant and unpleasant. You'll cringe in agony when you realize just how stupid we looked drawing a "Z" in the dirt to run faster when wearing Zips shoes. You'll recall that night you saw Pink Lady & Jeff on TV and realized adults didn't know what they were doing, either. You'll also get a lot of info on regional fads (typically southern California) that may not mean much in the rest of the country, but makes for interesting reading. The best part about the book is the editorial decision to not just concentrate on the happy/good parts of our collective past. A lot of dirt is listed, too, which will make some people uncomfortable, but it makes the book probably the most honest of the pop-culture books that reference the 70s. Instead of sanitizing and making palatable what was, in all honesty, an incredibly vapid and tasteless era, Retro Hell is more of a catharsis for everyone who grew up in that time. The book's not just a fun read, but it'll probably make you a better person, too.

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