

GEEK CHIC: THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO GEEK CULTURE

BY NEIL FEINEMAN

REVIEW BY PETER O'BRIEN

"I am not a geek," says Neil Feineman in the acknowledgements at the end of *Geek Chic*. This is a curious thing for the author to say, because according to his book geek culture encapsulates just about every contemporary activity or pursuit, and many historical ones. Among the people this book says are part of geek culture: Aristotle, Benjamin Franklin, James Bond, David Bowie, Michael Jackson and Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Among the things this book says are part of geek culture: coffee, the printing press, the light bulb, Aspirin, the T-shirt, potato chips, porn sites and iPods.

Attempting to be a guide, *Geek Chic* is much more a breezy series of graphic and text-based snapshots of things vaguely related to technology, and computers in particular. Along the way, we get Geek Food, Geek TV, Geek Gadgets, Geek Cars, etc.

There are some facts – we are told that in 1999 "Americans as a whole spent six times more money on [video] game players and games than on American school library materials" – but not much here that can't be found on a half-hearted meander through Google.

There is also some commentary – we are told that the virtual community "has dispensed with physical appearance, age, gender, race, location and, although probably to a lesser extent, class," and that the Internet "has become as close to a meritocracy as we've seen" – but in this book such observations are not burdened by intelligent, if geeky, context or insight. *Geek Chic*, like most marketing gestures, wants you to buy something but not think too much.

Are geeks a culture or a subculture or an anti-culture, or all three? If geeks take over the world (we are told they both "rule" and "rock"), do they remain geeks? Are all geeks bound, Pavlovian, to the limitations of technology and the newest computer gadget? These and other cultural questions remain unexamined.

At the very least, a geek proofreader perhaps would have caught the multitude of typos and instances of sloppy writing. Calling Dr. Seuss "the most cynical, post-modern cynic," invoking the "Sedgeway" (it's Segway) and noting that *2001: A Space Odyssey* came out in "large theatres" are not the best ways to hold an audience, geek or not.

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