

January Man has too many loose ends

The January Man

★★ 1/2

Famous Players Paramount

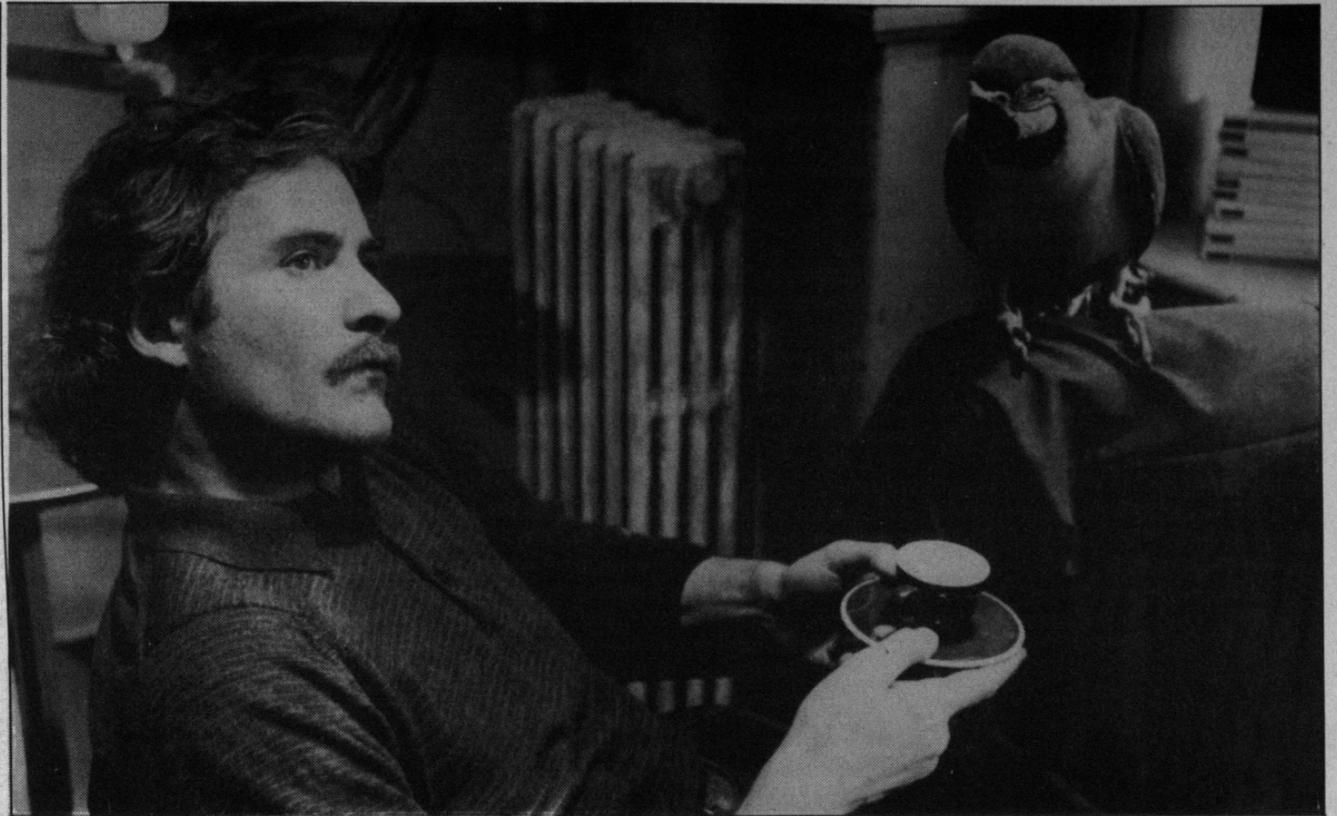
review by Ron Kuipers

Any moviegoer should expect big things from a film directed by Norman Jewison that stars Kevin Kline and Susan Sarandon, but these heavyweights cannot save *The January Man*, a film that ultimately lacks any sort of focus.

This is not a bad film. The only problem is that it is not a good one either. The plot itself is quite intriguing, but certain intricacies within it remain unexplored, and that is disappointing. The film is basically a detective story. A brilliant cop with a shady past, played by Kline, is rehired by the NYPD in order to solve a series of serial killings. Using various unorthodox and 'unpolicemanlike' methods, Lt. Nick Starkey is able to flush out the killer before his last murder.

What the audience is not shown is the reason for Starkey's fallout with the NYPD or the psychological makeup and motive of the killer. Had these two aspects in particular been fleshed out, the film would have been much stronger. Starkey's motives for taking the case would have been more easily understandable, and a stronger sense of the killer's inner workings would have made the whole movie more interesting. As it is, the film remains unclear, with many untied loose ends.

Another disturbing fact is that the film keeps shifting incoherently between com-



Kevin Kline and winged friend meditate on the joys of busting lowdown, scum-sucking, antisocial and generally nasty serial killers.

edy and serious detective drama. Unlike a film such as *Rain Man*, where comedy and serious drama complement each other, *The January Man* frustrates with false expectations. The audience is kept waiting for some connection between Starkey and the killer, even if it is simply at an intuitive, psychological level. But no such connection is forthcoming, as the actual arrest is dealt with in a comic manner.

What it boils down to is that this film would have been vastly improved if Starkey tried to think like the killer in order to solve the case. This way, it would not appear that Starkey had just stumbled

onto his clues, but discovered them because he knew what the killer was thinking. This kind of psychological link is only cheaply exploited when Starkey offers some half-baked, neo-Freudian explanation of the killer's motives. I kept wanting to see Starkey get close to the edge in this way, but he ends up solving the case at more physical than mental expense.

Why Susan Sarandon is in this film completely escapes me. Her only importance is to an unclear sub-plot. This is unfortunate, since we have become so accustomed to her in interesting roles, such as the insatiable ball team follower in

Bull Durham. It seems her only importance in this film is as a box office draw. In fact, it is the performances in smaller roles by Rod Steiger and Danny Aiello that are really a pleasure to watch.

All in all this is a disappointing, but not boring film. One can sit through it and be reasonably entertained. It could have been something bigger, but some executive saw fit to leave it small and instead rely on big names to attract audiences. My advice is to wait nine months until the video release. That way you can at least press pause if you have to go to the bathroom, and the film will be that much less disappointing.

★ Night Life
★ MUSIC Life
★ Street Life
★ STYLE Life

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Wild Life
★ PEOPLE

HUB Mall