

Beyond Her:

by Paule Sheya Hewlett



• In the Dark •

I have been a movie-lover all my life. Against all odds, I might add — since where I came from, experience-enhancers like popcorn and soft drinks were *not* part of the equation. “We go to the movie to see the movie,” my mother would say. And it stood or fell on its own merits.

I believe there was a time when this was a fair fight. I mean, movies used to be good, right? How else to account for the fact that after all these years, I still read the big, bold reviews (“Best Comedy of the Year!” “Truly, A ‘Best Actor’ Performance!”) And I believe them.

Then I go to these highly acclaimed (Ten Thumbs Up!!!!) movies. Often, I force others to go with me. And nine times out of ten, we leave the theater trying to explain to each other what happened in the movie and why. My question is — for \$400 million (or whatever it costs to make a movie these days) do we really have to guess?

Sometimes we just give each other The Shrug, which means “Oh, well — there goes another \$40” (Obviously, I have joined the ranks of the popcorn-eaters). It’s like, what can we expect?

Well, based on my early years, I believe

we can expect a plot with a beginning, a middle and an end. And I would prefer it to be a plot I have not seen in one of the other 55 adjoining theaters last week.

We can expect interesting characters that can be accounted for without resorting to witchcraft (“He must have been snatched by aliens or snuffed by the Mafioso.”). And I absolutely

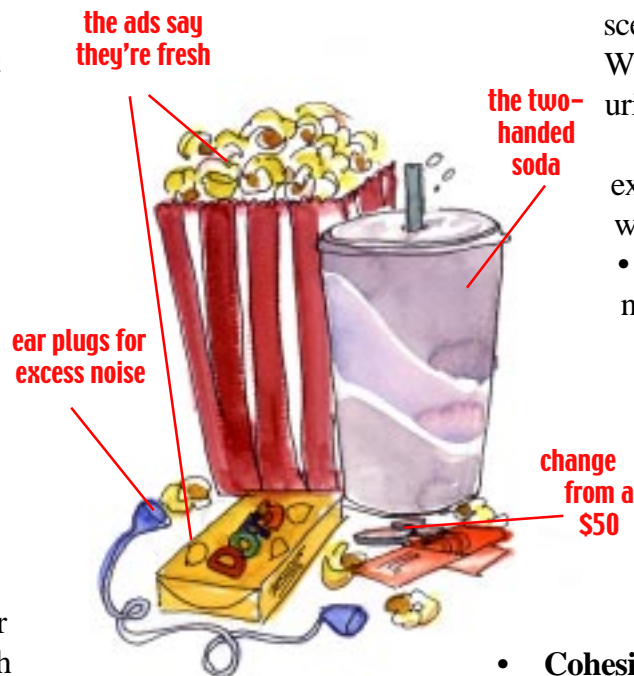
believe we are entitled to see at least one movie without a scene in the men’s bathroom. What IS this fascination with urinals?

Here are a few other expectations I’d like to share with the movie makers:

- **Length** – Evidently the new rule is, you only have four hours to make a good impression. Could someone please explain to directors that we don’t have to actually watch a character walk to Ireland to get the idea that he went there?

- **Cohesiveness** – I read that Alfred Hitchcock had complete storyboards for every frame he shot. My theory is today they just let the cameras rip while the crew grazes at the buffet table, and then it’s somebody’s job to piece the footage together over pizza and a six pack. If the focus group doesn’t like the ending, they just shoot another one – and stick in another car chase – ideally the one where the two main characters look at each other and scream. Guess what? We notice.

Movie Pack



- **Special Effects** – I can really see no dramatic value in watching people’s faces contort or their cars transform or their minds expand accompanied by ear-splitting noise. As for violence, as someone who nearly passes out from a paper cut, watching somebody’s intestines flailed onto a ship rail does not qualify as entertainment.

- **Potty Talk & Sex**– Don’t get me wrong. As a former flower child, I’m all for first amendment rights and a little rolling around in the sheets.

But is this really how we talk? (Gee, hardly anyone has called me a mother -#@\$@# today.) I find it equally distressing to witness the complete sexual act next to (a) my 16-year-old daughter, or (b) a friend’s 56-year-old husband. The only thing I know to do is to pass the Dots.

My other complaint is that the theater experience just ain’t what it used to be. The atmosphere today is most like a slumber party: kids running, people talking, phones ringing — and being answered — with wild abandon. (Did that guy really order a pizza?)

I find myself longing for a good usher — a bossy boy in a dirty uniform to make people behave. (Ushers were quite useful: one actually fished a dime out of Chris Atack’s nose during fifth grade summer. What do 11-year-olds do now?)

I may be the only person on earth who ranks the movies, but I don’t think I’m toughgrader. And every once in a while, a wonderful movie comes along and bolsters my hopes — and the category’s cumulative GPA. Then, there I am again, checking out the ads, thinking, “This one really *might* be Academy Award

material! This one *could* be the Comedy of the Year!!” Right. Or it could be another in the series of C+ ventures I have grown so fond of bashing.

As for the consistently rave reviews, the only explanation is that Roger Ebert has got his thumbs wired permanently up. My advice is not to go to any movie unless recommended by a friend. But as someone who enjoyed *Pulp Fiction* as much as *The Winslow Boy*, it’s hard to find someone whose taste matches mine.

So I’ll be looking at the ads this weekend, trying to make a calculated guess. And at some point, I’ll be sitting there in the dark. Due to faith or foolishness, I remain a movie-lover.

Of course, what I really want to do is direct.



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“Beyond Her” is a free electronic publication produced by Paule Sheya Hewlett at irregular intervals. Back issues are available at the Beyond Her web site: home.houston.rr.com/beyond_her/

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