

THE PROPER BOSKONIAN

The Proper Boskonian is the oft-heard of, seldom-seen Journal of the New England Science Fiction Association, Inc., and the J. Mark Anderson Cult of Admirers Society. The Editor is J. Mark Anderson, who can be reached c/o Mike Saler, 393 Main Street, Concord MA 01742. Special thanks to Claire Graham (NESFA Clerk) and Dave Anderson (my mother's only child). This issue's Quiz Question: What important number belongs at the top of the masthead? Members of NESFA and their immediate families and friends are ineligible to reply.

Anderson, MARK: MY WORDS

A loyal reader from Jones, Indiana, writes:

Dear Mark,

I am a loyal reader from Jones, Indiana, and I have a complaint. My wife and I read many thought provoking magazines each week, and we always have long, stimulating discussions on the material which we have read. Your Journal, however, often leaves us speechless, and it is at these times of non-communication that we see how sterile and futile our marriage really is. Please publish more stimulating material, so that Belinda and I may continue to distract ourselves from this life of quiet desperation.

Most sincerely,

Mr. Benjamin Barker Please Withhold My Name

P.S. I am enclosing a lengthy article, "The Scandalous History of the NESFA Budget, with Illustrations" which Belinda and I wrote during our 2nd honeymoon.

Much moved by your plight, Mr. Name, I showed your letter and article to Richard Harter, Sage of South Dakota. He read your minutely detailed history of the budget process, murmured "we've got to do something about this," and quickly handed me the article printed herein. I am sorry that it had to replace the article which you so thoughtfully sent (and sorrier still that your MS was destroyed during an LNG tank-car explosion, but such things do happen); however I am sure that Mr. Harter's double-barreled magnum opus will more than serve to keep you and your wife in nuptial bliss. "The NESFA Library" also makes an appearance, as do a wide variety of carefully selected typos and misspellings guaranteed to please even the most jaded nitpicker.

See you in a few weeks!

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THE NESFA LIBRARY

Three reviews by Jim Hudson

Vampires of Nightworld, by David Bischoff, Del Rey Books, \$2.25
The Revolution from Rosinante by Alexis Gilliland, Del Rey Books, \$2.25
At the Eye of the Ocean by Hilbert Schenck, Pocket Books, \$2.50

The first two books are both enjoyable adventure novels, falling in the "better than average but under 90%" class (i.e., both are crud).

Bischoff's is a sequel, and Nightworld itself was enjoyable -- fluff, but fun and a reasonable read. It had a diablo ex machina, which is replaced here by the devil's apprentice and a deus ex machina who solves everything. It had

neat realizations through robotics of ghoulies, etc.; so does this one. It had several cop-outs, and so does the sequel. It had cardboard characters, and so does the sequel. Nothing special, but a good, light read and probably worth the money.

Revolution is going to generate sequels, according to the trade press. I'm not sure why, though I'll probably buy them if the price isn't too much (worth \$2.25, not worth \$3.95). Good colony, being built, gets cancelled by the awful bureaucrats. So it revolts through high finance, and attempts to survive even though there are misguided fools as well as actual bad guys on earth. Passable politics, some nice ideas, and nothing special in the characters or actions, or in the prose (which is too slow and dry for this sort of book: the style should, though I don't like to say it, emulate Pournelle, not Niven). Worth the money, fun, but nothing special.

Vampires was done better by Stasseff; Revolution as Moon is a Harsh Mistress, TriCentennial, or even Colony. Still, reasonable efforts.

Now on to the fun one,

At the Eye of the Ocean is a first novel, I think, and one which I hope is an awards contender. I think it's SF; Ellen Franklin says it's an historical romance with some mysticism. Whichever it is, it has several real characters of both sexes, some interesting philosophical concepts; those concepts are realized through a world-view that I find fascinating, and that isn't garden variety mysticism. Also, the concepts unfold through a series of new insights as we follow the protagonists through their lives.

And all this with whaling ships in the 1850's? It takes chutzpah to write about whaling seriously, particularly in this time, and (in fact) any time, since the comparisons with Moby Dick became obvious.

The book works. I am extremely impressed, and recommend it to all of you (well, maybe not to those who read only adventure, S&S, etc., but at least to those who read SF and Regency Romances).

The book basically covers the full lives of a couple who grow up in the islands off Cape Cod (the Elizabeths and the Vineyard) in the middle of the nineteenth century. One is messianic; the other is a bit more sensible, but equally powerful. They grow, discover, love, and come to understand the world in many ways. The insights are based on the ocean, which is the source for the title. Again, a novel which is Highly Recommended.

Sunwaifs by Sidney J. Scyoc, Berkley Paperback, 1981.

Reviewed by Rebecca Kaplowitz

Jewelled and evocative prose. Bluntly put, this is one of the few books I have read within the past year that I would rank as a classic work of great fiction; the kind that will endure hundreds of years after its creator is dust.

This tale is extremely well choreographed; a stunning blend of sound, light, music. For example: "The distant cloud spoke again, and suddenly young Charles Edward Dunler, eleven years old, was transfixed by light, his upraised arms caught in a web of brilliance, his head thrown back with neck-snapping force."

Very large questions are, I thought, successfully treated; The balance between good and evil; the immediate needs of an isolated community of pilgrims from the

"Old Country," Mother Earth, who struggle to make peace with a new mother, Destiny, and the new Power native to this soil, this life. This conflict is mirrored in the six children: each simultaneously flesh of Old Earth, and child to Mother Destiny and fathered by the hard radiation of Destiny's sun. And nowhere have I seen the dilemma of evil handled more elegantly than in the confrontation between Corrie, born of darkness, the destroyer of the six, and Headfather Schuster of the pilgrims:

"You're bound to us, Corrie. While you thought we were shunning you, we were binding you. Any god, any power, however dark, craves worship. And once worshipped, the power must serve its subjects.

"Well, we have worshipped you in the most profound way, by publicly denying you, by struggling to close our hearts and our eyes to you -- by admitting in a hundred ways that you are so threatening that we can't bear to look upon you. And now you are ours.

"And Destiny is ours too. Oh, even now she'd like nothing better than to crush us. But the quality of her resistance is changing. Because she's learning the same lesson that you must learn: that a power once recognized and worshipped, serves. We've worshipped Destiny and now she struggles like a creature in a trap, knowing eventually she must capitulate."

"'And serve.'" I whispered, stricken. Although I wanted to reject this claim, I felt the truth of it."

A thoroughly deserving book!

Nebula Winners Thirteen, Edited by Samuel R. Delaney, Bantam Books, 1981.

Reviewed by Ira Kaplowitz

This volume covers the Nebula Winners for 1977. As befits SFWA award-winning stories, the accent is as much on literary craft as on entertainment, so they should not be considered "light reading," but the book is worthwhile. The stories are:

"Jeffy is Five" by Harlan Ellison. A tale about a five year old who never grows up is oddly nostalgic for Harlan, who also fails to realize that the things he attacks will become objects of nostalgia for people younger than he is. Well done.

"Air Raid" by John Varley. A combination Time Travel and After the Bomb story, the kind where you don't have all the facts at the start, and can enjoy figuring out the plot. Enjoyable if you accept Varley's various premises.

"The Screwfly Solution" by Racoona Sheldon. A not-with-a-bang-but-with-a-wimper story, but with a method which I've not seen done before. My personal choice not only for the best of the bunch, but also for the "Whointhellis?" award.

"Stardance" by Spider and Jeanne Robinson. Another example of the excellently crafted story that I just couldn't get into because I can't buy the idea of zero-g ballet repelling an alien invasion.

"Aztecs" by Vonda N. McIntyre. The above goes double for this one. After you find out that star pilots need to have their hearts replaced by plastic pumps (but not why), the whole story seems to lose direction, and for that reason seems much too long. Definitely the runt of the litter.

New Dimensions 12 edited by Robert Silverberg and Marta Randall, Pocket Books, 1981

Reviewed by Rebecca Kaplowitz

The gamut ranges from the serious to the wacky, and though the stories in themselves are competent to downright great, the transition between them is clumsy. Always a problem with a collection of various authors' works: to so arrange them that they flow harmoniously into one another, each story reaching out, as it were, for the story to come, yet providing necessary counterpoint between them.

"Delta D and She" by Michael Ward, for example. The reader grows to care about the woman who, through the omnipotence of Delta D, a very "famous" computer, loses her name and hence her identity. She cannot get back into her apartment; she cannot change clothes, nor eat, nor sleep; yet, when the computer has added the last of its horrifying touches to the joke, the reader grows violently angry at this woman, who does not even feel anger at her defilement, just resignation and puzzlement. The same as we might feel at a computer mess-up with our bank records, say, that claim we have less money than we really do. We cannot convince the machine otherwise, and for many of us, the anger gives way to resignation. I wanted to dismantle Delta D in the most painful way possible...

"Parables of Art" -- This story by Jack Dann and Barry Malzberg immediately precedes "Delta D". As clumsy counterpoint to human against computer, we have human dealing with human fallability. A failed artist discovers a "place of power" -- a secret room -- in his home, turns it into a studio, and his latent artistic gifts begin to flower. He becomes quite a popular artist and his work sells very well, but after a while the work loses the "fire and edge..." of previous work. Suddenly, he finds the false wall he has built between the bedroom and his studio has become real stone; he gives up art forever.

His wife's experience: she knew about the secret room all along, but never told her husband. She too is a failed artist, and when he succeeds, she jealously destroys the success by walling up the room herself. He never finds out.

Finally, the point of view of the art gallery owner: he had, in a way undetermined by the story, gotten the man and the house with the secret room together, but decides it is too uncertain a method of creating an artist. He thinks, "Better stay with feeding them hallucinogens and alcohol...self-delusion is slow, but in the end it pays and pays!" "Delta D" on top of this, I felt, invoked just a tad too much depression.

My favorite was "Cadenza" by Greg Benford. A woman who knows she is going to die in exactly 11 hours, 12 minutes asserts her right to live these last moments as she wishes. She deals with the problem of facing death, at first selfishly -- she is going to kill an old lover who ostensibly deserted her when she first became ill. When she confronts him, however, she is able to see him clearly for the first time. "He is afraid of death as an ending. Death to her is a mere stopping. To him...he does not even know what he has. Until she pulled the blunt logic of the pistol from her bag, he saw his future as hazy and indefinite. Now, in the first moment of seeing it fresh and final, his reaction is fear, panic. What he has lost is the sense of opening possibilities, but he does not know that... In the end she will miss not her life, but the uncertainty of it." When she and he simultaneously realize this, he grants her last request -- he kills her with the pistol after making love, before the terminal and painful cascade effect can claim her.

Most of the individual stories are worth reading. A reasonably good collection!

The Entropy Effect by Vonda N. McIntyre, Pocket Books, \$2.50

The Klingon Gambit by Robert E. Vardeman, Pocket Books \$2.25

Reviewed By Kenneth Knabbe

The Entropy Effect is a definite must for your "to be read" list. From the references in the novel, the plot takes place after the last television episode but before the movie. The plot (like those of most other S.T. books) refers to

On the other hand, many things which we assume are universals simply aren't. The particular patterns of marriage, work, etc., of our culture are not universal -- we could behave in different ways and people in other cultures do.

One other thing that I remember is that there is always a men's culture and a women's culture. That is, there are particular parts of the culture that are the provenance of men and particular parts that are the provenance of women. These may be secret or they may be nominally public. In our society they are (as far as I know) nominally public. There is no secret body of knowledge reserved to one gender that is totally unavailable to the other. However there are things that most women know that very few men do, and vice versa.

Let me give an example. If you hear one woman say to another, "My dear, you look ravishing. Isn't it marvelous what they can do with half sizes these days?" you may be sure that a deadly insult has been delivered. I think it is safe to say that most women reading this would immediately grasp the nature of this remark and that few men would. For the male half of my audience, let me explain. Women's dress sizes fall into three categories, even sizes, odd sizes, and half sizes. These categories reflect differences in body proportions. Even sizes are the normal sizes for adult women. Odd sizes are for juniors. Half sizes are for fat women, who have different body proportions. Given this information, I think that the nature of the remark becomes much clearer.

In our culture, neither men's culture nor women's culture is entirely private. However, men's culture is much more public and much more a part of public culture than women's culture is.

In general, the public culture reflects men's culture much more than it does women's culture. Men's culture is publicly available; women's culture is left to women. Men, on the whole, have little interest in or understanding of women's culture. This is noticeably true in literature, including the SF preserve.

Men and women readily grasp fiction which is rooted in the male viewpoint. However men have difficulty with fiction rooted in the women's culture. One should be careful here. There are two varieties of fiction with women in them that men will have little trouble with. The first is fiction in which women play the roles assigned to them by the public culture, e.g. the conventional romance. The second is fiction in which women play roles which men also play, e.g. the adventure novel with a female protagonist instead of a male protagonist. Neither category requires any real understanding of the women's culture on the part of the male reader.

With these preliminary remarks out of the way, let us turn to the Earthsea Trilogy. Earthsea is another world; there is a world sea with a large cluster of islands in it. Magic works; there is a general philosophy of what magic, the world, and life are about. Effective magic requires that you know the true names of things. There is an old speech, in which everything has its true name. This speech is the native speech of dragons, who can lie in it. It is not the native speech of men, who cannot lie in it. There are old powers of the Earth, who are dark and cold, and are alien to the pattern of life and death. The balance of things is very important; all disturbances of it must be compensated for and taken into account. Many people have powers to some degree; a few are mighty wizards (mages).

The trilogy relates three tales of the life of Ged, one of the greatest of the mages. The first, A Wizard of Earthsea, is a coming of age tale. The third, The Farthest Shore, is a save-the-world-and-learn-the-meaning-of-life-and-death tale. The second, The Tombs of Atuan, appears to be a quest-and-rescue tale. (I use the term "appears" because things are not quite as they seem.)

All of these novels can be summarized roughly by formulas. There is nothing wrong with this; there are certain universal plots which almost all great fiction use. Exactly what these plots are has been a matter of debate over the last two millenia. In The Science Fiction Novel, a symposium published by Advent Press, Robert Heinlein identified three basic plots as:

The Little Tailor
 Boy Meets Girl
 The Man Who Learned Better

whereas Robert Bloch divided literature into three categories of struggle:

Man against Nature
 Man against Himself
 Man against Man

It is noteworthy, by the way, that both use the word "Man". Being good writers, they use the "right" word and the right word here, in both cases, is "Man". The reasons are interesting. First of all, there are simple technical considerations involving the rhythms of the English language. The lines scan better with a one syllable accented word.

Technical considerations aside, there is no good substitute for "Man" (upper case) in the cited phrases. Man is, so to speak, the Platonic person in the sense of Platonic Ideal. As such, it may stand for an individual, a group, or humanity collectively. The theory of Platonic Ideals is beyond the scope of this essay; however an example will suffice. Suppose I consider chairs. I might think of the particular chair that I am sitting on; I might go further and think of the chairs in a particular collection of chairs; or I might go still further and think of all chairs, past, present, and future, i.e. the set of all chairs. Now this vast collection of objects has something in common -- what is it? One thing is that they are all members of the set of all chairs. This is not too helpful. It is like answering the question, "What do the things named in this list have in common?", with "They are all named in this list". However it is not so simple to determine what chairs do have in common. For example, we might guess that the thing that they have in common is that they were all designed for sitting on. However that won't do. First of all, there are chairs that were never designed for sitting on, e.g. doll's chairs. Secondly, there are things such as stools which are designed for sitting on which are not chairs. Moreover, even if we were to draw up a list of characteristics that specified "chairness" for all of the chairs that we know of, it would probably not be too hard to construct an object that was obviously a chair that did not satisfy our requirements.

Despite the difficulties, we might feel that there is some intrinsic property of "chairness". If an object has that property, it is a chair; if it does not have it, it is not a chair. This seems to be the case in practice. That is, we can usually decide in practice whether or not an object is a chair; this decision is made by comparing the object in question with some mental notion of what it means to be a chair. This notion is extendable; when we come to some previously unconsidered category (such as a doll's chair) we have no difficulty extending our concept of "chairness" to cover this new case. Moreover, the extension flows quite naturally -- as though the larger meaning were implicit in the earlier, smaller meaning. We might conclude from this that there is some general property, the essence of chairness, so to speak. At present we do not fully grasp this property; presumably we never will. However it is available to us and we can apply it, albeit imperfectly, at will. It is as though there were a universal thing, "chairness" which we can tap in on.

Plato taught that these essences are real and that there is an Ideal Object corresponding to the essence. Now whether all of this is so, or whether it even makes sense is the business of philosophy. However it is true that this pattern of thinking is very common and is embedded in our language. "Man" is a universal; "person" is not. The phrasing, "Man against Nature" implies universality; "A person against nature" implies particularity.

All of this is somewhat tangential, but then I did not set out to come straight to the point. Rather, I meant to beat around the bush a bit, seeing as how there are some interesting bushes along the way. Let us return to this question of universal plots. With all due respect to Mr. Heinlein and Mr. Bloch, I do not think their categories are entirely satisfactory. For example, I doubt that struggle is an irreducible element of fiction. Action may be -- the ultimate irreducible plot is "Something Happened". (Not to be confused with the novel bearing that title.) However I can think of many novels where struggle is tangential rather than essential. Nor do I think that Mr. Heinlein's categories are exhaustive. We could, if we wish, put the coming of age tale in the man-who-learned-better category, although it seems a bit strained. I wonder, however, where Mr. Heinlein would put Vanity Fair? None of his categories seem particularly suitable, although sections might well be put in the category of boy-meets-girl-and-learns-better.

Actually we are dealing with three different concepts -- universal elements of fiction, the categorization of plots, and primordial plots. Struggle, for example, is one of the universal elements of fiction. Plots are seldom, if ever, unique; they can be classified in a number of ways. A primordial plot is a little bit different. There is a collection of basic stories which have been told and retold. The circumstances, events, and characters vary from rendition to rendition but the story remains much the same. The particulars are stand-ins for universals. Not all fiction has a primordial plot. For example, A Wizard of Earthsea, has a primordial plot. Ged is a particular instance of any young person coming of age. Vanity Fair on the other hand, does not have a primordial plot -- Becky Sharp is not a stand-in for any one.

In general, primordial plot fiction gains its force from the underlying tale. It may be instructive, well written, filled with insights and powerful imagery and all that. However the satisfaction of hearing the basic story again gives the story its impact.

I called the third novel, The Farthest Shore, a save-the-world-and-learn-about-life-and-death tale. In this novel a person who does not wish to die has made himself "immortal" by being both living and dead at the same time. In so doing, he opens a hole between the land of the dead and the living, which is destroying the world. Ged finds out what the matter is and sets it right. This is not a primordial plot. Saving the world is a universal plot theme but it is not a plot -- a primordial plot specifies a story whereas plot themes specify categories of story elements.

The first and third novels are strong works. Each is worthy of an essay in its own right. However our topic is the second novel, The Tombs of Atuan. The plot line runs as follows: On the island of Atuan there is an ancient temple dedicated to the worship of the old ones, the dark powers of the earth. Underneath the temple and the surrounding lands there is a huge labyrinth, in which the old ones are present. At one time the temple was the chief temple of the land; now it is chief in name only and is rather run down. There is a high priestess, called arha, the eaten one. It is believed that she is immortal, that when she dies her soul immediately moves to her successor. A search is made for a girl baby who is born at the time the old priestess dies. This girl is believed to be the current reincarnation of arha; she is taken to the temple at the age of five and is trained to become the new high priestess. The narrative follows briefly the youth of the

current priestess, a girl named Tenar. The main action opens shortly after she has attained her majority. In principle she is the mistress of the temple. In practice she is dominated by her servitors who raised and trained her. She is, however, mistress of the underground, which is dedicated to her. She explores it at length.

Eventually a thief enters the underground labyrinth. She traps him. Instead of having him killed, she has him put in chains and imprisons him in the labyrinth. Although her duty would be to kill him, she keeps him alive and questions him in a series of visits. He is a wizard named Ged, who is seeking an important item hidden in the treasure room of the labyrinth. The servitors become suspicious and eventually she has to choose between killing him and escaping with him. She chooses to escape. As they leave the dark powers destroy the temple. They travel together a few days and arrive at his boat. The story ends with them at sea, headed for the inner civilization. She tentatively suggests that she would like to remain with him, but this is not to be and there is no romantic attachment between them.

Now let's look at some of the reasons why I was initially disappointed with the story. The Earthsea trilogy is about Ged. The first and third novels are big in theme. The first novel is about his coming of age and learning to come to terms with the dark side of himself. The third novel deals with an affair that is the capstone of his career and with the core of life and death. Both are rich in mythic content. Both deal with crucial stages in Ged's life and career. Both work out classic themes of fantasy.

The second novel is markedly different. The others range over most of Earthsea, this deals with a restricted locale. (It is noteworthy that the first and third novels include maps of Earthsea; the second does not. Instead it has a map of the temple and the underground labyrinth.) It deals with an important but not crucial event in Ged's life. If the first and third novels are major chords, this is a grace note. The mythic content is more subdued; the emphasis on magic is less and is of a different character. The most striking thing about the novel is that Ged is not the protagonist; the young woman is. If the trilogy is about Ged, why is one third of it taken up with someone else?

Unlike the first and third novels, the second does not play out any of the classic fantasy themes. If Ged were the principal character then we would say that this is a quest-and-rescue story. Ged seeks the broken ring of Erreth-Akbe. He retrieves it, and rescues the young maiden. If this were what the story is about, then it is badly told. Ged is not the protagonist; he does not perform great deeds; and the young maiden was not in peril until he came along. Obviously we have the wrong category. Is it perhaps the older-man-awakens-young-woman-and-takes-her-away story? That story can be told from either viewpoint. Again, no. This is not a romance. At the end she wants to remain with him, but it is clear that her motive is not romantic. She has just left behind her all she knows. Ahead of her is a life and world that is totally unfamiliar. Ged is the one person she knows -- it is natural that she would cling to him.

What, then, is this story about? Is it a random piece of fiction or does it have some larger significance? When I first read it I did, in fact, dismiss it as a tale with no larger significance -- well told, but without the intrinsic scope of the other two novels.

I changed my mind, of course. My belief now is that it has a major theme which I did not grasp because it comes from a culture that I am not intimately familiar with, the Women's culture. If this is true, it is not surprising that

I missed the point -- it is difficult to appreciate fiction set in an alien culture.

I will be the first to admit that I cannot do justice to this novel. If I am right, I am not qualified to do so simply because I am a man. I lack the requisite cultural background. On the other hand, I suspect that few women would do better, starting from a first reading. I have noted that the Women's culture is less known in the public culture than the Men's culture. People are not accustomed to writing about it or reading about it. A woman might well be more comfortable with the story than I would but would bring to it the same blinders. She would see things that I would not but she wouldn't cogitate upon them or put them in a review because those sort of things aren't written about. V.D. we'll talk about or conspicuously not talk about -- dress sizes simply aren't mentioned. There is no taboo as such -- simply a consensus that some topics are the private preserve of women.

What is in that private preserve? I don't know. I suspect, however, that a good deal of it has to do with what it's like to be a woman. When I say that, I am not thinking of women in their sexual roles. Mating, marriage and biology are part of the public culture. Men may not have babies, but they can have some notion of what it's about, if they choose to. Quite often they do because it is important to people who are important to them.

No, I am thinking of things like dress sizes. And things like, what is it like, being raised as a girl instead of as a boy? They are raised differently, you know. You start out with babies and then you have boys and girls growing up together and somehow you end up with men and women living in two different worlds. How does that happen?

Let's get back to The Tombs of Atuan. In our culture, most women have been raised to be dependant wives and mothers. They may rebel a good deal along the way; some break out of the mold, some delight in it, and many accept it with unthinking passivity. The process promotes unthinking passivity. One of the things about sustained pressure is that you are shaped by it, even if you resist it. In a prison, even the acts of defiance are part of the prison routine. You start out as a free person and you end up as a prisoner. You may be a "good" prisoner or a "bad" one but you are a prisoner all the same, and you think like one. It would be a gross exaggeration to compare being raised as a woman to becoming a prisoner; however, the elements of ^{the} process are there.

I submit that the protagonist is Woman, the platonic woman. In the beginning she is a real person, Tenar. At the age of five her true name is taken away and she is raised to become someone else, Arha. She is subjected to a rigid course of indoctrination, in which she is taught a predefined persona. She has her little rebellions along the way, but in the end they signify nothing. She is trained for her role, accepts it, and becomes it. She believes herself to be what she was raised to be. She has great nominal power but is in fact a figurehead--the power resides with those who raised her to be what she is.

And then Ged comes... Now it would be easy to misinterpret Ged's role in the story. One of the primordial plots deals with a young woman who is repressed home, and an older man. He may enlighten or awaken her, or he may seduce her, but the ending is that she leaves home and goes to live with him. It is a good story, quite popular. It happens in real life all the time. (primordial plots are like that, you know.) All too often the story is followed by another in which she decides that she has exchanged one prison for another. However we are not dealing with that story here, let alone its follow-up.

One of the things about internalized, unthinking passivity is that it can become a habit rather than a true psychological state. When this is true one can

the latter type of preview is the most beneficial; it allows the attendee to expound to his fellow sophisticates on how he expects the movie is going to be changed before the average American gets to see it. I have yet to be invited to a cocktail party (or any other sort of party, for that matter), so the news of the Ghost Story preview beckoned as a way to win friends and influence people. I dashed to the theatre.

Well, so did 5000 other people who probably don't get invited to many parties, either. I found myself pushing and shoving a few old people and children out of the way in my mad rush to get a ticket. As I elbowed an obese woman into a water-fountain, I rationalized that the increased gravitational force induced by the large mass of people was drawing me inexorably toward the ticket booth. With the fat lady out of the way, the path to the ticket booth was unobstructed, but only briefly.

From out of the blue, a man with a clipboard stepped in front of me, inhibiting those mysterious forces of gravity. "Would you please give us some personal information so that we can contact you for your reactions to this film?" he asked, pencil poised. As a horde of people stampeded past me, thoughts raced like Bill Rogers across the Heartbreak Hill of my mind -- I wouldn't be able to get a ticket, I wouldn't be invited to any cocktail parties, I would have to come up with another article for PB. I made ready to stomp on his feet, when he said "Universal Pictures has spent 16 million dollars just so you could escape from your petty cares and worries for two hours. The very least you could do is give us a little feedback." I thought back to my Bar Mitzvah: the pile of gifts I never wrote thank-you notes for, and the subsequent years of guilt and recrimination. I complied, and gave him my name, gross yearly income, and phone-number.

My fellow would-be cocktail party goers seemed to have had firm opinions on the merits of this rough cut. The preview started off well, with a filmed announcement welcoming us to the showing, enjoining us to pay attention to the film (leaving for popcorn or the bathroom is considered bad form during previews) and pleading with us to remain in our seats at the film's conclusion to fill out survey cards. The film sort of went downhill after that, and people stayed only long enough to boo at the conclusion and filch a few pencils from the survey takers.

I thought the sneak-preview experience was over, until I got an unexpected phone call a few nights later from Phoenix, Arizona. A young lady was calling, not to invite me to a West-coast cocktail party, but to ask me for my reactions to the film. What I thought would be a simple, quick survey turned out to be a three hour probe of my psyche, for two reasons. First, everything I said was recorded by her in longhand -- every thought had to be broken down into three word groups separated by an (exasperated) pause, and in the process it was not difficult to lose track of any point I may have been trying to make. Second, opinion poll takers must be Freudian analysts moonlighting for a few extra bucks or kicks, because every statement which I did manage to get across was countered by a neutrally intoned "why do you feel that way?". I was surprised to learn that my very favorable reaction to Alice Krige, Ghost Story's female lead, was not because of her "sensitive and hauntingly realistic portrayal of a ghost in search of revenge," as I at first stated, but because of her arctic nude scene halfway into the picture (and was just as surprised to be confessing this to an anonymous woman from Phoenix, Arizona).

In the course of our three-hour interview, I'm sure I gave her many wonderful suggestions as to how to improve the film, all of which will undoubtedly find their way into the final cut. I would hate to see the film panned in its final incarnation; after all, ghost stories are supposed to say "Boo!" to the audience, and not vice-versa.

If for Proper Boskonian
You haven't yet written
With small little hairs
Your face will be smitten