

purpose but survival. But my feelings are not egalitarian enough to extend the same courtesy to plants. I feel guilty killing the beetles eating my birch tree. Trees, of course, do react to stimulæ at least as far as pointing the flats of their leaves at the sun. But the sun doesn't move very fast and neither do trees.

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A slug moves faster and reacts to things going on around it. It could be I am not so much an animal chauvinist as a speed chauvinist. Perhaps I would feel less compassion for an animal that did not move all day than to a fast-moving and affectionate plant. I don't respect things that move a lot slower than I do and I don't trust things that move an order of magnitude faster than me. A tree could be absolutely brilliant and I still would not have much empathy with it. I might like it for what good it does me, but I would not invest it with a great deal of respect. It is like my house. I may claim to like my house, but I do only take care of it on a basis of wanting it to take care of me. Come the day that the garage is no longer useful to me and I couldn't care less what happens to it. That is not how I feel about Evelyn. I hope that isn't the way my company feels about me, but I will let you know the next time we downsize.

But I digress. Anyway, when Evelyn told me that she wanted the bushes shorter at the front of the house, I had no problem with her sentiment. So there I was with an electric hedge clipper shaping the bushes. I bore them no ill-will. I didn't care about them one way or another. It was as I was shaping the bushes that something happened very quickly. I guess I saw a bunch of flying insects swarm out of the bush. Now these are animals and I was sorry to disturb them, but they would be able to return in a few moments. It was then I became aware that they were not trying to escape but were flying directly at me. I could actually feel one land on my arm. This was all in a matter of under a second. It took me maybe another tenth of a second to realize that it hurt to have this insect on my arm. It was then it occurred to me that it was a wasp or a hornet or something and it was not fleeing but attacking. I wanted to flick it off my arm but my hands were full of biting hedge clippers. With a yelp I dropped the clippers, perhaps narrowly missing injuring myself--that wasn't where my mind was. I flicked away the wasp and put some distance between me and the

bush.

Well, I got away with two stings and between ice packs, rubbing the arm with aspirin (yeah, it didn't sound right but that is what I read you should do), and taking an anti-histamine the arm only swelled a little and it stopped hurting fairly quickly. Physically I was over the incident quickly, though I am a little shy to go near my bushes. But philosophically it is a different matter. Nothing has tried to sting me since I was a teenager. It is hard to come to terms with the fact that there was a creature, even if it was only an insect, who was trying to kill me. I understand her motivation--yes, if I have my entomology right it must have been a her--but it is hard to come to terms with anyone, insect or not, doing her level best to kill me. I knew that wasps stung other people and it was easy to rationalize that it was only to protect the hive. But it is a different matter to realize that I had accidentally earned that sort of a reaction. I mean right at that

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moment if you asked the wasp what would be a good thing to do with her life she might have said something like "Well, I dunno. I guess I kinda have hung around this nest most of my life. I kind of like the place. Then this big guy comes along and starts shaking things up a bit. I mean like out of the blue. What do I want to do with my life. I think I could make a real contribution if I could arrange to see his dead body lying on the ground. That way I could feel I had done something really worthwhile for the nest and paid back for all the nice meals and the shelter the nest has given me. Yeah, to see that body rotting on the ground, that would give me a real feeling of job satisfaction, you know?" And that body would be mine.

I don't think it will change my behavior, but it is something to give a person pause. It is like the character in CATCH-22 who suddenly comes to the realization that there are people trying to kill him. Well, yes, that is what war is all about. It seems almost comical that someone going to war would not realize that people would be trying to kill him. But it must be a shock to be in a war and to realize that people are out there who want you dead and are making efforts, actually taking steps, to accomplish the feat. That must be one heck of a realization. And I got a piece

of that feeling when an insect decided to risk her life because she wanted me dead. It is kind of a scary thought. [-mrl]

2. BABE (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: BABE is reminiscent of CHARLOTTE'S WEB, but more on the level of E. B. White's book than the weak film adaptation. This is one of those rare family films that may be better appreciated by adults than by children. If you wouldn't be caught dead going to a film about the adventures of a talking pig, you will miss one of the most enjoyable films of the year. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4).

These days you hear the terms "children's film" and "family film" used interchangeably. The film industry may intentionally blur the distinction so that some adult will drop in to see their children's films. They do not want to admit that even a "Rainbow Brite" film or MY PRETTY PONY might not be enjoyable or even appropriate for any adult with more neurons than fingers. But the result is that good family films that have plenty to offer adults are seen only by children and the parents who bring them. Very often my wife and I find ourselves in a theater the only adults not accompanied by children. And it is a pity. This week I have seen WATERWORLD, CLUELESS, and BABE. Of the three films, the one with the biggest

laughs, the most impressive special effects, and the best story was BABE. The story should be enjoyable for anyone in a wide range of ages. That range goes from adult down to any child old enough to realize and accept the reality that today's cute farm animal and tomorrow's dinner may be one and the same.

The story opens with the young pig, still nursing, telling us about the wonderful "pig paradise" where pigs go when the big trucks come and carry them away. Already we have a wry little dig at religion and this family film is just moments old. The runt of the litter

is given away to a small carnival where he is to be both the subject and the prize in a "guess the weight of the pig" contest.

The contest winner is Farmer Hoggett (played by James Cromwell), a pensive and quiet farmer who sees something special in this particular pig. His wife Esme (Magda Szubanski) sees something special in the pig also, a nice holiday dinner. In this world all the farm animals talk to each other; they just don't talk to humans. Babe, as the pig comes to be called, falls in with and is provisionally adopted by two Border collie sheep dogs. Fly, the mother collie, has just sadly watched her new pups given to strangers and she feels like adopting something new to care for. This is not a film to sugar-coat sad facts of life for farm animals. While the film does not dwell on these aspects or let them spoil the fresh and funny comedy, the film is honest enough to show that farm life can be painful for animals. Fly needs Babe as much as Babe needs Fly and we hear it in her voice. Eventually Babe will follow Fly and her mate Rex into the sheep-herding task. Comic relief is provided by Ferdinand, a street-smart and wise-quacking duck with a propensity for causing trouble. While some of his humor and mischief may be inspired by Donald Duck, he still is an original character and his mischief motivated by a very real fear of ending on the Hoggett dinner table. One convention is carried over from cartoons--the duck has many of the funny lines.

The visual effect of talking animals is not done by cartooning the mouths as is so often done, and not by filming animals chewing peanut-butter-like gum as was done with Francis and Mr. Ed. Instead animatronics from the Jim Henson shop are used to have lip-movement fit the words and to provide facial expression. A careful eye can tell the real animal from the mechanical one--some of the time--but there are certainly some scenes that should leave even expert effects spotters wondering how they were done. The screenplay was written by George Miller (known for the "Mad Max" films) and Chris Noone. Noone directed and Miller produced, working on this project for seven years. Miller and Noone have a good feel for where to economize in the production. The only familiar face in the film is James Cromwell and he has usually been a minor actor. No big name actors voice the animals, though Roscoe Lee Brown narrates. The score is by Nigel Westlake who simply reworked classical themes sometimes to great effect.

Hearing what BABE was about, I probably would not have wanted to see it. Even hearing positive reviews did not convince me. But the one or two film clips I saw were such a pleasure to watch that I was convinced. And certainly there was a great deal more to enjoy than what the clips showed. I rate this a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

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Success and failure are both difficult to endure.
Along with success come drugs, divorce, fornication,
bullying, travel, medication, depression, neurosis,
and suicide. With failure comes failure.
-- Joseph Heller

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