

CHUX OWN

"If I am not for myself, who will
be? But if I am for myself alone,
what do I amount to?"

Hillel.

AN OMPA
THING

I READ ALL the mailing. Especially VAGARY. Especially this piece.....

"By now, OMPA members should at least know that even the Americans did not care for the last TAFF voting system..... So I think myself that very few of them took advantage of six points for one candidate. And having had the pleasure of meeting Bob Madle, I honestly can't imagine him buying his way. It was obvious, once you got to know him, that he won fairly and - if it isn't an outmoded expression - he's a square shooter.... Its a pity this misunderstanding ever arose and it wouldn't have done if some of us over here had waited until further news had come through before going off at half cock..... Incidentally, I think Don ((Ford)) deserves our thanks for all the work he's done, so here's mine. Now, how about standing for TAFF yourself, Don?"

Yes, it's good old Bobbie again. Both feet in it right up to her kneecaps. She'll probably be overcome by remorse later and donate the thirty pieces of silver to the Kettering Beer Fund, but that won't solve anything, -- or stop me resenting the charge that I went off at half cock -- or any other cock for that matter -- over the TAFF business. I only wish I could remember what the first word on page 28 was again.

Seriously though, TAFF means rather a lot to me. I helped to found it, I've lobbed up a little for every election so far, and I've tried to imbue other fans with my enthusiasm. It's the only serious and constructive project that I really give a faint damn for, and, in a way, it acts as a raison d'etre (you think Willis is the only one around here who can use French? Huh, you wait until I get around to telling you about the plume of my aunt or publishing my poem about the red and black butterflies....Les papillons rouge et noir.), as a raison d'etre for the very existence of fandom itself. I get nothing out of it, -- I have been asked to stand in every British election so far, but I have refused and I will always refuse in future, -- except the satisfaction of participating.

Now, I am well aware that bickering won't help TAFF, -- and I am aware that I bicker incessantly about it. For why? Because if a thing is right it's worth fighting for, and because I am incapable of sitting down whilst the very spirit of TAFF is perverted and twisted away from its original form.

Right, let's take Bobbie apart. First, you can't surmise that because the Americans disliked the six-point voting system they didn't use it. We didn't like it either, but we were stuck with it, and it was obvious that the only effective way to vote was to plump for the same candidate as 1st, 2nd, and 3rd choice, and so we had to do it that way. The Americans are just as quick on the uptake as we are, darlings. You can bet your All that at least 80% of them made the best of a bad job and "plumped" the same as we did.

Next, the undisputed fact that Madle was a "square shooter" does not automatically make him the ideal choice for TAFF or put his policies or beliefs above reproach. I am convinced that it is within the realms of probability that John Foster Dulles is a square shooter too, -- but I didn't vote for him either.

You see, you blithely ignore all the reasoned arguments of the "rebel group" and rush ahead with this delusion that TAFF is a sort of international popularity contest open to anyone who thinks he can claim the label of "faan."

It isn't. It NEVER was. I was part of the group who dreamt up the idea at the 1953 Loncon, and although it was all delightfully vague, we did make one qualification for candidates. I will quote it from the first publicity that was ever given to TAFF -- Ken Slater's 1953 Convention Report. Here it is stated explicitly that the candidate SHOULD BE SOMEONE FAIRLY WELL KNOWN TO BOTH BRITISH AND AMERICAN FANDOM.

That's what I've been bitching about. When you, or Ford, or Gert Carr, or the Willis-is-a-bastard group that have been yowling their heads off Stateside can explain how Madle got over this hurdle, then I'll be glad to listen. Until then, any airy-fairy stuff about half cocks and square shooters is just pointless and you are selling the pass by publishing it.

Madle should never have been allowed to be nominated. He was NOT "fairly well known" over here and this made him ineligible. Only Ackerman, Ellington, Eney and Raeburn fulfilled the qualification, and the election should have been fought between them. This is what we were sore about. We were not "bad sportsmen" because "our" candidate didn't win, we are just annoyed that the one basic rule of TAFF was completely ignored. Anything else we could have borne, -- even Ford's odd insistence on using the six-point voting system because he had "counted some votes that way the previous year" -- but not this deliberate flouting of the one rule we made at the very beginning.

You want some more? Well, you know that every candidate was supposed to have five nominees before he could stand? That's another rule. In the last election only one candidate, (who happened to be Eney), had five nominees who actually voted in the election or made a contribution to TAFF. Two of Madle's nominators lost all interest after they had fixed it for him to stand, and did not vote nor contribute a solitary cent to the Fund. And he was by no means the worst either, --- with one candidate no less than 4 of his 5 nominators neither voted nor contributed. This is just farcical, -- and I doubt if even Ford can defend it without resorting to the biggest line of double-talk since the Delphic Oracle went out of business. It's not the least bit of good to drag up an assortment of all-American fuggheads and have them mouth into a tape-recorder about what a son-of-a-bitch Walt Willis is either. Facts can only be answered by more facts, --- not speculations on the Willis parentage.

And you want to give Ford a vote of thanks? You can include me out. I thought he had a Dictator Approach to the whole business. I thought him bigoted, stubborn, completely uncooperative, and I think the mess TAFF is in now can be laid solely at his door. You go praise Caesar, darling. Me, I'm strictly the undertaker's assistant around here.

As for your final diabolical suggestion that Ford should stand for TAFF..... well, words fail me. Haven't you realised that if he won he'd run the fund for a whole year afterwards again? Not on your nelly, O moon of my delight.

Let's change the subject. Let's talk about holidays.

I suppose I could be called a cosmopolitan really. I can count up the 13 in French, and wish you a hundred thousand greetings in the Gaelic, and I could probably find my way around in Sweden as long as it didn't involve anything more complicated than Skoal! It's true that I have only Been Abroad once, -- and maybe we did only spend seven hours in Dublin that day, -- but everyone here knows that the ramifications of my mind are Cosmic, -- let alone international, -- and that's the thing that really matters, I always say. And what do you always say?

Anyway, when I got around to thinking about this year's holiday I decided that we'd get really adventurous this time. I would discover some quiet unspoilt corner of Europe, spend all of my 14 day vacation there, and then come back and entertain the office with my Experiences for the following twelve months.

So, I wrote to Mr Cook, and Sir Henry Lunn, and a million zillion other entrepreneurs for their brochures and pamphlets and guide-books and maps, and after checking all the idyllic spots they listed, I decided that Majorca seemed a bit of all right and that we would go there.

I grabbed up the guidebooks, brochures, the pamphlets and the maps, -- just like an OMPA mailing in glorious technicolor -- and rushed off and dumped the whole 6 lbs of them into the lap of my fabulous red-headed dreamboat.

"Hon," I said to her, "let's go to this Majorca place, -- this little black dot here just two eighths of an inch from Barcelona. Smashing place... much more classy than Southend... film stars go there... could fly out... be real lovely."

She pushed the guidebooks, the brochures, the pamphlets, the maps, and me, off her lap onto the floor.

"How much?" she said.

"Do not worry, O moon of my delight," I told her. (I have been on a Rubaiyat jag for the last couple of months, and most any female under fifty is liable to be awarded such satellite status.) "Do not worry. The thrice blessed Ford Motor Company are members of the Co-Partnership Travel racket, and I think I can fix it so that the holiday won't cost us much more than the usual air fare alone."

She looked pleased and thoughtful.

"It's very tempting," she said. "It rained every day when we went to Cornwall last year."

"Stacks of film stars go to this place," I said.

"And when we went to Devon the year before we only saw the sun once," she continued. "It would nice to have a warm and sunny holiday without having to worry if our fortnight includes the four days of the English summer. Er,
...what film stars did you say go there?"

"ALL of 'em," I said expansively. "Brigitte Bardot, Martine Carol, Diana Dors, Rossanna Podesta...." I saw her frown beginning and changed the record hurriedly, "... Curd Jurgens, Alec Guinness, Dave Niven, Larry Olivier."

She smiled dreamily. She had a bit of a crush on Larry Olivier.

I got all persuasive and slipped my arm across her shoulders.

"Ghod," I said, "it'll be our best holiday ever. Imagine! Warm blue seas lapping softly on the silver sands of huge deserted bays..."

She sighed softly.

"...and a real tropic night with stars like handfuls of diamonds scattered across a black velvet sky..."

Another sigh.

"... and nothing to break the stillness except a whisper from the palms as the breeze caresses them, or a snatch of guitar music, softened by the distance, from the fiesta in the village behind the dunes....one of those unbelievably huge tropic moons....just you....alone.....with me," I finished.

She shrugged off the mood and my arm, and got up to make some tea. Two days later she gave me the old heave-ho. Looking back on it, I have an idea that she had Olivier cast for the male lead instead of Harris, but anyway, the Majorca and red-headed dreamboat idea is definitely through.

Fortunately, I had managed to salvage the travel agency propaganda, and I began to look through again for the sort of place where I could enjoy myself without the dreamboat. No more were warm nights and solitude at a premium, and I no longer had to worry about James White trotting out his joke about 'B.E.A. only allows 30 lbs of baggage, -- but more if you're married to it.'

Eventually, I went over to Catford, consulted Joy and Vinç, and returned home with a little guidebook about Paris. The more I look at the thing, the more I am taken with the place. It seems a very cosmopolitan place indeed, --- and chonk full of exciting places of interest. No, I was thinking of the Louvre and Notre Dame and suchlike, -- I will NOT be spending all my time in the Folies Bergere. Ho no. (I want to visit the Moulin Rouge, the Lido, Place Pigalle too!) Anyway, it seems probable that I will go there around the beginning of September. You'll probably hear all about it afterwards. And frequently.

If, by any chance, there are any other OMPAns interested in the idea of going to Paris, I'll be glad to hear from them, and perhaps we can arrange something. However, fabulous red-headed dreamboats amongst the congregation should write to me in confidence and I will be happy to make with the Majorca and tropical moon ploy again.

Sheila, my heart's darling, I think you'd be far more happier in Paris than in Blackpool.

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One of the nicest things about the Clarke flat is the fact that they have very nearly as much reading matter there as the Keeper of the Printed Books has in his repository, and they are not half as fussy about lending it out either. I have a little difficulty with Sandersod, who is relatively new at the game, but I am certain that he will respond in time. He has taken to secreting some of the esoterica in his own room, but he will learn, as Joy and Vinç learnt, that such tactics are worse than useless against a Collector of my calibre. Vincent, when I first enrolled him as a library-builder gave me no end of trouble. He used to shudder hopelessly whenever I walked in, (the Vince wince-- an unconditional reflex), and stare at my empty suitcase with undisguised horror. Sometimes he would even lie to me, -- try to pretend that he was exactly halfway through no less than 24 wartime ASFs simultaneously.

Naturally, I had no truck with such nonsense.

"Vincent," I would say to him, "remember we stand alone against the macrocosm. Remember that I am just a humble neofan and that it is your sacred stefnic duty to guide my feet along the road to trufandom and the enchanted duplicator. We are brothers, old mate. Always remember I am your FRIEND, Vincent, -- and don't force me to write you off in disgust as a mean old bleeder."

Then, when he was looking suitably shamefaced, -- he didn't have that beard then and you could see all of his face right around to his ears, -- I would pointedly ignore the ASFs that he was proffering so abjectly, fill my suitcase with UNKNOWN WORLDS instead, and then stamp out in a huff.

I think it's a pretty good technique but you have to be tough about it. The idea is to get them scared, keep them scared, and don't soften up through sentimentality. Training is an arduous process, but it pays off in the end.

4 Even now I can remember the look of anguish on his face after he'd run off

half a GRUNCH that I'd stencilled for him before discovering that I'd transposed the bylines and given him credit for a poem entitled THE POSTMAN'S LAMENT, and Normal George the credit for the GRUNCH. I still don't know which worried him most, --- the egoboo that he'd lost, or the egoboo that he was going to get.

Looking back on it, I think that was the weekend that Vinø invented proof-reading.

Nowadays, of course, he is a Changed Man. He cooperates perfectly. He takes the suitcase from me as soon as I arrive, fills it with whatever new stuff has come in since my previous visit, enquires politely after my Collection, (one of the largest in England now), and then hurries off to make me some tea.

No, seriously, what set me off on this was magazines and stuff. Joy and Vinø seem to buy all the periodicals except THE CHURCH TIMES, and I was wondering what the rest of OMPA reads in the way of mundane literature. Personally I get through these:- Newspapers, -- Express and Mirror. Weeklies -- New Statesman & Nation, Time, The Smallholder, Popular Gardening, Woman, and Woman's Own. The last two are only glanced at, -- I don't buy them myself! -- but the rest are read from cover to cover. I'd be interested in hearing what the rest of OMPA read --- and I do hope you all share my addiction to the New Statesman....

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You should have read the latest "-" by now. I trust you all noticed what Willis did to me, and that you have written to let him know just what a mean sod he is. Just because he's mailing the thing out without envelopes he drops my traditional quote from the bacover and gives the space to Peter Vorzimer's mum instead. It was a tradition, -- a sort of HYPHEN hallmark to have at least one Harrisque quote there, but that means nothing to Willis. He drops me. He demands that I say something brilliant as well as dirty. He ignores me, and when I chide him gently he just laughs at me. I do not intend to argue about it. I shall remain aloof and pretend that I don't care in the least, but I do want to say just one thing. This:- HURRAH FOR GERTRUDE M CARR. So there.

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By now all the congregation should know that I always favour loose associations, and this one that Vinø proposes in ZYMIC is no exception. In the last few years Anglofandom has withdrawn in on itself and we have become a clique. At one time there were doors leading from the macrocosm into fandom, -- doors like OPERATION FANTAST and the TWS/SS letter columns, -- but for the most part these are now closed. At present it seems that we have only NEBULA to act as a recruiting station, and it's not enough.

Suppose that a potential fan contacts one of the Nebula columnists or letter-hacks. He'll get an answer, and, in time, his very first fan mag. Think about the current crop of fanzines and imagine his reaction. If he's lucky he'll understand 10% of the allusions and the rest will go over his head. Unless he's a very rare bird indeed, he'll not be asking for a second copy, -- and we can't blame him either.

Yes, it's the old "are we too esoteric" argument again. We are, of course, -- but we like it that way and I'd hate to see the clannishness lost myself.

What we have to do is educate the poor swine until they can mingle with us and understand what's going on. We need a primer: something like Tucker's NEOFAN GUIDE, but a bit more extensive and informative, --- and we need a few protective wings to tuck the fledglings under until they can get around by themselves.

If Vincent's association will take care of this it will have all my blessings, some of my Valuable Time, and some of my money. Will you help too?

Isn't it awful when you get to the last stencil and run out of words, hmm? What can I tell you about? I expect John Roles would be interested to hear that I saw a superb Indian film called "Pather Panchali" last week, and I guess Ol' Dad Enever would be happy to know that I sprayed 40 gallons of tar-oil winter wash over the fruit trees during the last two week ends and that I've bought ten quid's worth of new trees from Laxton's Nurseries. But, how can I interest those others whose eyesight hasn't given out yet?

Could tell you about What I Do For Fandom? Right?

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Well, my main trouble is that I can never divorce fandom from my ordinary life. Ideally, I suppose, I would be just a typical clerk during the working day and then metamorphose into a trufan every evening when I clocked off at 5.15. It just doesn't happen that way though. Fanac keeps sneaking into working hours and I get into the dammedest scrapes through it. Take the Eileen business for instance. Eileen is my newest typist at work. She is a Nice Girl. She is quite pretty, and she has a fabulous shape too. I guess I spent quite a lot of time getting my wonderful personality across to her, but it was well worth the effort. I had gotten to the stage where we had lunch together in the cafeteria every day, and I was just working up to the point where I could ask her to come out with me and know that she'd agree. It was by no means Serious, but it could have developed into a Beautiful Friendship. Not now though.

You see, I had been writing to Arfer Thomson. I had been discussing artwork with him, and wanted him to do me an illo containing the Venus de Milo for a Project of mine. I thought it would be a Good Idea to send him a picture of the statue to copy from in case he didn't have one available and Olive was shy about posing. Well, as any British fool knows, the Venus Pencil Company use a picture of the statue as their trademark. I had a box of their pencils in my desk and, without giving it a thought, I got the box out and began to cut off the picture with a razor blade.

Reputation apart, I was purely disinterested in the picture apart from its value to Arfer. When Eileen came up to my desk for some more work, I just grinned at her and carried on cutting.

She didn't grin back though. She blushed. "Oh, Charles!" she said, -- you could feel the reproach in her voice too, -- and she pulled her jacket into its most concealing position and marched back to her typewriter.

I was FURIOUS. I went rushing after her trying to explain about fandom and stencilling and how it was just artistic and how I don't really care about nekkid wimmin done in marble and how I'd hate her to think of me in That Way, but it didn't do the slightest bit of good. She won't speak to me at all. She has told every other girl in the firm about what a dirty beast I am, she won't sit within twenty yards of me in the cafeteria, and she never takes her jacket off in the office now no matter how high I turn the heating.....

I'm hoping that Arfer hurries up with that stencil so that I can show it to her and try to get back into her good graces that way, but I don't really have much hopes of doing so. I remember last year. I'd told Doreen Ince -- the boss's secretary, -- that 'the old man is a bit of a fugghead sometimes' and even though I took in a HYPHEN the very next day and showed her the word in black and white she was never really the same towards me afterwards.

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Chuck Harris. "Carolyn" Lake Ave. Rainham Essex.