



The Bad Seed

06 – MISTLETOE AND WHINE

END OF YEAR LETTER TO THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR RED.
NO PRIZES FOR GUESSING THE FINALE.

BY WAYNE FLASK

Dear Santa,

I haven't even had time to file the mistake-riddled letter that my secretary had dutifully written to you last year. Before I know it, it's the silly season already.

Since then, quite a few things have happened. For starters, I've fired my secretary, not because I believe I can go it alone, or because of her abject grammar and orthography, and not even because of the recession (fat excuse – I used it shortly before I fired my accountant. I mean there's no money, what's the use for an accountant?). Her long-awaited dismissal came as a result of repeated letters to the President, written on my behalf and entitled *Klabb tal-Bocci*, which she addressed to Dr Fenech Adami. After the fifth letter, the president himself (Gorg) phoned me to ask if I wanted to... what was that phrase in Maltese?

You must be entering your busy season, too. (Isn't it tough getting into Maltese houses these days? I mean, with all the one/two bedroom apartments being built, you're lucky to even find the kitchen, let alone the chimney.) Back to us. Where was I? Oh.

The Roman Catholic Church (RCC for those who just can't live without an acronym) has decreed 25 December as the birthday of Jesus Christ. In your lofty Scandinavia, it must be hard to

picture that the Son of God was born on a cold night in Bethlehem, miles away from his native Nazareth, hunted by hostile militias.

Here in Malta we are all fervent followers of RCC's teachings. We celebrate Christmas humbly, doing our best to clog our calendars with dinners and lunches and gorging ourselves with food and wine for 10 glorious days of uncontested gluttony.

This year, I'm at pains to send you my usual list of who gets sweets and who gets coal. I know you're tempted to raid the shelves of Luqa's Lidl, but I wouldn't want anyone at Mepa to get a rap on the knuckles if a plane collides with a dozen deer driven by yourself.

It's been a year of highs and lows, you'll gladly admit. The credit crunch of 2008 turned into a full scale recession in 2009. This new economic phenomenon has provided the world in general with a plausible excuse for everyone and everything. Think of, hmmm, people getting fired, yep – just like my poor accountant. Or the thousands of poor – no sarcasm here please – factory workers dismissed by automotive giants. I wonder what their Christmas is going to be like.

We've had our fair share of movement year here in Malta too. Apparently a Renzo GrandPiano is designing the new City Gate and Parliament. I pray he

makes sure our MPs have good enough leg-room.

Just as I'm penning this morose Christmas letter, I am looking into the non-reasons for the ban of university newspaper *Ir-Realta*, which carried Alex Vella Gera's *Li Tkisser Sewwi*, a socio-realistic piece that the university rector deemed unfit for distribution on campus grounds. I mean, the paper did not cover its proverbial bottom by putting the "18" tag on the front page to indicate mature content.

But what escapes me is why the institution of university – the very pinnacle of maturity – took it upon itself to ban a piece of cultural work. A university should be the promoter of new cultures and expressions, the avant-garde creative factory. Instead, pretty much like the rest of this church-dominated country, it finds itself serving another conservative warrant. We'd be appalled if this happened in Teheran, but now that it's happened in tal-Qroqq....?

But, you'll understand, my little red friend, that censorship isn't simply a new monster that has reared its head this summer, when Adrian Buckle's *Stitching* found itself on the receiving end of a shocking ban. Without going into the merits of the quality of the play, and whether its content is truly questionable, it was a timely reminder that censorship, and the moral guardians, are woven into our social

texture in the same way as *pastizzi* and Kinnie.

How else then, would you judge the sacking of Fr Joe Abela from his chairmanship of the censorship board for merely stating that he would have approved *Stitching* with an 'R' rating? How else would you explain that our members of Parliament cannot Google Pat Kurs's works? I could go on.

This is no country for liberals, Claus.

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It's been a silly year, true. To hell with sweets and coal. As much as I hate presenting misbehaviours with a pollutant, I would resent riddling those who did well with diabetes. Maybe it's really an idea to get some tacky gift from that supermarket I mentioned before. As long as you keep your head down, you're safe.

Oh I forgot. I need a couple of ideas for a New Year's Resolution. Was thinking of a couple of tweaks but otherwise the Bad Seed might become the Good Deed, and there's too much hypocrite well wishing going on right now. I'm sure you'll have some suggestions.

To anyone out there who's glad the year is over, Happy New Year. In a bit.

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