

On My Mind
9/5/03

After years of procrastination, the CNMI government finally managed to get its act together, and built the long-promised extension to Tinian's runways, making it possible to bring tourists/casino players directly to the Tinian Dynasty, and thus, hopefully, enabling the hotel/casino, despite the SARS scare, to finally begin turning a profit.

But now it turns out that the tourists still can't go there, because there are no security guards to examine them and their luggage.

Is it merely fate that seems determined to thwart the Dynasty's interests? Or are there other, more tangible forces at work?

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No one is saying exactly who it was who decided that the CNMI should charge the pre-positioning ships that anchor off our shores double what they had been paying so as to offset presumed increases in the cost of the security services the CNMI had been providing. But if ever proof was needed to support the long-standing complaints about how unfriendly the CNMI is towards the business sector of the economy, that decision sure was clear and convincing evidence.

Imagine! Not only, apparently, not consulting with the affected party. But not even, apparently, making any effort to arrive at a rational figure. Nope, just double the fees.

Well, I'm no fan of those pre-positioning ships. I think those grim reminders of war out there totally ruin the effect of tropical sunsets over idyllic beachfronts. Their presence is an ungainly and unsightly blot on what should be an open horizon. And I've thoroughly enjoyed the views off Beach Road in their absence. But be that as it may. Whoever it was obviously has no business sense whatsoever!

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The <I>Variety</I> reporter who stated, in an article on public lands in Tuesday's edition, that "The CNMI Constitution allows every indigenous-descent person in the CNMI to get a homestead lot from the local government" better go read her constitution again. What it says, in Article XI, section 4, of the CNMI Constitution is that "The corporation shall make available some portions of the public lands for a homestead program."

One could argue that the "corporation" has already done so, and need do so no longer. It has used a portion of the available public lands for homesteads. The Constitution does not say that this must go on in perpetuity. Nor does it say anything about every indigenous-descent person being entitled to a homestead.

It is precisely such errors of fact that cause people to treat newspaper stories with skepticism.

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A newspaper story that arouses scorn (for the subject agency, rather than the writer) rather than skepticism is the one in yesterday's <I>Variety</I> announcing that the Saipan Chamber of Commerce plans to charge an admission fee of \$20.00 to the debate it has arranged between the several candidates for senator in the upcoming election. According to the story, the admission fees will go to the Chamber's scholarship fund.

There's nothing wrong, per se, with charging admission to events as a way of raising money for scholarships. But when the event constitutes providing significant information to voters to help them make informed decisions, there is something wrong with the idea. Is the Chamber saying that only those who can afford it should become informed? What about those voters who cannot afford the \$20.00? Is the Chamber saying it's not important that they also receive the information that will be presented at the debate?

Granted that in all likelihood, most of the "information" will be in the form of platitudes and promises, but even the way those statements are presented, and what is or is not included in them, provides useful information to voters.

If the Chamber's concern is to limit attendance, because the multi-purpose center is so small, there are better ways to do so than to discriminate against those who may not happen to have \$20.00 in discretionary income. Numbered tickets could be issued, so that it is first come, first served. Or each candidate could be given a limited number of tickets to distribute among his supporters, so that the audience won't be stacked with supporters from just one candidate.

But for a civic-minded organization to charge for providing the public with such critical information under the guise of raising scholarship funds seems somehow unpatriotic, too commercial, an oxymoron. A nominal fee of \$5.00 might be acceptable. A fee of \$20.00 is not.

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The good news is that "Finding Nemo" - the animated movie about youthful rebellion, a father's love, and a cooperating pelican, that mostly takes place under water - is breaking all sorts of attendance and earnings records in the entertainment industry. As well it should. It is a delightful heartwarming story, with incredible underwater scenes that are as faithful to reality as any animated film could hope to be.

The bad news is that Hollywood will no doubt see this as incentive to produce more animated underwater stories, without beginning to understand that the reason "Finding Nemo" is so popular is that it doesn't contain nudity, it doesn't contain violence, it doesn't contain rude or lewd language, it doesn't include fist fights or sword fights or gun fights or explosions or car crashes or pain and suffering or weird creatures from outer space, nor does it include sex kittens or rock stars or anything else shocking, noisy or ugly. Hollywood, no doubt, will bring in man-eating sharks, underwater warfare, silly plots, and all the rest of the mayhem that passes for entertain-

ment in most current movies.

“Finding Nemo,” in short, is so popular because it is a movie the family can see together. And very subtly, it demonstrates and confirms traditional values.

There are other outstanding movies out there that do not cater to the vulgar taste for sex, violence and smuttiness that seems to dominate the movie business. But they don’t come to Saipan because Saipan has been “red-lined” as small-town, rural, presumably interested only in guns, cars, hunks and blond bombshells, so to speak.

People, children, teens copy what they see. If all they see is the current menu of so-called suspense and action movies, they will lack models that show love, compassion, integrity, modesty, humility, generosity, thoughtfulness - all those positive qualities that help a society function smoothly. Which is why it’s so important to show movies that do reflect those values.

Wouldn’t it be nice if everyone who saw “Finding Nemo” took it upon themselves to lobby the distribution chains for a more varied menu at local outlets, to lobby the movie industry for better, more up-lifting, movies?

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Thirty-six people employed by a single garment manufacturer, Hansae Saipan, Inc., have all lost their passports, according to a notice in yesterday’s <I>Variety</I>. That doesn’t make any sense to me, and I hope it doesn’t make any sense to the powers that be, either.