

● T2 Evelyn Waugh: Scoop

“Scoop”, published already in 1938 and still relevant today, is a satire on the way newspapers not only report on events but actually try to influence or even create those events. (William) Boot is a freelance journalist who writes a regular column for the Daily Beast. He has been asked to cover an African war because he has been mistaken for another writer, also called Boot (John Courtney), who is a best-selling author. Lord Copper is the newspaper owner, friendly with the Prime Minister, and has been persuaded that “Boot” is the best man for the job, although he has never actually met or read him. Salter is the foreign news editor whose job it is to initiate William into the trade secrets of foreign reporting. The scene here is a meeting between William and Lord Copper with Salter in attendance.



“Come in, Mr Boot. This is a great pleasure. I have wanted to meet you for a long time. It is not often that the Prime Minister and I agree, but we see eye to eye about your style. A very nice little style indeed ... You may sit down too, Salter.

5 Is Mr Boot all set for his trip?”

“Up to a point, Lord Copper.”

“Excellent. There are two invaluable rules for a special correspondent – Travel Light and Be Prepared. Have nothing which in a case of emergency you cannot carry in your own

10 hands. But remember that the unexpected always happens. Little things we take for granted at home like ...” he looked about him, seeking a happy example; the room, though spacious,

was almost devoid of furniture; his eye rested on a bust of Lady Copper; that would not do; then, resourcefully,

15 he said “... like a coil of rope or a sheet of tin, may save your life in the wilds. I should take some cleft sticks with you. I remember Hitchcock ... Sir Jocelyn Hitchcock, a man who used to work for me once; smart enough fellow in his way, but limited, very little historical backing – I remember him

20 saying that in Africa he always sent his dispatches in a cleft stick. It struck me as a very useful tip. Take plenty.”

“With regard to Policy, I expect you already have your own views. I never hamper my correspondents in any way. What the British public wants first, last, and all the time is News.

25 Remember that the Patriots are in the right and are going to win. *The Beast* stands by them four-square. But they must win quickly. The British public has no interest in a war which

30 drags on indecisively. A few sharp victories, some conspicuous acts of personal bravery on the Patriot side and a colourful entry into the capital. That is *The Beast* Policy for the war”

“Let me see. You will get there in about three weeks. I should spend a day or two looking around and getting the background. Then a good, full-length dispatch which we can

35 feature with your name. That’s everything, I think, Salter?”

“Definitely, Lord Copper.” He and William rose.

It was not to be expected that Lord Copper would leave his chair twice in the morning, but he leant across the desk and extended his hand. “Good-bye, Mr Boot, and the best of

40 luck. We shall expect the first victory about the middle of July.”

When they had passed the final ante-room and were once more in the humbler, frequented by-ways of the great building, Mr Salter uttered a little sigh. “It’s an odd thing,” he

45 said, “that the more I see of Lord Copper, the less I feel I really know him.”

The affability with which William had been treated was without precedent in Mr Salter’s experience. Almost with diffidence he suggested, “It’s one o’clock; if you

50 are going to catch the afternoon aeroplane, you ought to be getting your kit, don’t you think?”

60 “Yes.”

“I don’t suppose that after what Lord Copper has said there is anything more you want to know.”

“Well, there is one thing. You see, I don’t read the papers very much. Can you tell me who is fighting who in Ishma-

65 elia?”

“I think it’s the Patriots and the Traitors.”

“Yes, but which is which?”

“Oh, I don’t know that. That’s Policy, you see. It’s nothing to do with me.

You should have asked Lord Copper.”

“I gather it’s between the Reds and the Blacks.”

“Yes, but it’s not quite as easy as that. You see, they are all

70 Negroes. And the Fascists won’t be called Black because of their racial pride, so they are called White after the White Russians. And the Bolsheviks want to be called Black because of their racial pride. So when you say Black you mean Red, and when you mean Red you say White and when the party who call themselves blacks say Traitors they mean

75 what we call Blacks, but what we mean when we say Traitors I really couldn’t tell you. But from your point of view it will be quite simple. Lord Copper only wants Patriot victories and both sides call themselves Patriots. And of course both sides will claim all the victories. But, of course, it’s

80 really a war between Russia and Germany and Italy and Japan who are all against one another on the patriotic side. I hope I make myself plain?”

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Reference: Evelyn Waugh, *Complete and Unabridged – Scoop*, Heinemann, London 1977, pp. 419f.