

**OPINION**

# The truth vs. Georgie's killing orgy

Bush the conqueror asks journalism: 'c'mon honey, just another quickie?'

I had one of the worst dream/nightmares of my young life the other day. It was the type of dream that ends with you sitting up in bed in a cold sweat thanking your lucky stars that what your mind just experienced was only a subconscious short story.

The causes of my terrifying experience were obvious to me: the revived tensions in the Middle East, George Bush's familiar pre-war rhetoric and the press' patriotic swallowing of the entire affair.

Apprehension began building as I witnessed the press jump all over the story of the evil Saddammeister's sinister plot to keep his military and nuclear establishment and the Bushier's build up to tear it down. Throughout this latest foreplay to *Gulf War: The Sequel*, there has been little media attention to the fact that Georgie left Saddam — the new Hitler — in power because Republicans favor an evil dictator who likes selling oil over fundamentalist Muslims who would give Western powers nothing but the finger.

Another important catalyst for my dream was a recent edition of *Extra!* the publication of a media watchdog group called Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, which detailed American journalism's failure to cover the entire story of the Gulf War.

There has been little-to-no press coverage of the devastation Iraqis have been dealt. A recent Harvard study reporting that 55,000 Iraqi children have already died from post-war complications, and at least 170,000 more will die within the next year unless sanctions are lifted, cannot be found anywhere in mainstream American media. No, if you want to find out about truths like that your only hope is to come across small monthly publications such as *The Progressive*.

*U.S. News and World Report* recently ran articles dealing with conditions in Iraq, but headlines like "Still the big man in town" and "On the street where he rules" imply Saddam has brought all of this on himself. Maybe, but these articles rob Iraqis of their humanity by treating all citizens as if they are simply extensions of Hussein. Racism plays a big part in being able to treat all Iraqis as one entity, but that is another column.

There has been a premium put on the truth by the profit-driven, corporate-owned press as one editor of a paper in Pennsylvania found out the hard way. The gentleman wrote an editorial with the headline, "How about a little PEACE?" and soon found that he had no job.

The truth, or lack thereof was the theme of my recent nightmare. I dreamt I was granted an interview with the head of the American press conglomerate — the editor of the *Globe Times Chronicle Nightly News*, I.M. Bottinpaider.

Bottinpaider's office was on the top floor of a magnificent skyscraper in the middle of New York's Business district. His lavish oak desk took up about three acres. He sat at one end, and I sat at the other, about a half mile away.

"So, little boy, they tell me you want to talk to me about my press corporation's coverage of that gulf crisis thing," he said, looking down from his stock market report.

"Well sir, I think it was actually a full-blown war."

"Nonsense. Wars are long, drawn out, bloody affairs," he scoffed. "This gulf thing lasted, what, uh, um..." Bottinpaider leafed through some files searching for an answer. "Oh, here it is, one-hundred hours. And the casualties were, uh..." he searched his papers again. "Oh yeah, a few hundred. That's no war, son."

"Well, that seems to be part of the problem with your coverage sir. It was a bit one sided. The casualties you're referring to are American. What about the Iraqi point of view?"

"I don't think you understand, son," he replied, "Iraqis don't buy advertising with us."

"I don't mean to be rude, sir, but your coverage of the Gulf War fell well short of even approaching a level of being fair or accurate. Especially when it comes to reporting the results of what a month of unprecedented bombing can do to a tiny, third-world country."

"What do you mean 'fair'?" he asked.

"For example. Your news organization jumped all over a story about Iraqis killing up to 300 premature babies in a Kuwaiti hospital. The story

was all over your news vehicles for weeks. But when Kuwaiti hospital officials came out and said those stories weren't true, there was not a word said about it. Why is that?"

"That story wasn't timely anymore."  
"But to be fair and even-handed, shouldn't you be doing stories on the Iraqi children dying from disease because they have no clean water to drink?"

"Not relevant."  
"OK, why was a cameraman fired from your organization for filming extensive footage of Basra and Baghdad and the devastation those areas suffered?"

"Silly little boy. When you've been in the business as long as I have you can recognize the difference between news and propaganda. Obviously, aggressive pursuit of civilian deaths and destruction would only give aid and comfort to the enemy."

"But it was the truth. In a democracy isn't it the duty of journalism to present the truth and let the citizens react as they will?"

"Idealists..." Bottinpaider said, shaking his head. "Saddam Hussein is one scurvy dog. Should U.S. media provide him with an open forum to indoctrinate gullible American citizens like when he paraded those P.O.W.s around on T.V. in direct violation of the Geneva convention?"

"Well, uh, Mr. Bottinpaider, why was there no discussion of American violations of international law? You ran photos of laser-guided bombs blowing up hydro-electric dams but never mentioned that bombing such targets is a violation of Geneva protocols. And burying dead soldiers in mass, unmarked graves, like the U.S. did to Iraq's dead, is also a violation. Where was that story?"

"Details."  
"You didn't miss any of the details when the Army was inflating figures about how much of a force Iraq had set up in the desert as one U.S. commander recently admitted doing. In fact, you jumped all over those figures without so much as a hint of skepticism."

"More details. The American public was well informed about the truth."

"Is that right? Then how do you explain that in a recent survey by FAIR, only 13 percent of Americans knew that Iraqi Ambassador April Glaspie told Hussein the U.S. wouldn't get involved in an Arab border dispute?"

"She did?"  
"Not only that, 65 percent believed the U.S. actually told Hussein they would use force if he grabbed Kuwaiti territory. Most people do not know that Syria and Israel, U.S. allies, are also occupying territory in the Middle East. And only 14 percent knew that the U.S. was one of the minority that voted against a UN resolution to a political settlement to the Palestinian/Israel conflict."

"Silly, silly boy. Americans were well informed about events and politics in the gulf. We have a poll that clearly shows 81 percent of Americans know the name of the missile the U.S. used to shoot down Iraqi scuds."

"It's no use. You're not going to accept the fact that journalism experienced one of its darkest moments in the gulf, are you?"

"Darkest moments? What are you saying? We came out of a situation that had great potential for tragedy smelling like a rose. Think about it from my point of view. Wars can be very dangerous for journalists. If we had presented facts that Americans didn't want to own up to as they ate their dinners, it could have spelled disaster. It could have dragged our popularity and ratings down, advertisers could have deserted us and our ability to present our side of the news could have been seriously handicapped. As it was, well maybe you read about this in the *New York Times*, we were able to increase ad sales by assuring advertisers that we would tailor war specials to provide positive and patriotic lead-ins to commercials."

"Wow, sir, I guess we just measure journalism success with different yardsticks."

"Now you're seeing the light, son. Climb on board, don't rock the boat and maybe someday you can be a part of the team."

Thank God for alarm clocks.  
*Pat Malach is managing editor for the Emerald.*



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**THE FAR SIDE**

By GARY LARSON



"Boy, that's good. But it's interesting, Bob. . . . Do you think everybody's mother makes a different kind of potato bug salad?"