

Soldiers of Iraq! You serve a noble post that befits your great civilization, which had many great leaders in the past. Now a pathetic man vomits lies on your country and tries to use you as a puppet. Saddam seeks to bend you to his illegal purposes, to protect himself and glorify and enrich himself. He does not care if you die for nothing.

Saddam dishonors you as soldiers by playing at being your commander. He crushes the liberties of the Iraqi people and prepares for war, neglecting your health, roads, and education. He spurns the world and your brother countries. All of the world sees that Saddam is a violator of laws who lives like a king at your expense. Decide for yourself!

A single possible escape remains for you. Approach the United States forces slowly with your hands in the air. Have your weapon across your back with the muzzle pointing down, and with the magazine removed, and empty of rounds. Those who do this will be spared and will reunite with their families. Only surrender will let you avoid death from our swift and powerful forces.

In Umm Qasr Kilroy advises on and oversees the distribution of candy to Iraqi children, Hershey's bars, with and without almonds, crates of Kit Kats and M&Ms. He smiths lines for soldiers to offer, in translation, on little Bazooka-gum-style addenda. Statements to play on the loudspeakers as the kids arrive for their candy bars. Words to set the parents more at ease, words to clear the air. You need to build trust. Everybody likes chocolate.

You can't just take down a statue of a dictator. Production values must be considered. It's a photo shoot and a dance party. The locals are often ill-equipped with proper tools, pick axes, heavy chains and the like. Children must be involved, at least in the celebratory gestures. Kids in ragged clothing. A boom box or two can supply the songs of liberation. Dollars, candy bars, and bottled water. Camera crews. It's not easy, but a statue falling with no one there to hear it might as well not have fallen.

Your leader prepares massive weapons in violation of his promises and agreements, though these weapons will not help him. He refuses to allow inspectors to assure that his military conduct is appropriate. He spurns the world and his own people. Saddam shames the soldier and the people of Iraq by being a false soldier.

Our planes and helicopters and tanks will swarm over you and overtake you before you are even alerted. Our swift and powerful weapons will end your lives. The bombs of the United States are accurate enough to strike right on your vehicle or hit you where you stand. They are awesome and massive in the destruction they bring, powerful enough to open the skies and the earth.

Remember that Saddam placed mines behind those troops he threw into the desert without equipment, after the invasion of Kuwait. There is no path away from us where you can flee. Sling your empty weapon toward the ground, on your back, and hold your hands up, surrendering to the United States forces. Only this will allow you to live.

"Good work with the children, Kilroy. Now we want you to do some similar work for stickier situations."
"Stickier situations, sir?"

"Woman walking towards a checkpoint pushing a baby carriage doesn't stop as ordered. Warning shots fired. Woman still won't stop. She is fired upon, is hit. Stops. Turns out it's a baby, not a bomb."
"My assignment?"

"The letter to accompany the compensation."

Kilroy wonders about Marie now and then. She never wrote him after. He follows the movements of her unit and thinks of slipping it in the first time, of her rising and falling in that hotel room, her moan, the quiver of her lip. She never calls. She never writes. Not that he does. Sometimes he thinks about his wife. Sometimes the two of them talk on the phone or video. He will never tell. She will never know. He feels distant from her and from himself; he thinks about this late at night.

"Ape Boss, it's totally fucked up that the people from the Bible used to live here."

"Ain't it."

"Bad guys living here since the Old Testament.

Pharaohs made slaves outta the Jews. Then the Jews smoked 'em. Wrath of God type shit."

"Member that sniper doin' card tricks in Abdali?"

"Kline? He must have bagged a dozen haji by now."

"He ain't gettin' any more. Got hit by an IED."

Some of the guys in the Unit are sitting in the middle of the Humvees with plates behind 'em, guys lucky enough to have flak jackets on the outside. The active-duty guys are dressed for the dance, sure, armored head to toe. The reservists have the same uniforms, more belly, less kevlar. This guy from Implementation, Ted, tells about manning a machine gun in a convoy. Without ammo. Haji snipers were probably up and down the route. His CO ordered him to look mean.

How graphic is an image of a body bag hoisted over one marine's shoulder, really? Does the black bag's anonymity remove from us the horror of that death's singularity? Does it make it possible for us to regard the fallen man as waste? It is the same color as the bags seen at lawn and leaf collection time. The skin is thicker, holding fluids and other things that are falling out. We can show the body bag, not the body. We can put the bag in a cardboard box and ship it home.

The Implementation Star was busy covering high school basketball and the four-cell annex on the jail. There was not much written about the war until the special section explaining each of the playing cards. When the National Museum of Iraq was looted, for a about half an hour, three elderly women held placards that said "Security must preserve culture, too!" at the site of Implementation's demolished library. Nobody driving by really understood what they meant.

"Widget, what's the first thing you're gonna do when you get back home?"

"The first thing I'll do is take a nice long piss, 'cause I can barely stand to go the can on a Herc. Latrine, no troubles, but the plane gets me plugged up."

"I wasn't asking about your bodily functions."

"Then I'm gonna go to the mall, or to a proper PX, and get me an Xbox."

"Spoken like a true American."

"Yo Ape Boss."

"Get on with that blanket drill. We roll at 0600."

"I had that dream again, motherfucking haji kid with his face half blown off, calling my mama a ho."

"Guess you showed that motherfucker."

"Kid was my little brother's age. Didn't know shit."

"You know, my little brother got his brains blown out on a street corner in Compton. Happens everywhere. Shut your eyes and sleep."

"Saddam's art collection was shit. Think oil on velvet. Think heavy metal posters. Lots of bare breasts and swordplay. Gold faucets, but you would think the guy would have like frescoes, or one of those tile things—"

"A mosaic?"

"Yeah, about the fertile crescent of civilization and all."

"The guy had poor taste."

"A Monet or something. He coulda bought a Picasso."

"Philistine."

"I don't think they should show the corpses on TV."

"Honestly, they're savages."

"Yeah. Rumsfeld looks like Skeletor—that hideous laugh—that dry chortle. He's enjoying this."

"No, I mean the Iraqis. What they've done. What they would do if we didn't stop them."

"You mean like invade another country and try to topple the regime there, for no clear reason?"

"This mess is a fucking zoo. I mean, shit, you know."

"Widget was crying about the monkey house."

"One of the fucking lions got out and ate a horse."

"You seen that tiger? Skinnier than Gwyneth Paltrow. People don't know how to take care of animals."

"This is a humanitarian crisis. We gotta get these cats some meat."

"It's not a humanitarian crisis, sir. Technically. They are animals."

"I think the motherfucker looks like a test chimp what they would send into outer space."

"Nah, that's Alfred E. Neuman in a flight suit."

"Mission accomplished, thank you very much. When am I gonna get to drink my celebratory six pack?"

"When I get home, I'll go to Yale on the GI Bill."

"I think I'll invest my combat pay in a baseball team. The Expos are for sale."

"Fire in the hole!"

Knowing nobody and having little else to do, Roxanne worked with great intensity. The apartment was small and unfamiliar, the office large and open, filled with people at desks. No cubicles, but it didn't matter. They hardly ever talked on the phone or with each other. Keyboard activity, the rolling of designer chairs. She reconfigured her life. The smiling people who hustled in the street and stood looking sexy at subway stops. They were shy, it turned out.

Roxanne gives up cornflakes for bagels and lox. She eats pre-cut slices of mango served in plastic packages, bird-seed-like brittles wrapped in deli plastic. She wonders at the people performing youth and beauty. For a second time she walks to the gaping hole in lower Manhattan, just to look again. She wonders what kind of life her mother would have had, if she had lived, if she had lived in New York City, if she had left him when she was young.

Samantha and Frank are having their first real argument. It starts out innocently enough: They are naming a fictional child. The child is a boy or a girl, it does not matter. What matters is that Samantha thinks Frank should have a political consciousness. Frank says that he's against much of what's going on but that he does not think one can make a difference. Once, when she is angry, Samantha says this is bullshit. The child's name may be Leah, it may be Lee. It does not matter.

Having come, the war doesn't go away. It lingers, like a cloud of dust, or data. Frank feels bad. Business is good. He could have made other choices. She is right. He cares about her, about the new library, about his new chair and getting her a piece of jewelry which will be appropriate (she would not want expensive) and yet show the way he feels. He'd supposed to care about the kids over there, he knows. He ships boxes. He feels guilt. He carries on.

Frank is invited to address the VFW the weekend Samantha drives up to Cleveland with a group from some arts mailing list she gets over the Internet. Frank is introduced as a patriotic supplier of materials necessary for the invasion. Samantha is going to put up stickers at the protest. Neither is quite certain what the other is doing. Frank tells her he has a business meeting, she says she's meeting some old artist friends from college. Neither lies. Neither tells the truth.

Roxanne calls her father once a week. She plans to become a Yankees fan so that the antagonism between her and her father, on the level of baseball, will lead to a better relationship. She consults a coworker about how to become a fan and he looks at her as if she has asked how to grow arms. She gains the courage to ask a bartender. "It's not that tough to become a fan. Had to do it for this job. Sports page is required reading. You like hot dogs?"

Most of the others in Roxanne's building were polite but distant. They say apartment dwellers only get to talk to their neighbors when they're standing outside watching the building burn down. The five punk kids downstairs in a one-bedroom were responsible for the all-night pulse of sounds. From right above her there was often male and female Slavic yelling. She tried to ignore it. But there were slaps and thumps and screams this night. Roxanne picked up the phone.

After the police conversation was over upstairs and no noises flowed in its place, neither the earlier sounds of domestic violence nor the punk soundtrack, Roxanne went to her small separate kitchen. Her mother was there, closing the refrigerator, looking over, understanding how she felt without needing to hear a word. Her mother handed her a glass of milk. Strange that she was here and not in Implementation. Roxanne looked up from the glass. The kitchen was empty.

Samantha took out another notebook that already had scraps of her evolving society in it. The hieroglyphics that were also characters of another sort, conversing and interacting in peaceful, playful primate ways. She picked up a pencil, then a pen. She looked over the pages of different sizes that were pinned around her room. Maybe by the time she reached the end of the notebook she would know who they were.

Frank fucked Samantha with the TV on, volume low. The TV said that 2,000 or so Iraqi troops had been killed. The TV said at least three Americans were dead. Samantha was a good ripe fuck on top. Frank let Samantha fuck him like that for a while, just like that. Frank watched the TV. "All those dead," Frank said, "miraculous." "Oh god."