

THE DUEL

BY JESSE LICHTENSTEIN

An Iraqi vice president offered an unusual suggestion Thursday for solving the U.S.-Iraq standoff: Saddam Hussein and George W. Bush should fight a duel to settle their differences and spare their people the ravages of war.

—Associated Press.

Dear Mr Saddam Hussein,

By your Distempers and want of those Decent Principles by which have all Men liv'd peaceably, by your Baseness and notorious Felonies, your Threats and Vile Expressions, you have much offended one who give no Cause for Offence. Therefore it leave to me no Choice save that I request a Gentleman's Satisfaction, and do hereby await your Reply.

I am, Sir, your most humble, etc.,
George W. Bush

Dear Bush,

Salutations! This be indeed a Surprise most pleasing—much time has pass'd. I trust this Missive finds you well mend'd from the Frightfull Fall upon your Cheek. Were it not you I recently espy'd on CNN, so flush'd and Healthfull? I pray you bestow my Fond Regards upon Richard Cheney, and also the goodly cast of "Friends," in most particular Rachel, with Felicitation upon the Birth of a Girl Child.

I remain your humble servant, etc.,
Saddam

Dear Mr Hussein,

It seems you had mistook my Meaning, else do deliberately pervert it. Your Pleasantries and Flattery shall not preserve you in this most Grave Matter, nor shall your seditious Moustaches, for the Hour of Preens and Chatterings is pass'd. You, Sir, are a Plaguey detractor and your Presence a Pestilence upon the Common Peace. I must have Satisfaction. Name the Place and Conditions of your Attendance there. It be prov'd unto the World you be a Prevaricator; shew yourself not to be a Coward as well.

I am, Sir, your most humble, etc. etc.,
George W. Bush

Dear Bush,

I curse you. May you be trampil'd by Swines. May the Oil you unstintingly Obtain from me be of Inferior Quality. May your Ears grow by Night and your Nose by Day, you leprous Swag.

There. Indeed that was most Refreshing. The exchange of wilde Oaths and Invektives were always a favourite Pass-time for me, even as a Childe.

I shou'd delight of a Meeting. I have oft heard tell of your Country Estates, which, if I be not in Error, inhereth within the Texas country. This I do propose as mete for Conference. Be Texas not a Land of great Chattel and nubile Maidens? Are there not hang'd and Injection'd Criminals of most debas'd Nature? Further, your man Cheney avows that your Grounds be equipp'd with Hot Tub. If this be Truth, I shall assuredly convey with me the apposite batheing Attire.

I am your devoted, servile, etc. etc.,
Saddam

Dear Mr Hussein,

Scoundrel! You will not by mine nor any other Permission befoul, besmirch, nor be-sully the Land of Texas with your Odious Presence. Kno' you nothing of the Code of Honour? The Grounds need must be neutral! You be the challenged Party, and Selection make. Look you do so without further Delay.

I am, Sir, your most humble, etc. etc.,
George W. Bush

Dear Old Bush,

You Filth-Pot. You Scurvy Dog. You Slop-Monger. (This be Entertainment!)

Very well, I accede to your Importunities. I will not have it say'd I forc'd you to Face your Destiny discomfit'd by the Grounds. Hark, then, for either Disney World or Biarritz shall do—I have heard that both be lovely this Time of Year.

I am, and remain, with Admiration, etc. etc., at your Bidding,
Saddam

Dear Mr Hussein,

This selection of Location has prov'd Disastrous beyond all Sense and Reason. I think I shall be forc'd to track you like a Craven Animal into your Lair! At leaste have the Decency to make choice of Weapon. Have you a shred of Honour left to expend in this Meeting?

I am, Sir, your most humble, etc.,
George W. Bush

Dear Bush,

Verily, you are in the right. Let us settle the Matter, then: I hereby select a Weapon of mass Destruction. Two, perhaps, were better, lest one Misfire. Yet, and this it paines me to Reveal, my Armory be somewhat reduc'd. Might I not trouble you for a Loan?

I remain prostrate, self-mortifying, in terrible Awe, etc.,
Saddam

Dear Mr Hussein,

Good God, Man, can truly this great Mockery transpire in our enlighten'd Age? You shall employ Conventional weaponry, to be Inspect'd and prepar'd by our Seconds, avowing the Probity of these Actions. This be not Discretion! Justice shall be done, Honour shall be restor'd, and you shall Fall, you Murtherer, you shameful, Cankerous Blight.

I am, Sir, most humbly yours, etc.,
George W. Bush

Dear Bush,

Cankerous Blight! That were a splendid Frase—I shall have it fram'd.

Lamentably, it be not possible that I concur with such Inspections as you proffer. You have my assurances that all my Armaments be in Working Order and of great Readiness, for they are amongst the finest know'd to the World, amongst which they be of Russian, Chinese, and American Fabrication. Allow me to Demonstrate by Means of an Assay upon my own Countrymen—my Friends the Kurdes are ever Eager to volunteer, and I have found this to be an effective Proof. If it suffices not, volunteer your own Expendables and we shall make a Demonstration thereupon. Thus you shall have your Satisfaction.

I remain assuredly in your Thrall, and humbly do submit this Reply, etc.,
Saddam ♦