

The Introduction to *Bushworld: Enter at Your Own Risk* by Maureen Dowd, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Columnist for *The New York Times* (Putnam; 039915258X)

In March 2001, I went to flat and dusty Aggieland, Texas A&M at College Station, to speak at the Bush presidential library. "We had to wait until the Silver Fox left the country to ask you," George Herbert Walker Bush told me, only half teasing, since Barbara Bush was abroad. He lured me there by promising to show me an eleven-page comic screed against *The New York Times* and a few other media miscreants that he'd typed on his computer in the Arthurian style of a column I had written portraying him as the Old King and W. as the Boy King. Like me, 41 has an easier time unfurling his feelings writing than talking, so I especially appreciated his wacky satire about a royal court, sprinkled with words like *verily*, *forsooth* and *liege*, and characters such as King Prescott of Greenwich, George of Crawford, Queen Bar, King Bill, Maid Monica, Hillary the Would-Be Monarch, Knight Algore, Earl Jeb of Tallahassee, Duke Cheney, Warrior Sulzberger, Knight Howell Raines, Knight Ashcroft and Lady Maureen, "charming princess" of the *Times* op-ed world. The delicious frolicking, falconing and scheming at the "moatless" court of the old warrior king, however, will have to forever remain our secret.

I was a *Times* White House reporter for the first Bush administration. Though 41 was always gracious, I know he was disappointed at first to have drawn an irreverent, newfangled "reporterette," as Rush Limbaugh would say, who wanted to focus as much on the personalities of leaders as on their policies. But I always figured it this way: Politicians can tell you they won't ever raise taxes -- read their lips -- or won't ever nation-build, but sometimes, because of their basic natures, needy egos and whispering Iagos, they find their way to believing or acting in glaring contradiction to their original promises. When the nation has been scarred by crises like Watergate and Vietnam, it has been because presidents have let their demons overcome experience and common sense.

Poppy Bush had been expecting a traditional pin-striped *Times* correspondent, one with a name like Chatsworth Farnsworth III, who would scribble about 41's role leading the Atlantic alliance. The son of Prescott Bush and Dorothy Walker is a modest man, whose mother warned him so often against focusing on what he called "the big I" that he would cut the personal pronoun off the start of his sentences and just plunge into the verb, as in "Not going to do it," or "Nah-ga-da-it," as Dana Carvey would say on *Saturday Night Live*. (41 joked that he was "a Dana Carvey soundalike.") Or use staccato Bushspeak, as in his encomium to his coffee warmer: "Mug warmer. Electric. 93-point-25-dash-1, it says." It made him squirm to be inspected by the press closely or saucily. One New Year's Eve, over dinner in Houston, Brent Scowcroft, 41's national security adviser, formally requested that I stop referring to Mr. Bush in stories as acting "goofy." And the president himself complained in amused chagrin to his press secretary, Marlin Fitzwater, in one of the little "blue notes" he sent out to his staff, that I had been sitting cross-legged and arms crossed, "like some Hinnianistic Buddhist" pose at a golf course in Kennebunkport, staring at him in a "Gail Sheehy" manner as he was teeing off. Actually, I was just trying to muster some interest in golf. But I guess it's hard to tee off when you're teed off. Another time, on Air Force One, when he came back to talk to a bunch of reporters, he ordered me to "stop staring" at him; I lowered my eyes.

But over the years, 41 tried to adapt. He has often kidded me about "our love-hate relationship," dubbing me his "favorite-unfavorite big foot columnist" and chastising me about being a "limo-lib"

who cast him unfairly as an "elitist." He loved it when I wrote columns tweaking the Clintons and hated it when I wrote columns tweaking the Bushes, the two rival political dynasties of meritocracy and aristocracy -- both driven by feelings of entitlement -- that I seem destined to cover in endless succession. Poppy Bush sometimes threatens to seek psychiatric counseling to cure himself of this "love-hate" syndrome, knowing that will make me laugh. Both Bush *père* and *fils* are notoriously allergic to introspection and analysis, considering even questions about TV and movie tastes a dread attempt to put them "on the couch" and plumb the unconscious depths.

After moderating the panel on "The Media and the White House" at his library, the former president took me, along with a bunch of his former officials, to a red-meat feast at a local barbecue joint. He was charming, and glowing with pride at being only the second man in history to have his son follow him into the Oval Office.

But in hushed voices, out in the parking lot, some of his former aides, men who had worked for the pragmatic, realpolitik team of "the Velvet Hammer" James Baker and "H.W.," as 41 sometimes differentiates himself from his presidential namesake, confided that they were already anxious and mystified about the chest-thumping, ideological foreign-policy tone of Bush II.

In its first two months, the new administration had gotten into tussles with Russia and China, blowing off treaties and making the rest of the world jittery. After running against the hormonal irresponsibility of the Clinton era, could W. be indulging in an even more destructive teenage rebellion against his family? Prodded by the "forward-leaning," my-way-or-the-highway twins, Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, Bush the younger was doing an Oedipal loop-de-loop, intemperately shredding the internationalism and traditional alliances so cherished by his father and grandfather, a Wall Street banker and Connecticut senator. (My two older brothers were Senate pages in the early fifties for JFK, LBJ, Richard Nixon and Prescott Bush, whom they described as a central casting senator, tall and craggy, favoring gray worsted suits even in warm weather.) W. was replacing the old family motto of noblesse oblige with a new one: Oblige *this*. It seemed odd that Mr. Popularity at Yale, the gregarious frat president who gave everyone cute nicknames and led pranks like scalding DKE pledges with hot wire hangers, was suddenly scalding the world and not leaving them laughing.

At the barbecue dinner, a top official of Bush I fretted that the Bush II foreign-policy team -- the seasoned hands who were supposed to be the adults taking over from those Clinton adolescents who seemed to make it up as they went along -- was too belligerent, too conservative, too blunt, too negative and too improvisational in dealing with the globe on everything from missile defense to Kyoto. (W. mocked enviros as "green, green lima beans.") "These guys are linear," the official said. "They have to have black and white. They have to have bogeymen."

Bush 43 exhibited a weird combination of arrogance and tentativeness. "You're never quite sure," another Bush I official observed, "if those papers in front of W. blew away in the wind, if he would know what to say."

The old man, as his admiring former officials called him, reflected only paternal pride in W.'s fledgling presidency, even though his son was consciously patterning himself not on his own father but on Ronald Reagan. The Great Communicator so overshadowed his vice president that the

syntax-mangling Poppy seemed to droop a bit in the Gipper's presence, managing to look shorter even though he was taller. One of 41's speechwriters called it his "deferential Episcopalian tilt."

Bush 43 certainly wasn't following in the diplomatic footsteps of his father, who practiced an intensely personal, folksy, feet-up style of diplomacy. I spent half of 41's presidency watching him aggressively charming world leaders -- sometimes too aggressively. He loved demonically driving visiting heads of state on his cigarette boat around the Kennebunkport bays -- except François Mitterrand, who begged off, saying he got mal de mer. Continuing a social diplomacy tradition he'd practiced as ambassador to the UN and liaison to Beijing, he dragged Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir of Israel to the Air and Space Museum to see the movie *To Fly*, King Hussein down the river from Mount Vernon on a boat, and Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak to his first baseball game to see the Orioles play the Red Sox, complete with hot dogs and horseradish. When the announcer gave the names of the celebrities in attendance at Memorial Stadium, the name Ted Williams got a roar from the crowd, while the name Mubarak provoked only silent wonderment. ("Who did he play for? The Indians?") Bush 41 loved Saudi Prince Bandar so much, pheasant hunting at his British estate and allowing Bandar alone to smoke cigars at Kennebunkport, that the Saudi ambassador became known as "Bandar Bush."

41's still at it. He invited Mikhail Gorbachev to come to College Station for his eightieth birthday parachute jump and tried to persuade the former Head of the Evil Empire to jump with him. "Afraid," Gorbachev demurred. W. attended his dad's birthday party but did not stay to watch him fall 5,000 feet, returning to the White House for a T-ball game.

For Poppy, who belonged to three men's clubs in Washington and the all-male Bohemian Grove in California, the global stage was the ultimate exclusive men's club -- Margaret Thatcher, "the Iron Lady," who ordered Bush Senior not to "go wobbly" on Saddam, included.

Before 41's 1990 summit with Gorbachev, Richard Perle, the cold war arms expert who would one day be a leading Bush hawk on Iraq, pooh-poohed such personal diplomacy. "It's very easy to get caught up in personal relationships and fail thereby to analyze the situation accurately," Perle sniffed.

H.W. and his pal Baker had an ad hoc, practical, and sometimes disturbingly unsentimental "we know best" foreign policy, with none of the moral umbrage of Jimmy Carter or soaring dreams of Ronald Reagan. As Tom Friedman and I wrote in a *Times* magazine piece in 1990: "They regard themselves as good people who will do the correct thing and, if circumstances permit, the right thing. The approach is: split the difference. Keep things stable. Democracy where possible. Free markets where possible. Apple pie where possible.... If what seems reasonable at the moment is to side with the Chinese power elite rather than the students in Tiananmen Square, then you side with those in power. If what seems reasonable is to split the difference between the aspirations of Lithuanians and the interests of Gorbachev, then you split the difference.... Bush and Baker failed to convey passion on issues, and that can be a real liability."

Long before his son strutted as "Top Gun," *Time* magazine had hailed the elder Bush and Baker as "Top Guns on Top of the World" on their February 13, 1989, cover.

It became clear during W.'s 2000 campaign that the one-term Texas governor, who got sober and serious late in life, had not studied up on foreign policy at his father's knee. In his time around the White House, when he was still known as "Junior," he had hung out with Lee Atwater, the Machiavellian wunderkind of the revived Republican Party, in the political chop shop. Junior was the loyalty enforcer, making sure that Bush staffers were vetted as true-blue. He was a good-time guy with a quick temper, not considered by the Bush family and staff as presidential material, or even gubernatorial material.

I came a cropper of him once, back in those days, when I was on summer duty at Kennebunkport as the *Times* White House reporter. Wanting some playful payback against his dad for making reporters awake at dawn to watch him tee off for one of his breathless games of "aerobic golf" or "golf polo," as we called it, I rummaged around in my suitcase and came up with a "Bob Dole for President in '88" T-shirt and a "Jesse Jackson for President in '88" hat. I knew 41 would get the joke, but when father and son swung by me in their golf cart, Poppy wasn't looking and Junior gave me a scary glare. Later he sent back word that he was not amused. I comforted myself with the knowledge that Junior, a Midland businessman, would never be in a position to wreak revenge on me. After all, Jeb was the family comer.

W.'s quick turnaround from black sheep to boy king took a large measure of grit and discipline. When I ran into him covering his Texas state house and White House races, he was genial, appreciatively noting my green cowboy boots or bantering about his parents. On the day he announced he would run for president, we reminisced about the golf course contretemps, sitting on the back porch of the Bush estate in Kennebunkport, overlooking the sparkling Atlantic, as his parents perched nearby. Grinning disarmingly, W. asked, "Are you still holding that against me?"

One of Barbara Bush's White House aides had predicted that W. would never make it through a presidential run because he was too much like his mother, prickly, tart-tongued, an injustice collector. But he surprised everyone -- including his parents -- and got his Roman candle side under control. His father had helped to swaddle him with a foreign-policy "dream team" that would give voters confidence -- even if there were a few slips along the way, like the pop quiz that had W. sputtering "General" when asked who the head of Pakistan was. The patrician bequeathed to the prodigal son his own foreign-policy war council -- Cheney, Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice and Paul Wolfowitz -- to tutor him and confer gravitas upon him.

Dick Cheney was just the sort of family retainer and consigliere the Bushes loved -- deferential, loyal, leakproof, not competitive. So when, as head of the vice-presidential search committee, Cheney chose himself, both father and son were well pleased.

But it soon became clear that this wasn't the cautious, modulated Dick Cheney of Bush I, such an invisible staff man that the Secret Service gave him the code name "Backseat" when he was in the Ford White House. This Dick Cheney was quietly but firmly running the show, and the show was swaggering and ideological. He brought in his mentor from the Nixon and Ford years, the charismatically cranky Donald Rumsfeld, the famous infighter who had been a sharp-elbowed rival to Bush Senior in the old days, rooting for Bush for CIA director because he thought it would hurt 41's chances to be president. Rummy, of course, thought he would make a stronger president than

H.W., whom he considered flighty and insubstantial, pulled up the ladder by his pedigree and given appointed jobs by his friends.

Cheney brought in a neocon chief of staff, Scooter Libby, a protégé of Wolfowitz, and Rummy swept into the Pentagon the neocon gang of Wolfowitz, Doug Feith, William Luti, Stephen Cambone and, as Pentagon advisers, Richard Perle and Newt Gingrich. Condi Rice was the tyro president's remedial foreign-policy governess and workout partner, which left her little time to do her real job, sorting through and brokering national security information on things like Al Qaeda terrorist threats. Terrorism was considered a leftover Clinton problem and this White House disdained everything Clinton. Their concerns were more retro; Rummy was fixated on getting a missile defense shield and developing laser weapons in space; Cheney was turning back the clock on environmental progress with secret energy meetings paying off all their oil cronies who had fed the fund-raising engine.

The new Bushies wanted to be feared, as Reagan was in the world, and brought an intensely moralistic component to their foreign policy. But they didn't seem to care about the flip side as the sunny Reagan did -- being revered. Or even about being collegial, as 41 did.

With each passing day of the Bush restoration, it became clearer that we were entering the primal territory of ancient myth, in which the son must define himself by vanquishing the father. While W. loved his dad and was close to him, he wanted out of his shadow. Even as he acted out with alcohol and pranks and a lackadaisical record at school and the National Guard, W. was also emulating his dad's stuffed résumé -- Yale, Skull and Bones, fighter pilot, Midland oilman, politics -- and usually falling short. Where his dad was captain of Andover's soccer and baseball teams and Yale's '48 baseball team, W. had to settle for head cheerleader and self-appointed role of "Stickball Commissioner" at Andover. While his dad was a fighter pilot who got shot down in World War II, W. avoided Vietnam and settled for flying jets in the National Guard, "defending Texas against Oklahoma," as one Bush I official sardonically noted.

Marlin Fitzwater once mused to me that the first President Bush would have been better off if he were all preppy or all Texan, that the strain of trying to be striped watchband and pork rinds, blue blood and red meat, tripped him up.

The second President Bush had found the experience of watching his dad fail to get a second term very painful. He was going to make sure that when he said "fixin'" and "bidness," it rang true; that he was a real conservative, not a moderate, like his grandfather, and not a moderate pretending to be a conservative, like his father. He was going to be a Southern born-again evangelical Christian, not an Episcopalian like his father and grandfather. More than anything, he was going to make sure he was never called a wimp, as his father had been on the "Wimp Factor" cover of *Newsweek* during his first presidential campaign -- an incident so traumatic for 41 that he counted the number of times the word had been used in the story and demanded a meeting with Kay Graham, the publisher of *Newsweek*.

From the start, W. and Karl Rove used Bush *père* as a reverse playbook; if they avoided the father's missteps with the right, they could keep their base happy. It informed everything, including Middle East policy. Daddy Bush loved the Arabs, especially the Saudis (the ultimate elite men's club), and

he could be tough and impatient with Israel, sending his support among American Jews plummeting. Rove and W. believed that winning a larger share of the Jewish vote would be key to getting that second term his dad missed out on. W. preferred to go easy on Israel, even when Ariel Sharon took advantage and reneged on his own promises to 43 to ease his harsh rule over the Palestinians.

I often wonder what Bush the elder must have been thinking after 9/11 as the neocons started their drumbeat about the need to rectify the huge mistake of not getting rid of Saddam in '91; and watching, from the sidelines, as his son reached back in time to fix the ending of a war that 41 felt he'd ended as well as he could. And what did 41 make of the biggest mystery of all, even among some conservatives -- why had Cheney and Scowcroft protégé Condi gone so haywire?

It's easy for me to believe that the manners-obsessed and gallant 41 would not want to tread on 43's presidency by offering a lot of unsolicited advice. But it's hard for me to believe the son wouldn't take advantage of his dad's counsel on diplomacy and Saddam. He was, as he told Bob Woodward, relying on two other fathers. Pressed by Woodward on why he did not consult the only other president to go to war with Iraq before he himself went to war with Iraq, 43 said: "He is the wrong father to appeal to in terms of strength; there is a Higher Father that I appealed to."

In addition to his relationship with Jesus, W. felt he could especially trust Cheney because Cheney didn't want to run for president. 43 seemed totally under the sway of this Darth Vader Dark Father who was steering him back in time, with fixations on Star Wars and rewriting the end of Desert Storm. Cheney, who was burrowed down in his secret undisclosed locations after 9/11 reading worst-case scenarios on terrorism and lugubrious tomes contending that war is the natural state of mankind, yanked the formerly sunny sonny into a neo-Hobbesian world where, as neocon guru Robert Kagan put it, "Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus," a gloomy universe where America must throw off weak international institutions and prevail with a muscular unilateralism.

All presidents are in a bubble, but the boy king was so insulated he was in a thermos. He said he did not read newspapers. His dad read everything about himself -- even reporter's pool reports for other reporters. W. preferred to get his information directly from his advisers. His regents put their own spin and filter on the information they fed him, creating an alternative universe where they were never wrong because they never let in any information showing they were wrong and because they conjured up information to prove they were right. They transmit; they don't receive. They didn't listen to Congress or to allies or to Bush père or his friends, like Baker and Scowcroft.

I went on W's first foreign trip in May 2002 and he wore his chip on his shoulder, proudly. Sometimes the little-traveled 43 seemed like an accidental tourist. As a British reporter wrote, he did not always seem sure what country he was in. He was bristly at the anti-American demonstrations and the politely condescending attitude of the French and Germans. When the president got irritated at Élysée Palace and called NBC's David Gregory a pretentious "intercontinental" for playfully asking Jacques Chirac a question in French, it puzzled the French reporters I was sitting with. How could it be rude to speak French to a Frenchman in France?

Everything had been transformed by September 11, 2001. You could see in President Bush's eyes, darting and daunted, as he stayed frozen in his seat after learning about the second plane going into the World Trade tower, reading with second-graders, that the bill for his lifelong lack of seriousness had come due. (Maybe that's why he sat so long, when he should have been scrambling jets.) Bush and Cheney were frightened for America and wanted to protect the country; but they also began wielding fear as a political weapon.

The wave of positive feeling and sympathy for America after 9/11 dissipated quickly, as the emboldened Bush crew continued to strong-arm the world. For them, 9/11 represented an opportunity beyond the war on terror. It was a chance to pool their various grandiose dreams for transforming American psychology, Arab political culture, the American military, the security of Israel and the strategic direction of the Middle East. They were conservatives, but their audacious and profligate schemes for social and political engineering at home and abroad made Hillary Clinton's unwieldy health care plan look piddling.

Cheney and Rummy wanted to toughen up the American character, to exorcise sixties moral relativism, the Clintonesque if-it-feels-good-do-it ethos, the post-Vietnam focus on America's imperfections and limitations, and the ambivalence about using force. Dick and Lynne Cheney had long been critics of multiculturalism and the blame-America-first attitude. The vice president had wanted to establish America's primacy as the sole superpower for a decade. And the neocons had long had utopian dreams about making the world over in their own image of America's image. Though most had managed to avoid military service, they subscribed to the theory that war is too important to be left to the generals; they wanted to reduce the rest of the world to subservience and spread democracy through coercion.

Back in 1992, when W. was still just the cocky, hot-tempered scion whose political judgment was considered dubious, hanging around on the edge of his dad's reelection campaign, Cheney, then the Bush I defense secretary, and his aides Libby and Wolfowitz were already preparing what would someday be known as the Bush doctrine, an aggressive, unilateral policy that told the world to get back, Jack.

That '92 "Defense Planning Guidance" draft, a big swinging-stick "Empire Strikes First" manifesto, called for unapologetic world domination, asserting that America's mission after the cold war would be to intervene to thwart any countries, allied or hostile, from becoming a rival to America's superpower stature. Western Europe, Asia and the former Soviet Union, the document declared, could not be allowed to challenge U.S. supremacy.

It stirred outrage among some senior Bush I officials and members of Congress who got wind of it. Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia denounced the draft as "myopic," and warned, "In the long run, it will be counterproductive to the very goal of world leadership that it cherishes."

The first President Bush cringed at such solipsistic grandiosity, and Colin Powell considered it voodoo foreign policy. They squelched it, but it rose up from the dead like a blood-starved vampire, when Cheney, Scooter and Wolfie found a younger, more malleable President Bush, who was drawn to the notion of letting the world know in no uncertain terms who the sheriff was.

Two other steroid-infused manifestos would find a host body in W. years after they were written. In 1996, three men who would become Bush national security advisers and leading hawks in the whack-Iraq group -- Richard Perle, Douglas Feith and David Wurmser -- helped write a report about how Israel could transcend the problems with the Palestinians by changing the "balance of power" in the Middle East and replacing Saddam; they had prepared the report for then-Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Even the hard-line Bibi found the plan too far-out and rejected it. And in 1997, while W. was worrying about changing the Texas taxes and execution controversies, Bill Kristol, now of the *Weekly Standard* and Fox News, and other conservatives formed a nonprofit group called "Project for the New American Century." They published a "statement of principles" signed by Jeb Bush and future Bush officials Rummy, Cheney, Wolfie, Scooter Libby and Elliott Abrams. It rejected 41's realpolitik, called for a return to "a Reaganite policy of military strength and moral clarity," foreshadowing what five years later would become 43's preemption strategy.

"America has a vital role in maintaining peace and security in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East," they wrote. "If we shirk our responsibilities, we invite challenges to our fundamental interests. The history of the 20th century should have taught us that it is important to shape circumstances before crises emerge, and to meet threats before they become dire." It was a kick-the-door-in policy straight out of Philip K. Dick's science fiction *Minority Report*: Identify the future bad guys and arrest them before they commit the crime.

America, the signers of this barrel-chested declaration wrote, should "challenge regimes hostile to our interests and values."

Just as Cheney, Scooter and Wolfie wanted to correct what they saw as errors in their previous life in government, so did Rummy. As he told Bob Woodward, he had had a hard time getting control over the Pentagon the first time he was secretary of defense in the Ford White House. Now he wanted to make his mark with a transformation of the military, showing that smaller, more agile forces could be sent to dispatch more villains; he would stubbornly cling to his theories, even when experts like General Eric Shinseki and Senator John McCain warned him he could not achieve security or troop safety in an Iraqi occupation with such a reduced force.

In addition to the neocons wanting to transform the Middle East and Rummy wanting to transform the military and Cheney wanting to transform the American psyche, this was a chance for W. to complete his transformation from the screwup son to the son who fixed his father's screwups, from a man favored by history into a man who changed history. Indeed, W. wanted to change the end of the very war his father wrote about proudly in his book *A World Transformed*.

Perle was no Pitt and Wolfowitz was no Clooney, but they pulled off an "Ocean's 9/11" heist of the war on terror, slick and over budget. The hawks knew it would be too hard to sell an eschatological scheme to stomp out Islamic terrorism by giving the Arab world an extreme makeover. They needed a smoke screen, and why not the smoke of a mushroom cloud? Saddam was the perfect villain, and the perfect lab monkey to test all their bold theories on. The neocons had always been burned up that they didn't get to see Saddam, running like a rat across the sands, at the end of Desert Storm. They felt passionately that the first President Bush had betrayed the Shiites and Kurds by letting Saddam slaughter them after 41 had urged them to "take matters into their own

hands and force Saddam Hussein, the dictator, to step aside." Despite pushing the first Iraq war as a moral obligation, the pragmatic Desert Storm team was reluctant to interfere when Saddam sent out his helicopters to kill the resistance because it feared radical Islamic factions might take over if Saddam was sacked.

Back in 1991, as Bush I defense secretary Dick Cheney defended the decision not to go into Baghdad, saying that America would simply have installed a "puppet regime." "How long would we have to stay there to keep this regime in power?" he said. "How effective would it be if it were perceived as the puppet regime of the United States military? It gets to be a very difficult, a very nebulous, a very long, drawn-out kind of commitment, what I would describe as a quagmire. We have absolutely no interest in getting U.S. military forces involved inside Iraq."

In *A World Transformed*, Bush père and Scowcroft write that it was Cheney who helped make the decision that Saddam could keep using his helicopters as gunships to put down the uprisings, a decision that in retrospect 41 seems to have regretted. But Bush Senior defended his decision not to sack Saddam then, saying he had no "exit strategy," something he also intensely worried about when his son went to war with Iraq. "Going in and occupying Iraq, thus unilaterally exceeding the United Nations' mandate, would have destroyed the precedent of international response to aggression that we hoped to establish," he wrote. "Had we gone the invasion route, the United States could conceivably still be an occupying power in a bitterly hostile land. It would have been a dramatically different -- and perhaps barren -- outcome."

The neocon heist, a decade in the making, nurtured in the Clinton years in the offices of the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank where Cheney mingled with Perle, Feith and Wolfowitz, went quickly and smoothly. Cheney lurked over at Langley, breathing down CIA analysts' necks. And Feith developed his own CIA in the Pentagon to forge the link between Saddam and Al Qaeda that the CIA couldn't turn up.

Ahmad Chalabi also helped gin up the "evidence" they needed. He provided defectors to link Saddam and Al Qaeda, and to inflate Saddam's nonexistent arsenal into a threat to U.S. security, even reportedly getting an aide's relative, code-named "Curveball," to become a key source on WMD, a charge Chalabi denied. They successfully persuaded many Americans of a lie -- that Saddam was behind 9/11. A study released last year showed that of three misconceptions about Iraq -- that Al Qaeda and Iraq were connected, that WMD had been found, and that the world approved of the U.S. invasion of Iraq -- 80 percent of Fox viewers believed at least one of them. On the flip side, only 23 percent of PBS viewers believed at least one misconception.

In a plot twist worthy of Evelyn Waugh, the neocons conning America got conned by a con man. The Bush administration pals of Chalabi, convicted embezzler in Jordan and alleged Iranian spy, paid him \$39 million (the U.S. government paid him at least a hundred million from '92 until his Baghdad house was raided in May) to feed them the empire cakewalk fantasies they wanted to hear, and to help build the trompe l'oeil case against Saddam that would end up costing America a billion a week.

As Vincent Cannistraro, a former CIA counterterrorism specialist who now consults for the government, told *The New Yorker's* Jane Mayer, "With Chalabi, we paid to fool ourselves. It's

horrible. In other times, it might be funny. But a lot of people are dead as a result of this. It's reprehensible." (Chalabi, too, wanted to topple Saddam to avenge his powerful father, who had been thrown out of Iraq decades ago.)

In what Senator Bob Graham called "incestuous amplification," the bogus stories of Chalabi and his friends on WMD ricocheted through an echo chamber of government and media, making it sound as though multiple, reliable sources were corroborating the same story, when it was the same unreliable source.

Colin Powell knew that Cheney had an unhealthy "fever" about Saddam, as he told Woodward, and he knew Feith's Pentagon "Gestapo office," as he contemptuously dubbed it, was hyping evidence. He holed up with George Tenet to try to weed out some of the bogus Cheney & Co. stuff from his UN speech making the case for war, but, in the end, he did not have the gumption to fend off the hawks or sound the alarm loudly with the president. Rummy and Cheney moved the war plan along so quickly that by the time W. had to decide, it was easy for the regents to suggest it would be wimpish to turn back at that point. W., or "The Man," as Cheney liked to call him, certainly could not abide the "W"-word.

Wolfowitz of Arabia and his aides grabbed control of the occupation from the State Department, rejecting the diplomats' postwar plans even as they failed to prepare adequate ones of their own, and State sulked.

W. had gambled huge, risking his own legacy while undercutting his dad's. It was an intense and historic family drama, all the more remarkable because the father and son who hate being put "on the couch" were now involved in a Freudian tango that was rocking the world.

In an interview in May with *The Washington Times*, W. said he was determined not to repeat what he thinks were the two big mistakes of his father's one-term presidency: abandoning Iraq and not beating the Democrats. He vowed never to do what his father did -- "cut and run early" from Iraq, saying: "Freedom will prevail, so long as the United States and allies don't give the people of Iraq mixed signals, so long as we don't cower in the face of suiciders, or do what many Iraqis still suspect might happen, and that is cut and run early, like what happened in '91." Of course, some would say that cutting and running is exactly what the Bush team did, first in Afghanistan to hurry on to Iraq. And again when Chalabi led America into what General Anthony Zinni in 2001 predicted would be a "Bay of Goats" in Iraq, and the administration wanted to hurry out before W.'s reelection campaign began.

The president's chief of staff, Andy Card, who was deputy chief of staff in the Bush I White House, said the difference in the two presidents was Texas, implying the second Bush was the real Texas, as in, tougher. W., he said, "came from West Texas. And West Texas was his home for a lot longer than it was for the former president. He was the governor of Texas. He wasn't the first envoy to China or the UN ambassador or the CIA director. His training was dealing with problems on the streets of Laredo or Dallas or Houston or Midland or Austin. This president came with a kind of street smarts and recognition of the importance of the resolve of America."

Even for a president who favors Western bumper sticker talk, the "cut and run early" crack directed toward his own father seemed so harsh, it made you wince and wonder: Is this what happens when international strategy is reduced to a psychodrama of family competition?

W. avenged his dad, replaced his dad, made his dad proud and rebelled against his dad, all with the same war.

I have covered other feverish bouts where Washington was overtaken by the convoluted psychologies of people in power: the Iran-contra hearings, the Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill sexual harassment hearings, the Clinton impeachment hearings, the 2000 election stalemate (the heist before the heist). But this is the most astonishing and dangerous subordination of American history to particular psyches I've seen. It is bad enough that two presidents have been trapped in Bushworld, the perverse theme park created by W.'s posse. But now all of America, and most of the planet, find themselves trapped in Bushworld with them.

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