



War Reporting for Cowards

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Chris Ayres is a small-town boy, a hypochondriac, and a neat freak with an anxiety disorder. Not exactly the picture of a war correspondent. But when his boss asks him if he would like to go to Iraq, he doesn't have the guts to say no. After signing a 1 million dollar life-insurance policy, studying a tutorial on repairing severed limbs, and spending 20 thousand dollars in camping gear (only to find out that his bright yellow tent makes him a sitting duck), Ayres is embedded with a battalion of gung ho Marines who either shun him or threaten him when he files an unfavorable story. As time goes on, though, he begins to understand them (and his inexplicably enthusiastic fellow war reporters) more and more: Each night of terrifying combat brings, in the morning, something more visceral than he has ever experienced -- the thrill of having won a fight for survival.

In the tradition of *MASH*, *Catch-22*, and other classics in which irreverence springs from life in extremis, *War Reporting for Cowards* tells the story of Iraq in a way that is extraordinarily honest, heartfelt, and bitterly hilarious.

War Reporting for Cowards Details

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Author : Chris Ayres

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From Reader Review War Reporting for Cowards for online ebook

Sarah says

I got really frustrated with this book. It was breezy reading, but even for a memoir, it was grossly and overtly self-centered. There were so many aspects of the public's opinion on the homefront that he generalized in a pro-Bush view that I got sick of it. It seemed like the kind of book that I would get into, hence why I picked it up, but instead it is a messy, and quite frankly, un compelling retelling of Ayres' experience of embedded journalism. So much that it really doesn't merit a long review from me. This book is going straight back to the library.

Sarah says

I read this on the recommendation of my boyfriend. I'm not sure what I was expecting, this wasn't quite it. I think I was expecting more of the actual war but more of the book is taken up on how the author ended up in Iraq.

I don't think I'd agree with much of the author's politics, or his views and feelings on the invasion of Iraq specifically, but that hardly matters in the reading of this book. It's not a journalistic account of the Iraq war, 9/11, or anything in any way related to that, it's a memoir. It's entertaining rather than insightful.

It tells the story of how this guy chances his way into a career as a financial journalist, and then accidentally finds himself being sent to cover a war. And it seems the gulf between being a financial reporter and being a war reporter are only slightly narrower than that between being an accountant and being a soldier.

War reporting is something he's definitely not cut out for, although it does appear to cure his generalised anxiety disorder.

Renee says

It's hard to imagine less than two weeks of actual war reporting being stretched into a whole book, but Ayres does it quite well, and I only rarely begrudged him my \$12 in exchange for a memoir so light on the experience actually, you know, billed in the title. I found myself laughing out loud on the Metro, which is always a good sign for a book.

What's more, I never felt like Ayres was dogmatic in any way. This isn't an anti-war book. It's an anti-Ayres-being-at-the-war book. And it's not a dry political/military history book -- he doesn't spend much time discussing the overall politics and war strategy of the Iraq war (is it too soon for that?)

Best of all, Ayres appears to have real respect for the others who seem so alien to him, especially the Marines with whom he lived for a short time. Ayres says in the acknowledgments, "My own experiences in Iraq are trivial compared with those of the Marines; but warriors are rarely writers (when they are, they win Pulitzers), and I hope that my memoir helps readers understand what these men's daily lives are like." That it did.

(As an added bonus, Ayres' account of his experiences in NYC on 9/11 and the days shortly thereafter exhibit an insight into the emotions of those weeks better than anything I've read in a long time. I found myself contemplating my own perspective of those anthrax-and-terrorist-filled days much more deeply than I have in the last 5-7 years. A beautifully heart-wrenching chapter.)

Kaifilion says

I heard about this book on a list of 'best unread books of the decade', and saw that it had good reviews on Amazon. A funny story told from the frontlines of the Iraq war - sounds great, right?. Unfortunately, the guy doesn't actually get to Iraq until page 192, and he only spends about 12 days there. Those few days he does spend with troops are actually really exciting, and the people he meets sound like they would have great stories to tell - only, he doesn't ever talk to them. The author would much rather just talk about himself, and his mind-blowing realization that in this war, with bombs and guns going off all around him, for the first time in his life, he feels like he's actually living. Wow - that's only been reported by EVERYONE who has ever been in a scary, life-threatening situation. It may have been mentioned once or twice in Fight Club, among a few hundred other movies.

Though it ends well, the rest of the book is pretty dull, and mostly filled with the author's whining. I have no sympathy for a man who goes to a North Face outlet to buy camping supplies to take to Iraq. Yeah, it makes for kind of a funny story, but if I wanted to hear about funny stories about shopping in LA, I'd watch the Hills, or 90210.

I recommend pages 192-275, but the rest of the book is crap. If anyone out there has a recommendation for a good story about the Iraq war, I'd love to hear it.

Jim says

Although at times humorous and entertaining, I was in the end somewhat disappointed in the result. All build up and little delivery, so to speak. He was embedded in the same division as the author of Generation Kill (a superior effort), though Ayres was in an artillery unit instead of with a recon unit. There are interesting insights into the world of journalism.

Esther says

CONTAINS SPOILERS

Don't read this book if you have a passion for journalism. Don't read this book if you believe war correspondents do a meaningful job.

It's the first book which managed to make me feel personally insulted.

There is this guy who accidentally ends up as a war correspondent and spends the first week in Kuwait in a luxury hotel enjoying room service and spa. Instead of going out digging for stories as any good journalist would do.

The same guy witnessed 9/11, calls his boss to write a story and instead of seeking the story first strolls home.

Okay, finally in war - after almost 200 pages of whining, asshole thoughts, big ego and basically nothing interesting to say - he doesn't tell us about the suffering, the reality of war, he tells us about his uncomfortable position in the Humvee and lack of sleep.

He is not at all interested in other people, doesn't want to tell their stories. He is only interested in his own misery (nothing compared to what's really going on). He even dares writing that the 9 days with the Marines turned him into one and that he feels like a hero.

In the end he grabs the first chance to get out of it and return to luxury and spa.

There is only one great passage in the book and this is what a Marine says to him. "You think it's okay to give our position away? I'm glad you're leaving, because otherwise I'd be kicking your sorry ass out of here. You're a piss-poor journalist."

Bananon says

Hmmm, interesting.

Good memoir but in the end, I didn't like the author. He was an interesting character but not one I felt any sympathy for. His experiences were hard yes, but they were also ones that hundreds if not thousands of hard working young journalists would kill to have. He was breezy about being given great opportunities, if he even knew they were opportunities.

Hard to like a book too much when you can't stand the writer.

Colleen says

I do NOT know why this was worthy of a book. There wasn't much of a story to be told and what little there was was badly told. I kept trying to give this author a chance--I did make it all the way through the book--but he irritated me every time I picked it up. I'm kind of mad that it didn't live up to the hype in the title, inside front cover, back of the book, and reviews. The two or three funny lines in the book were placed there just like in a movie trailer for a bad movie. He's not funny at all and a poor writer to boot. (Tons of typos in this book--it drove me crazy!) How he got a job with the London Times is beyond me. The author was clearly an immature, boorish young man. He describes his characters in stereotypical ways and with no originality. And he's very condescending to women--they're either in stiletto heels (how many field reporters would actually get around in stilettos?) or they're very butch. Much of the narrative sounds hyped up, if not downright untrue. His claim to have seen people jumping off the World Trade Center, very close, seems made up. By the time he got down there, I doubt they would have let him anywhere near that area. And, according to Ayres, he came oh so close to death when the Towers collapsed. (He came oh so close to death many, many times.) Another example of his immaturity was his delight in giving us the gory details--bodies sliced in half and on and on. A TOTAL waste of my time.

Emily says

Quite good, and while not sacrificing truth it is less painful to read than most accounts of modern war.

Zohar - ManOfLaBook.com says

War Reporting for Cowards by Chris Ayres is a book which tells of the time the author was embedded with the Marines in the second Gulf War. Mr. Ayres still writes to British magazines and screen.

If there is one word to describe War Reporting for Cowards by Chris Ayres it's "honest" – and probably also "funny". So funny and honest it is.

The book follows Mr. Ayres as he becomes a "war reporter", a short autobiography of growing up, going to school and getting a job. From there Mr. Ayres tells us about being a foreign correspondent in New York City and witnessing the 9/11 attacks from ground level. Mr. Ayres then gets assigned to Los Angeles, where he knows his assignments are not serious, yet he has to take them seriously in a wry sort of way. Then he goes to Iraq.

Sometimes people want to talk with me about the Israel-Palestine, an issue I'm always willing to discuss frankly. Many are just trying to get information before making up their minds, but every once in a while I get the "why did Israel disproportionately bomb Palestine after they shot 'only' 2,000 rockets on them?" My answer is almost always the same "what would you want to do if only one of those 2,000 was aimed at your kids?"

"Idealism increases in direct proportion to one's distance from the problem." – John Galsworthy

Being embedded with American troops is no joke, as he soon finds out. Even as an embedded reporter Mr. Ayres finds that he has been hardened witnessing the grim reality of war. The author finds that being on the front lines (without a gun) Mr. Galsworthy starts making sense.

The author's self-deprecating humor shines throughout the book. He does not make himself to be a hero of the stature of John Rambo or John Matrix, but a reluctant reporter, a coward among brave men. Only that he's not a coward, just a rational human being.

The book is an enjoyable read, an accurate war story without embellishments and with humor. A fun and easy read which will resonate with many people.

What I couldn't get past though, were some of the mistakes in the book, outright jumbled words and calling Todd Beamer, the American passenger aboard United Airlines Flight 93 which was hijacked as part of the September 11 attacks, "Tom".

I know those are minor complaints, but they really irritated me.

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Kat says

Hilarious and easy read

Kase! Wickman says

An honest account of a total pansy's foray into war reporting in Iraq. Ayers had been a foreign correspondent before — stationed in Los Angeles, California and reporting for a London paper. And before London, he covered the New York financial scene (aka watched CNN and wrote news briefs based on that "reporting" all day) and had reluctantly covered 9/11, which he stumbled across on his way to his office, where the cubicle next to him was eventually exposed to anthrax.

Unlucky guy.

It's easy to laugh at Ayers' unease, shake off his cowardice, until you realize that cowardice is only logical in his position. As an unarmed reporter traveling with a convoy of American marines wearing a bright blue vest with PRESS stamped across the front (in English, not Arabic), Ayers was a walking target with a poorly functioning satellite phone.

I probably would have been scared too. I would have been more afraid.

War Reporting for Cowards is a refreshing turn away from the typical war reporting memoir, and a damn easy and entertaining, while still truthful and sometimes shocking, read. Highly recommended as entertaining and quick reading for smart kids.

Martin says

I ended up enjoying this book, but I really didn't like it for the first 3/4... I guess this might be the first time an English writer's self deprecating style took a while to gel. To me, Ayres spends so much time explaining why he's useless that when the book gets interesting, in the Kuwait and Iraq parts, it takes a bit to respect his narrative. But stay with it- it gets better. I think this is best for more mature readers but fine for kids over about 10 or 12 who want to plumb deeper shoals. A good look within both the media and the military- and the weird intersection of the two.

Jo says

‘War Reporting for Cowards’ is an illustration of how humor can be found anywhere, even in the midst of blood, sweat and tears. Chris Ayres spent time embedded with the Marines at the beginning of the Second Gulf war and the book starts off with him smack bang in the middle of this experience, grimly digging trenches in a chemical suit in 100 degree heat while shelling is heard in the distance, wondering how the hell he got there. As the title makes clear, he was not perhaps the best person for the job and much of the book explains how he got to be in this situation despite his obvious shortcomings.

Another title for the book could be “The Accidental War Reporter” as his career spectrum initially began with the financial pages, in London and then New York, took him to Hollywood and eventually, purely because of pride and his inability to say no, he ended up in Iraq. There are many moments of laughter in the book as he describes his initial forays into journalism, joining the Times, preparing for embedment, having never even camped before, and I liked the insider views into how a newsroom is run.

Everything is pretty light and amusing until the events of September the 11th. For all the jocularity of his writing pre this period, there is not one trivialization of what happened that day in his first hand account. Reading it made my blood run cold reliving the events that were beamed around the world. This part of the book not only illustrated why Chris is a journalist in that it was so well written and also why he was eventually chosen to embed, but perhaps also provides some illustration of the emotion that led to the eventual war in Iraq whether you believe it was right or wrong.

Chris never really comes out behind either view point choosing instead to focus on the men who had to fight the war. I appreciated his treatment of the marines he encountered; he didn’t sugar coat their less admirable traits but at the same time emphasized their loyalty to one another, their youth and what they endure because they made a certain choice when they were eighteen. Though the book is primarily a humorous autobiography it leaves no doubt about either the terrible things that occur in war or the lengths journalists will go for a story. He may make fun of his colleagues as he does himself but at the same time it is clear how important their contribution is in global conflicts from world war one to the present day.

Michelle Teeter says

I picked up this book because of the funny title. Also having started writing articles myself, I thought it might give me insight into what the life of a writer looks like. I have never had the desire to do "hard news" like war reporting, but neither did Ayres from the title. This book gave a genuine look as to what war reporting would be like for most of us (those who aren't crazy adrenaline junkies that is). He showed the terror, the boredom, the divided emotions, even how one goes to the bathroom out in the field. This was an honest, refreshing look at something most of us will never have to do.
