



Source: David Sanger, 'Bush's last roll of dice in Iraq',
The Age online, 02/12/06.

Tags: [Iraq](#), [child/parent](#), [war](#), [home](#)
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Shaun had a weird headache. It wasn't like one of his boozy or stress headaches, when a nerve on the right-side of his neck goes into spasm, and all he can think about is digging into the spot with an acupuncture needle. It was a softer pain, spread across his forehead and around his temples. He knew that it was related to the awful smell of roasting two-tooth, but he knew that it wasn't going to go away—not until he went back to his place, rolled a joint, and went to bed. He wondered how he might make a graceful exit, perhaps with a promise to come back tomorrow night.

Just then, his pig-of-a-brother Damien came up from behind and grabbed him by the shoulders, shaking him in that way that was meant to suggest brotherliness. The shake was, as always, really hard and it created this strange 'whir' sound that was no doubt an effect of the headache. Damien looked at Naomi Robson on the television. He loved Naomi's look; he once told Shaun that she reminded him of a cgi character he once came across, and was sure she shaved. He glanced at his mother and, when he saw she wasn't looking, slipped his fingers beneath the elastic of his track suit pants.

Naomi was talking about a mix-up with Jake Kovco's body. Damien's fingers stopped feeling his pubes as Naomi showed us a picture of Kovco, smiling in his cammies. She explained that Kovco's corpse had been left in Kuwait, while the body of some Bosnian bloke had been sent to Melbourne instead. Damien had known Kovco for a few years—they had trained together at Singleton, where he immediately took to Kovco's gaming prowess. He just lived for his games. Damien remembered that he had introduced a lot of his mates to the thrill of *Warcraft* and *Halo*. The guy was the master of *Command & conquer: renegade*, and had been working out ways of attaching a camera to his gear to record his movements, which Damien thought was weird but probably cool. Soon after Kovco had been shot, Damien's mate Simmo told him that Kovco had been going out on patrol in Baghdad with his video camera hooked-up to his helmet. Simmo said that some of the footage had been uploaded somewhere, and that it was really cool.

As Naomi spoke, the screen showed images of a casket being taken from a plane on a tarmac. Naomi told them that Kovco's family was waiting at the airport, and that this was just the latest in a long line of stuff ups related to the Kovco story. The boys' mother became interested in Naomi and listened to her from behind the bench. It was odd. Everything their mother had to say about this war was so incredibly unsympathetic. The war made complete

sense to her: 'they are out of control and need to be pulled into line'. She actually said that once. But somehow at this point she found sympathy. 'His poor mother and wife', she said, and true enough.

Just as Naomi's attention turned elsewhere, Shaun looked at his brother and was caught by his odd pose. He stood there, with this palm pressed against his stomach and his head weirdly cranked, so that his head and body were parallel and joined by a long, diagonally stretch neck. He seemed kind of discombobulated, and Shaun was surprised by how profound this seemed. For Shaun, there was no way of telling what his brother was thinking at this moment. He knew that there must have been guilt in there, as well as the more expected affects like grief.

But the recognition in Shaun of the 'profundity' of Damien's response was actually a registration of both how little he, Shaun, cared for Kovco or his story, and how cruel this seemed. He wasn't sure exactly how Kovco had died, although he knew he hadn't been killed by enemy fire. For five days now he had heard speculation that Kovco killed himself after an argument with his wife over the telephone, or else accidentally shot himself while playing a form of Russian roulette that may or may not be popular among bored soldiers. Shaun just couldn't bring himself to care about any of this; it seemed so banal.

But Damien stood there (now well-and-truly seeing passed Naomi), thinking about playing *Renegade* with a dead man, and wondering how he might be able to see some of that footage Kovco had taken on patrol in Baghdad. Shaun would have liked to see that footage as well. He wondered how banal it might be, given that nothing ever seemed to happen over there for the Australian troops. He imagined that there might be images of soldiers in ACPs moving down heavily barricaded streets, or triumphantly passing beneath the Swords of Q_disiyyah. He also imagined images of soldiers moving over a flat desert landscape. But Shaun was more interested in the possibility of footage of more pedestrian activity—the stuff that he couldn't imagine so easily. And he wondered what kind of narration Kovco might have provided with these images, if at all. Did he speak with that nasally Gippsland drawl that Shaun imagined?

Shaun stood up to go take a piss. His head throbbed now, as the stink of the roasting meat took over the room. His mother was still banging on about wives and mothers.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Shaune Lakin.