

from amistad to the brave new world

Imposing and inspiring, Benjamin Netanyahu leaves this young writer with many more questions about the future.

... Abandon every hope, ye who enter here.

These words — their aspect is obscure — I read as I drive past the gateway at the Renaissance Esmeralda. I am wholly unprepared for a night of tawdry political streamlining, with only the fair warning of an arcane inscription (read: an ABC News bio), the memory of peace negotiations past and a guide (my creative writing teacher, Ms. Jordan) to aid me.

The wan, sullen crowd yields as we step inside the property. This evening I am uncharacteristically presentable (I am even wearing a tie!), the assumed gentleman who can suppress urges to gawk and scornfully harass. I intend to stay long enough to hear former Israeli Prime Minister, MIT graduate, author, Likud party leader, retired soldier of the Israeli Defense Forces and generally satisfactory husband Benjamin Netanyahu lecture on the addictive issue of terrorism in the Middle East.

I am uneasy here. As my party approaches the desk, a clerk detains us. I look to my guide for reassurance. I receive it, as well as a pass that depicts me as “Student Media” and an American Flag lapel pin that is, ironically, made in China.

We are now free to enter the room reserved for young politicians and subordinate journalists of the high school variety. Many appear affiliated with the

local Young Republicans. I soon lose interest, as does my guide. Then the esteemed lecturer and his cadre of bodyguards make a dramatic entrance.

Benjamin Netanyahu is a monolith of a man, a powerful presence, fiercely charismatic and personable. For those on the Youth Ambassadors ticket, Netanyahu has mostly chitchat and then, like quicksilver, he flashes off to an official press conference.

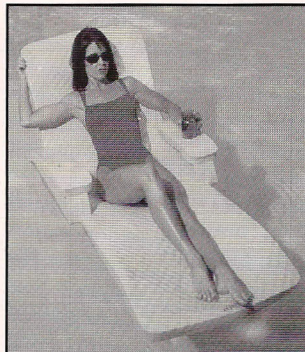
Several minutes and an elevator ride later, I am at the press conference. Netanyahu merely grazes the issues that will dominate his impending speech in the grand ballroom: the role of rogue nations in fostering terror networks, the need for the United States and allied nations to crush the enemy and Yasser Arafat’s duplicitous nature, among other topics. This portion of the evening would have been a waste (like I said, he would cover these topics later in greater detail) if not for one blunt statement he verbally chiseled into the marble slab of my mind: “Treaties in the Middle East don’t mean a thing. Israel has illusions about this. Still, it must honor them, unlike other nations in the region.”

A pro-Bush sentiment, and then the man leaves to schmooze with the board of directors, donors, patrons, sponsors and special friends ere the important hour when he will enlighten the well-paying, if huddled, masses. *continued on page 103*

BY ROBERT SCHOFIELD

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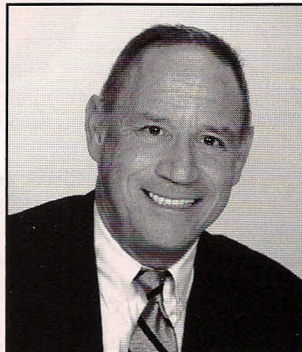


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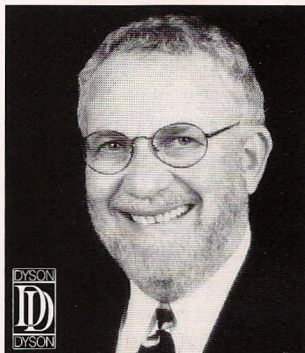
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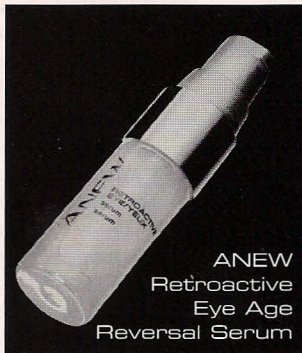
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We descend one flight of stairs, find our reserved seats and listen to the banal smooth jazz that drones over the loud-speakers. Finally, after proper introduction, Netanyahu casually appears on stage, instantly enthralling the audience with a humorous anecdote involving Henry Kissinger. On a trip to Israel, Kissinger visited a biblical zoo (a zoo holding "biblical" animals), or so this suspiciously allegorical tale would have us believe. The following day, the local media reported that after his visit a lamb was seen in the same cage with a lion. Fancying him a miracle worker, reporters asked how such a tremendous feat had been achieved. "It's simple," Kissinger replied. "You put a new lamb in the cage every day."

A simple message: "The world is roaming with lions, wolves and beasts of prey and we must not be the lamb," he tells us. "Until we reach the messianic age, we must defend ourselves, sharpen our teeth.

"This war is a war of ideals," he continues in a fervor. "We must hold steadfast and not cease until we have elimi-

nated the enemy. Fanaticism and terrorism must not be allowed to gain power! This nation is the standard of democratic ideals, and if we fall, the rest of the Western World falls. Terrorists, knowing this, have put America in their sights. September 11th was a wake-up call from Hell."

But what of our future? I wonder as he describes powerful enemies who could eliminate any chance of happiness and well-being for U.S. citizens.

"The victories over terrorism, the handmaiden of totalitarianism, must be coupled with moral clarity and a rigid thoroughness, either decimating regimes or dismantling them."

Wise advice.

"All will be over in a few years, opening a new chapter for America. Though we are faced with a tremendously powerful threat, we are leaders of the world and have a responsibility to defeat it."

My confidence in future well-being is returning. He closes the speech with a mantra of affirmation: "Keep it up! We're going to win!"

After the event, my guide and I find that hidden road to make our way back to the bright world with no care for any

rest. From the parking lot we emerge to see the stars.

Although it is unfashionable to question nationalistic views in this era of militant patriotism, I wonder if it is possible to obliterate such a fierce and fanatical belief system. Has the opposition, deemed inherently villainous, not been caricatured and oversimplified by the nation's hubris?

Are we entering a glorious new epoch, or succumbing to the unrelenting flanking of the enemy, ever weakening, finally being felled to no one's surprise but our own?

Beyond the brilliant semantics of Netanyahu's rhetoric, I am met only with the determined and capricious gaze of a foe that is beyond our feeble comprehension: the spindle that weaves our now uncertain fate.

Robert Schofield, a 2002 graduate of Amistad High School in Indio, earned a first-place scholarship from the Desert Literary Society award. He also runs Starvation Records, an independent record label, sings for the local band Martyr's Brigade and will attend College of the Desert this fall.