

**THE BLOG**

Try This SOTU Thought Experiment

By Marty Kaplan

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Imagine that everything Bush said in his SOTU is completely true.

That's right: Go on an irony fast. Forget fact-checking. Don't discount his speech as spin. Don't see it through the prism of political motives and framing devices. Instead, take it all on face value. The false dichotomies aren't false; the straw men aren't straw; the "some say" and "others say" bogeymen really are lurking under our nation's bed. Imagine that the tribute to Coretta King isn't cynical opportunism; forget that Harriet Meier might have been the one in the black SCOTUS robe; really believe that the slogans actually mean something, that the anecdotes and cameos aren't manipulative, that Saudi Arabia is making great strides on the road to freedom, that it's genuinely "responsible," as the President said, to make his tax cuts permanent.

Ok, so you've put your head in the position of a true believer. The President's not telling you a bedtime story. He's actually telling you the truth. This is not a pseudo-event; it is Real. This is as historic and as momentous as it gets. This is a night that transcends partisanship, unites us as citizens, and engages us in the great conversation of American democracy.

Now if you can really manage to do that, who are you?

A resident of Pluto?

A flatworm?

A writer for the Wall Street Journal's editorial page?

To truly believe in tonight's Tinkerbell, it's not enough to be one of those solons on the House floor clapping wildly. Politicians are all card-carrying members of the Sorcerer's Guild. They know far too much about blue smoke and mirrors to take W's words at face value.

Nor is it enough to be some pundit high on Mehlman's talking points and the red light of a tv camera. Those gasbags are powerful entertainers, but they know better than to actually believe the crap they spout.

Nor is it even enough to be Cheney or Rove. They're way too canny to fall for their own palaver. Even Barbara Bush is too tough a cookie to think that W really is doing a heck of a job.

No, to take the SOTU as gospel, you've probably got to have the mindset of someone who still thinks that Saddam planned 9/11. Or that Iraq won't descend into civil war the moment we leave, whether it's in six months or six years. Or that spaghetti grows on trees.

I'd add, or you'd have to be a nine-year-old, but none of the ones I know is capable of that kind of naivete. Once you've seen The Simpsons, it's pretty much impossible to recapture the Teletubby frame of mind that's Bush's ideal audience.

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