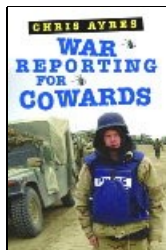


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**Book Review**  
**War Reporting for Cowards**  
by [Chris Ayres](#)

Reviewer: [Geoff Wisner](#), Staff Reviewer  
Posted: December 16, 2005

*War Reporting for Cowards* is an object lesson in the importance of just saying no.

Chris Ayres, a reporter for the *London Times*, went into financial journalism because it allowed him to eat excellent expense-account lunches and to avoid violent crime, fire, and other unpleasant aspects of life. Fate, however, had something else in mind. Assigned to New York, Ayres found himself in lower Manhattan on 9/11 close enough to Ground Zero to have to run for his life when the first of the towers came down. Not long afterward, he was working in the Rockefeller Center when anthrax was found in a nearby cubicle. He fled with his reluctant girlfriend to California, where he could report on Hollywood. What could be safer?

Then came an early-morning phone call from London. Would he like to report on the war in Iraq, which was expected any day? Ayres was afraid of war, of course, but more afraid of damaging his career in journalism. He failed to say no, and before long he was embedded with a Marine unit on the front lines of the invasion.

*War Reporting for Cowards* reads like one of those sprightly first-person books that the British seem to turn out so easily. But unlike the classic British books of travel and adventure, usually marked by the author's *savoir-faire* in the face of adversity, Ayres is disarmingly frank about his stark terror and his impressive incompetence as a fledgling war reporter. Not a fan of roughing it, Ayres has never even been on a camping trip before his trip to Iraq. At an LA sporting goods store he buys more equipment than he can carry, including a bright yellow tent that would have made an excellent target if he had ever actually used it in the field.

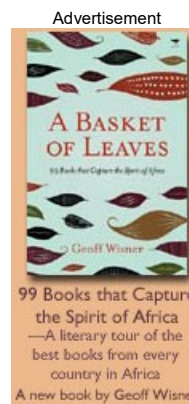
Ayres' bright-blue Kevlar flak jacket also makes an excellent target, as the Marines point out to him when he gets to the field. The jacket is marked PRESS in big letters, and the Marines amuse themselves by coming up to Ayres and pushing him in the chest (it says PRESS, right?).

The Kevlar vest does almost get him killed, but not in a way that has anything to do with the enemy. When Ayres' Humvee swerves to avoid a landmine, the door swings open and Ayres falls halfway out, nearly tumbling under the wheels before he can haul himself and his heavy vest back inside. It is only the first of his brushes with death.

*War Reporting for Cowards* is entertaining, but it also does an excellent job of conveying what the experience of war is like for someone who is dropped with little or no preparation into the noise and filth and fear and chaos of battle. Though it sheds little light on the politics of the Iraq war, it puts you there with great immediacy.

**About the Reviewer**

[Geoff Wisner](#) is a freelance writer and staff member of Indigocafe.com. He is the author of [A Basket of Leaves: 99 Books That Capture the Spirit of Africa](#). Visit his website at [www.geoffwisner.com](http://www.geoffwisner.com).



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