

FROM THE EDITOR



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Kill Thy Host: The Murderous Craft of the Big News Infiltrators

We can all be sure that heavy-desk journalism and traditional publishing finds itself in a flamingly transformational vertigo, a classically moribund and clawing deadfall.

Daily newspapers with million-plus circulations, the big regional wood chippers, the mom-and-pops, the managerially inept uptown bastions of the magazine elite—all of it that requires old-fashioned paper processing, ink, delivery trucks and professional staffing—have now been run-through by the economy, the increasing maturation of wireless and cablecast devices and the idea that more waves of un-invented digitalization is in the pipe.



Although not the exact image from Huang's piece, you get the idea... Cunnighame, Kermit, TR, Heller, and Heatley at Buffalo Camp during their 1909-1910 safari. Be sure to read Jim Heffelfinger's scientific-based response about genetics and trophy hunting on page 56 of this issue.

No one can be sure how long some of it can drag itself along, or what well-fertilized entities will grow from its greasy death forms, but, figuratively, the print-media industry has been near centered with a broad, barbed, poisoned spear. The publishing DNA of The Establishment is damaged, none of which is news to the print folks.

So do some ultra-select magazines like *Fair Chase* have an immunity gene? Probably, I think. *Fair Chase*, for example, is beautiful and strives for accuracy; it's important broadly and within its hyper-niche, and it's solidly funded through membership

and advertisers who understand its value. But could the paper manifest you're reading right now be worth \$300 in 2050 to bidders of relics at world-wide digital auctions? Might the Club have long since begun to disseminate its opinion, news and entertainment as a digital exclusive by then? In a word: absolutely.

The January 12, 2009, issue of *Newsweek*, a withered hardcopy vestige of the super-power journalism-slash-magazine publishing era, will be worth less than its current cover price to collectors in 41 years. I opine that as a lightweight, yellowing fold of paper it might bring the modern equivalent of 25 cents as a future resell. Part of the reason why some of these things don't maintain worth or appreciate in value is that they are of little significance to begin with.

Credibility, you see, is a very, very fragile treasure of the news media. It would seem extra difficult for any news-based publication to maintain its healthy existence in troubled waters when its news is either misrepresented, in factual or, God forbid, inaccurate and biased. And what occasionally happens to expose the possibility of totally shoddy, slanted journalism, the rotting of the core of a book maybe like *Newsweek*, is that itinerant readers like me occasionally stumble into subjects we're familiar with, as was the case recently with Lily Huang's travesty in *Newsweek*.

The Huang piece starts well enough with an antique image of a young, bespectacled, dashing, Theodore Roosevelt, one of the elite patriarchs of wise-use conservation, in an African foreground, sitting his haunches just beyond the penumbra of the sweetest savanna-land expedition tent ever sewn. The caption reads: Theodore Roosevelt and another hunter hold the heads of kudu they killed on an African safari. So, there we are 10 words into the written part of the treatment and already two problems: Zero thought [read research] is given there or anywhere else in the text to the scientific, cultural and political importance of the safari. Additionally, at least 60

percent of the horn is eland.

Of course, there's more...

When hunting is severe enough to outstrip other threats to survival, the unsought, middling individuals make out better than the alpha animals, and the species changes, proclaimed Huang, who with that gush seemed to come across as pretty good God intoxicated with the idea that she and her sources have now cracked the very vaults of evolution.

You like apples?

Tusked elephants, like the old dominant males on Ram Mountain [bighorn sheep], were "genetically 'better' individuals," says Festa-Bianchet. "When you take them systematically out of the population for several years, you end up leaving essentially a bunch of losers doing the breeding."

"Losers" tend not to be very good breeders, meaning that this demographic shift ultimately threatens the viability of a species. Researchers also worry that the surviving animals are left with a narrower gene pool. In highly controlled environments, a species with frighteningly little genetic diversity can persist—think of the extremes of domesticated animals like thoroughbred horses or commercial chickens—but in real ecosystems changes are unpredictable. Artificially selecting animals in the wild—in effect, breeding them—is "a very risky game," says Columbia's Melnick. "It's highly likely to result in the end of a species."

How ya like them apples?

I personally know of many successful individual breeders—and a middling journalist or two—who one expert or another might tag as "losers." I'm obviously no geneticist either, but I must also vehemently cry bull on the notion that the still fairly mysterious jellies of life, the deoxyribonucleic acids, could ever possibly be lost from lineages due to the roulette wheel of "selective hunting," death by old age and/or localized cessations wrought by flood, fire, collision, entrapment or disease.

So, what might the single individual do about tainted, big-jack journalism? Well, today, we can whip up well-conceived, genteel comments from our word-processing devices and attach them electronically to the Internet versions of stories: the modern adaptation of the pleasingly personal, published letter-to-the-editor. And with that, bells toll for some level of natural extinction, for the birth of a better way. ■

