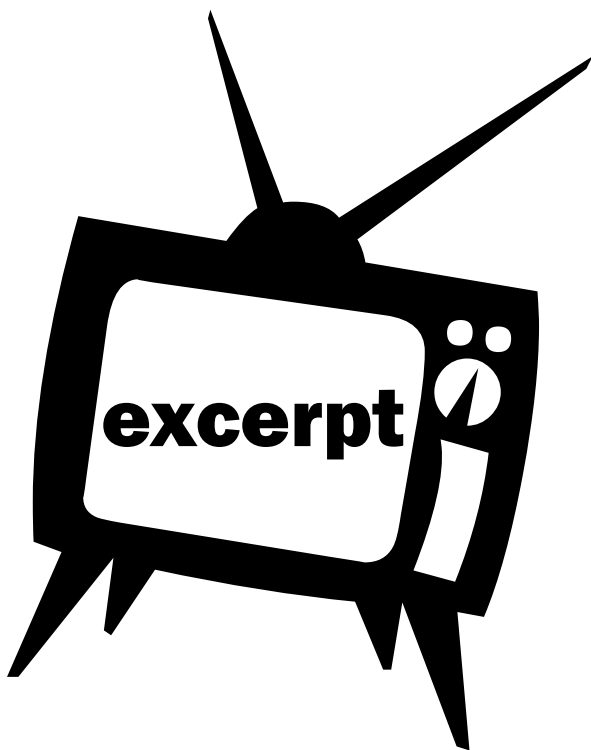


**DAVID A. BRENSILVER**

**EXEC  
TV**



ENC Press



**X**avier, from behind the bar, alerted Montana to a matter of tremendous import. “My friend,” Xavier said and handed the television remote to Montana, indicating, with the subtle follow of his eyes and the habitual twirling of the tip of his pirate-chic moustache, that Montana ought to have a look at the television set.

Serena bustled into the Tango del Sol, which rendered turning up the volume unnecessary.

“Oh my God, so, like, Thistle has Snell in a van? And, like, they’re on their way here? But, like, the highway is,

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like, blocked or whatever? And, like, all these people are, like, lying down on the highway? So, like, the van can't, like, get through, you know what I mean?"

Now Montana cranked up the volume on the television set to drown out the sound of Serena's voice. Serena just stood there, yapping inaudibly, talking with her hands.

One of the twenty-four-hour cable news networks was interviewing the Democratic gubernatorial challenger.

"We're here in the middle of the interstate with the Democratic gubernatorial challenger who lies prone in front of the Department of Corrections van that is transporting the Killer Castrator to his execution," reported one plastic-faced reporter, his sleeves rolled up just like the politician's. "Your opponent, the governor, is a staunch supporter of capital punishment here in Florida. Will repealing the death penalty be a big part of your platform during the campaign?"

Looking into that particular network's camera with a beaming smile and the suggestion of Botox treatments, the gubernatorial challenger gave the camera the requisite two-handed thumbs-up, lifting his head off the hot blacktop, which had a sticky hold on the back of what likely was a toupee. The politician's up-reaching arms revealed sweat marks around his armpits; the backs of his shirtsleeves black with tar. It was an image that would surely make it into a political science classroom somewhere, as an example of a perfect photo-op gone terribly, terribly wrong. The same classroom would also likely learn that the governor's staff should have taken advantage of the opportunity to promote his tough-on-crime attitude, arranging for him to drive the DOC van himself, waving to constituents on the way, ostensibly, to executing Snell with his own hands.

Montana channel-surfed. Now it was the demonstra-

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tors who resembled armies of ants, armies of two species warring against one another, agreeing violently to disagree, jumping up and down on the wrong band-wagons.

The twenty-four-hour media outlets all had news crews embedded in the midst of the fray, the reporters and camera crews wearing riot gear for protection. One attractive female reporter wore a helmet that was much too big for her head and kept falling over her eyes as she reported, while demonstrators on all sides of her shouted at one another. “. . . Things are very tense here folks, very tense indeed. The demonstrators are getting more and more unruly, and the heat cannot be helping. I'm going to try and talk to some of these demonstrators, to give our viewers at home an idea of what the mood here on the ground is. Sir, pardon me . . . I'm with the press, can I please get through, sir . . .”

One bearded neo-hippie in a tie-dyed T-shirt carried a placard that read SNUFF SNELL. Montana thought his nose could smell the patchouli through the television set and turned the volume up a notch to hear what the guy was shouting over the embedded reporter and in the direction of a burly redneck with a gray crew cut and beard, in a faded black T-shirt that advertised CLEMS GUNS, stretched by his sizeable potbelly to the point that it failed to cover his National Rifle Association belt buckle.

“Mr. Snell is no vigilante,” the man explained to the reporter, identifying himself for the record as Clem, a gunshop owner who sympathized with ultra-right-wing conservative politics. “Mr. Snell was simply rooting out the kind of moral terror that has all but stripped our country of its values. He was doing what we all wish we could. But putting Mr. Snell to death isn't going to bring those poor fags back to life,” Clem said in a gruff, intimidating voice.

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“Sir, you seem to disagree,” the reporter passed her microphone in front of the neo-hippie’s face.

“Mr. Snell is a terrorist!” the peacenik declared. “He doesn’t believe in the kind of freedom we have in this country that allows people of all persuasions and orientations to coexist, and he deserves to be tortured— he deserves to die a slow, miserable death.”

“Lots of strong opinions here . . .” The reporter adjusted her earpiece. “I can barely hear you back in the studio, so I’ll just keep reporting and hope we’re getting all this.” She ducked to avoid a would-be glancing blow thrown from behind at nobody in particular. “I’m going to try and fight my way through the crowd . . . There’s a situation developing just ahead of our position that looks like it could get out of control, the police are here in force but they’re vastly outnumbered . . . pardon me, pardon me, sir . . . Press coming through . . . Press!”

Another network had already gotten to the situation, and Montana found another embedded reporter, this one a rather athletic-looking man in his forties, with a moustache and a class ring. Montana figured, probably a network anchor sent in for his experience.

“Folks, we’re here just a few yards from the Department of Corrections vehicle that’s transporting Randall Snell. We’re in the middle of what can only be described as a war zone. The Florida Alliance of Gays—or FAG, as its acronym allows and as their members call themselves—has gotten completely out of control. As you can see, the FAGs are quite heated, and have, in some cases, come to blows with a group of Christian missionaries. Let me see if I can’t get some comments from the protestors . . . Sir, excuse me, sir! Sir?

“Sir, what precipitated . . . Oh my!” The reporter’s head was nearly taken off by a baseball bat that appeared to have been swung by a young missionary. “Oh my, well, for those watching at home . . . You might want to put the chil-

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dren to bed because this is getting downright ugly! Oh my, oh my . . . Folks, there is absolutely no order here, none whatsoever . . . I'm going to . . . Excuse me . . . Sir! I'm going to try and push my way through here . . . Looks like another fight is about to break out!"

The picture went fuzzy for a moment, and Montana lit a cigarette, taking a long drag between his lips while slapping the remote control against the palm of his hand, exhaling in time to see the image clear to reveal a fearsome argument by two on opposite sides of the abortion issue. As if they'd been planted there, Montana mused, each wore a slogan appropriate to their positions. One said NOT EVERY EJACULATION NEEDS A COLLEGE FUND, and the other, which was intended to promote celibacy, said NO SEX IS SAFE SEX, a slogan that could've been thought out better.

"I drink stem-cell martinis for lunch!" the pro-choice activist shouted, utilizing the news anchor's microphone to make his point heard beyond the din of the interstate. The reporter began a play-by-play.

"The woman to my left is shouting, 'Baby killer! Baby killer,' and, oh my! Right in front of me . . . I hope our cameras are catching this . . . a FAG has just knocked out a nun with a vicious blow to the head! My, oh my . . . Folks, things are getting downright ugly down here on the interstate."

Dragging hard on his umpteenth cigarette in as many minutes, Montana aimed the remote at the televised scene and stopped pressing the channel button when he saw a live shot of a handful of missionaries trying unsuccessfully to break Snell from his captivity.

"He would insist we rescue God's soldier!" one of the missionaries told yet another embedded reporter, glancing skyward to qualify just whom she meant by "He." "Randall Snell was delivered to do the good work of the Lord!" The reporter abruptly abandoned the missionaries

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in favor of the swiftly arriving Florida National Guard.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the guard is here for one reason," the reporter told his audience. "They are making sure this execution goes forward. One guardsman told me in no uncertain terms and in strict confidence that 'no demonstration's going to rain on the governor's execution parade.'"

The reporter turned into the middle of another melee that had ensued just behind him, at his heels.

"Ladies and gentlemen, what a terribly violent scene we're in the middle of here." He tried to keep his balance and only barely did. "I can only describe the scene here as horrific. Ladies and gentlemen, embedded with the guard were two students who, just moments ago, told me they were journalists from their college newspaper. But no sooner had the guard arrived on the scene than the students attacked one guardsman viciously, striking him from behind with their cameras and beating him mercilessly to the ground, shouting, 'Murderer! How does it feel? How does it feel?' If we can get the camera in here, excuse us . . . Please, excuse us . . . Ladies and gentlemen, you can see the students kicking the guardsman repeatedly . . . They've just put a hood on his head and . . . Is that? Yes, it is . . . They've just put a dog leash around his neck and are now stripping him naked and are binding his hands and feet! They are still shouting at the downed guardsman, 'How does it feel? How does it feel?' Ladies and gentlemen watching at home, please make sure your children's eyes are averted . . . The guardsman does not appear to be moving—"

"Time to let the dogs out?" Montana wondered aloud, amused. There were no dogs.

He switched channels again, this time arriving at a helicopter shot of the scene on the ground.

An unseen helicopter reporter described the scene: "The black smoke you see is coming from the National

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Guard Humvees that transported the guardsmen. From what I'm being told by our correspondent on the ground, the vehicles were set on fire just seconds after they arrived. All we know at this point is that the letters ELF were spray-painted on the side of each, perhaps an indication of who would do such a thing. Nobody saw who set the Humvees on fire, but each vehicle is simply engulfed in flames . . . Oh, thank God . . . we've just been told no guardsmen were trapped in any of the burning vehicles—”

Another network was broadcasting from its helicopter as well. That news team's reporter described what he was seeing below him: “Folks, if you look about thirty feet in front of the DOC van, you might be able to make out a large contingent from the Florida Democratic Party . . . They're carrying signs in support of the gubernatorial challenger, who is known for his strong anti-death penalty position, but they sure don't want that van stopped in its tracks! They want their candidate out of the way— They're calling loud and clear for the death penalty. Can we get any closer?” the reporter could be heard asking the pilot. “Well, I doubt if our viewers at home can hear over the chopper blades . . . The Democratic supporters are chanting, ‘What do we want? Snell dead. When do we want it? Now.’ And to our left, we can see strong GOP representation, the incumbent governor's supporters. If we can just get a shot of those signs . . . They're carrying poster-board signs with pictures of Randall Snell dressed as Jesus Christ, and they are sending a clear signal that they are completely unified in strong opposition to the death penalty. The governor's supporters are now calling in response to the liberal contingent, ‘Save the saint, kill the sinners . . .’”

Montana clicked back to the previous helicopter broadcast and its unseen reporter.

“ . . . It's an ugly scene right below us . . . A group of blacks and Hispanics are being registered to vote, but,

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as more arrive, they are being denied access to the scene by the local police . . . Now, we've just been told that the chief of police has issued a statement that says this is neither the time nor the place to register people to vote, and that anybody caught attempting to register voters during this demonstration will be prosecuted. It is a veritable sea of politics on the interstate. It is complete and utter chaos . . . And now I'm being told . . . Over there, over there!" The unseen reporter once again dictated flight patterns to his pilot. "A Marine helicopter has just arrived and is hovering directly over the van . . . It appears that . . . Yes . . . Folks, a team of Marines has just swept down and rescued Randall Snell, along with his lawyer and a pair of corrections officers, and . . . Yes, I'm told they are being airlifted out of harm's way and transported safely to Payback Beach so that Snell can be executed . . . I tell you folks, just when you think you've seen it all . . . Anything can happen in Florida."