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# HARPER'S

M A G A Z I N E

## THEATER OF WAR.

By Lewis Lapham.

New Press, \$22.95.

Lewis Lapham honors the spirit of three very different patriots in "Theater of War": the greatest Roman orator, the last Judean prophet and the most pungently sarcastic of American newspapermen. Cicero would have respected Lapham's attack on the arrogance of power, Jeremiah would have understood his boldness, and H. L. Mencken would have appreciated the barbs that give these sentences their sting. With characteristic verve, Lapham, the editor of Harper's Magazine, dissects the contretemps that closed the last millennium, the ballot recounts that dismayed both presidential candidates and the gifts-and-pardons gala of the Clinton family's last night in the White House. However, what signally distinguish these essays are the connections that Lapham unflinchingly draws between American presumption and self-satisfaction (which he flatly calls hubris) and the terrorist attacks of September 2001. He bitterly skewers the claim that the calamity was "unbelievable." "From whom do we suppose the terrorists learned to appreciate the value of high explosives as a vivid form of speech if not from our own experiments with the genre in Iraq, Serbia and Vietnam?" Rarely are hard-won insights so bluntly and so perceptively put.

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