

# NEW YORK MAGAZINE

• By [David Edelstein](#)

... it's possible that the contents of Robert Greenwald's *Iraq for Sale: The War Profiteers* would lead off every TV news show in the country: In 75 harrowing minutes, Greenwald spells out why the war has been, for this administration and its friends, a windfall no matter which side claims victory and how many Americans and Iraqi civilians die. Eighteen and a half billion to Halliburton? Bring it on! But while they leave you shaking with rage, Greenwald's talking-heads docs don't have much in the way of cinematic juice. At the other, non-agitprop extreme is James Longley's *Iraq in Fragments*—poetic, allusive, nonprescriptive, and nearly as incendiary.

*Iraq in Fragments* is a triptych of despair, rage, and terror. Part One tracks an 11-year-old Baghdad boy, Mohammed, whose father was probably murdered by the forces of Saddam Hussein. You think he'd be delighted with the occupation, but he's in hell. The city is trashed—Longley gives us jumpy blurs of helicopters, smoke from nearby explosions, and the threatening rattle of military convoys. Mohammed needs to make money, but to get out of this place he also needs an education—and he hasn't managed to graduate from first grade in four years. Part Two is a panorama of the Moqtada al-Sadr movement: Shiites who'd like to purge the blaspheming occupiers and return the country to Islamic law. Men flagellating themselves with chains, blood spattering their faces. Alcohol sellers in the marketplace rounded up and beaten while crying that this wasn't supposed to happen anymore. Part Three is set in the quiet—quietly devastated—Kurdish north, where they're happy Saddam was deep-sixed but worried the Sunnis and Shiites blame them for opening the door to the Americans. They sadly survey a country in pieces.

Longley's material seems to have found its own shape—or, in some cases, shapelessness. Part One feels unfocused, although Mohammed's face stays with you: He's viciously abused by his bitter old boss for not being able to spell the name of

a father he barely remembers—a textbook case of insult added to injury. Part Two does go on. But in the end, the movie is more than the sum of its fragments. The montages are intense, the images ravishing. The movie is tactile. When you finally feel this place, you understand just how little you understand.