



Imperial Life in The Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green Zone

By Rajiv Chandrasekaran

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A National Book Award Finalist and New York Times Bestseller

The Green Zone, Baghdad, Iraq, 2003: in this walled-off compound of swimming pools and luxurious amenities, Paul Bremer and his Coalition Provisional Authority set out to fashion a new, democratic Iraq. Staffed by idealistic aides chosen primarily for their views on issues such as abortion and capital punishment, the CPA spent the crucial first year of occupation pursuing goals that had little to do with the immediate needs of a postwar nation: flat taxes instead of electricity and deregulated health care instead of emergency medical supplies.

In this acclaimed firsthand account, the former Baghdad bureau chief of *The Washington Post* gives us an intimate portrait of life inside this Oz-like bubble, which continued unaffected by the growing mayhem outside. This is a quietly devastating tale of imperial folly, and the definitive history of those early days when things went irrevocably wrong in Iraq.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

As the Baghdad bureau chief for the *Washington Post*, Chandrasekaran has probably spent more time in U.S.-occupied Iraq than any other American journalist, and his intimate perspective permeates this history of the Coalition Provisional Authority headquartered in the Green Zone around Saddam Hussein's former palace. He presents the tenure of presidential viceroy L. Paul Bremer between May 2003 and June 2004 as an all-too-avoidable disaster, in which an occupational administration selected primarily for its loyalty to the Bush administration routinely ignored the reality of local conditions until, as one ex-staffer puts it, "everything blew up in our faces." Chandrasekaran unstintingly depicts the stubborn cluelessness of many Americans in the Green Zone—like the army general who says children terrified by nighttime helicopters should appreciate "the sound of freedom." But he sympathetically portrays others trying their best to cut through the red tape and institute genuine reforms. He also has a sharp eye for details, from casual sex in abandoned offices to stray cats adopted by staffers, which enable both advocates and critics of the occupation to understand the emotional toll of its circuslike atmosphere. Thanks to these personal touches, the account of the CPA's failures never feels heavy-handed. (Sept. 22)

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From [The New Yorker](#)

This revealing account of the postwar administration of Iraq, by a former Baghdad bureau chief for the *Washington Post*, focusses on life in the Green Zone, the American enclave in central Baghdad. There the Halliburton-run (and Muslim-staffed) cafeteria served pork at every meal—a cultural misstep typical of the Coalition Provisional Authority, which had sidelined old Arab hands in favor of Bush loyalists. Not only did many of them have no previous exposure to the Middle East; more than half had never before applied for a passport. While Baghdad burned, American officials revamped the Iraqi tax code and mounted an anti-smoking campaign. Chandrasekaran's portrait of blinkered idealism is evenhanded, chronicling the disillusionment of conservatives who were sent to a war zone without the resources to achieve lasting change.

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Rajiv Chandrasekaran, assistant managing editor of the *Washington Post* and its former Baghdad bureau chief, knows the landscape in Iraq as well as anyone, having spent two years in-country as a reporter. His careful, evenhanded reportage amplifies the seriousness of the problems that America still faces in Iraq. As Adam Dunn points out, "the Iraqis don't fare much better than their occupiers" under Chandrasekaran's judicious gaze. The book covers ground similar to that of Larry Diamond's *Squandered Victory* (2005) and Anthony Shadid's *Night Draws Near* (2005), though the author's proximity to the events he reports in this "withering assessment" (Andrew Metz) separates *Emerald City* from the spate of books being published on the war in Iraq.

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