



COMEDY

by Simon Hardeman

No knowledge required

And so to Sky television's plush new Westminster studios on Millbank. The Americans had been trying to break the will of Iraqi prisoners by playing them incessant heavy metal music and theme tunes from *Barney the Purple Dinosaur* and *Sesame Street*; and I had been asked to comment on this on the Richard Littlejohn show. Why me? Well, I'm on the bottom of some list of ribald rent-a-gobs for use when all the usual pundits and mouthy media whores are unavailable. I have in the past opined on live TV on, among other things, date rape, Madonna, and the US presidential inauguration, so coming up with a few incisive giggles on the techniques of the US Psychological Operations unit falls well within my remit.

But I often feel slightly fazed by the assorted experts assembled by this type of show. In the green room I was chatting to a very eminent and glamorous black-velvet-clad female lawyer who asked me, not unreasonably, what I knew about the subject. Suddenly I wasn't a media whore - I was Manuel from *Fawlty Towers*. "I h-know h-no-thing," I think I heard myself say. "You're a music journalist, then," she perceptively shot back.

I was eventually live on camera with a nice chap who did actually know something. No, not Richard Littlejohn - I assume he knows quite a lot but has to give the impression of knowing less than his guests - but a professor of acoustics, or

waveforms, or stress, or something like that. He made soothing, intelligible sounds, but then I suppose it's his job to know how to do that.

The form for a rent-a-gob like me is generally this. The expert makes an interesting and perceptive remark based on either years of research or substantial experience. Then I say something along the lines of "tosh!" "rubbish!" or "yeah, right!" and attempt to justify this outburst with something approaching comedy. This has in the past led to me telling Chris Eubank he couldn't box, a Labour MP and close colleague of the Prime Minister that he knew nothing about politics and a chart-topping group that they couldn't sing (in this last one I claim some justification).

So I rubbished the professor's view that days of heavy metal would destroy the will of the unfortunate Iraqis. I reasoned that as hundreds of thousands of western music fans pay to subject themselves to days of non-stop heavy metal and no sleep in appalling conditions which would be condemned by human rights groups if they weren't sold as "Knobworth's Satanic Behemoths of Deathmetal", then it followed that 24-hour Metallica would have little effect on the Iraqis. They'd probably come out playing air guitar and looking for a computer to sign up to Napster and the like.

Quite a good gag, I thought, and I prepared to deliver more of my bons mots to leaven the Littlejohn prog. But - what's this? - Richard returning to the expert for more facts rather than my comedic froth? But I've got gags! Like the one about depleted uranium and heavy metal. And the one about the website for jihad against Barney the Purple Dinosaur (honestly, check out www.jihad.net). But there was precious little time left as the show ticked to a close. And, anyway, what do I know? I gave up. An hour of watching and then participating in the Richard Littlejohn show and my will was broken. Perhaps the Americans are on to something.