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TO: TIME PRESS

FROM: LONDON BY: CHRIS HANSON(CBA)

SLUG: TEST TUBE TEMPEST EOH:

THE EDITORS COMMENT

THE TEST TUBE BABY STORY, AS COVERED BY BRITAIN'S SENSATIONAL TABLOID DAILES, IS LIKE A REMAKE OF "THE FRONT PAGE", LAMENTS THE UPRIGHT SUNDAY TIMES. QUITE SO. IF ONE WERE TO TREBLE-CLONE "FRONT PAGE" EDITOR WALTER BURNS, AND THROW IN A COCKNEY ACCENT, YOU WOULD GET THE CHARMINGLY ROUGHISH, HARD-BOILED, UP-FROM-POVERTY EDITORS OF THE LONDON DAILY EXPRESS, MAIL, AND SUN. (TREBLE-CLONE THE NATIONAL ENQUIRER, THROW IN A LITTLE "REAL" NEWS AND AN OCCASIONAL NAKED LASS, AND YOU GET A ROUGH IDEA OF WHAT THESE THREE PAPERS ARE LIKE.)

SUN EDITOR LARRY LAMB AND DAILY EXPRESS CHIEF DEREK JAMESON CONFIRM THAT THEY WERE VERY MUCH IN THE BIDDING FOR THE TEST TUBE STORY, BUT WERE OUTGUNNED BY THE DAILY MAIL, AND THAT THE MAIL'S HIGHEST OFFER WAS POUNDS THREE HUNDRED AND FIFTEEN THOUSAND. (THE MAIL IS STILL REFUSING TO COMMENT ON THE AMOUNT IT FINALLY PAID OR ON WHO IS BEING PAID). "100,000 WAS AS HIGH AS THE EXPRESS WOULD GO," SAYS JAMESON. "WE DIDN'T THINK WE COULD PROECT THE PROPERTY--HIDE THE STORY FROM THE WORLD LONG ENOUGH."

THE OUTBID PAPERS GOAL BECAME TO TORPEDOE THE MAIL EXCLUSIVE. JAMESON CONFIRMS THAT HIS INGENIOUS EXPRESS REPORTERS FOUND THE

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TEST TUBE COUPLE BY TRACING A LISCENCE PLATE. "WE CHECKED THE PLATES OF THE CAR OF THIS BLOKE WHO LOOKED LIKE A NERVOUS FATHER. THE PLATES WERE FROM BRISTOL -- 2 AND 1/2 HOURS AWAY BY ROAD, AND WE HAD HEARD THE COUPLE LIVED THAT DISTANCE AWAY. THEN WE CHECKED WITH THE MOTOR LISCENCING BUREAU, AND, FROM THE PLATE NUMBER, THEY WERE ABLE TO GIVE US THE NAME AND ADDRESS OF MR BROWN."

A LISCENCING BUREAU SPOKESMAN INSISTS THAT THE EXPRESS COULD ONLY HAVE LEARNED THE NAME AND ADDRESS FROM GOVERNMENT FILES BY "SUBTREFUGE, EVEN BRIBERY." BUT AN HONEST FAVOR FROM A COP OR OFFICIAL MAY HAVE BEEN SUFFICIENT.

CHORTLES JAMESON: "THERE WERE MURDOCK, THE MAIL, THE NATIONAL ENQUIRER PUTTING IN BIDS OF THREE HUNDRED THOUSAND POUNDS AND THERE WE WERE OUT GETTING THE STORY BY OLD-STYLE JOURNALISM."

IN SAYING THIS, JAMESON, WHOSE EXPRESS PAID MORMON SEX-IN-CHAINS QUEEN JOYCE MCKINNEY POUNDS TEN THOUSAND FOR AN EXCLUSIVE, IS NOT DISPARAGING "CHECKBOOK JOURNALISM," BUT MERELY BRAGGING ABOUT HIS PAPER'S VIRTUOSITY. JAMESON AND THE OTHER TABLOID EDITORS ARE IMPATIENT WITH SELF-RIGHTEOUS PAPERS LIKE THE GUARDIAN, WHICH LOOK DOWN ON BIG PAYMENTS FOR STORIES. "ALL JOURNALISM IS CHECKBOOK JOURNALISM," SAYS SUN EDITOR LARRY LAMB.

THOSE WHO DENY THIS TALK RUBBISH. I OFFER A GUARDIAN REPORTER MORE MONEY TO WORK FOR ME AND THAT'S CHECKBOOK JOURNALISM -- THE PHRASE IS JUST MEDIA JARGON."

PETER PRESTON, ULTRA-REFINED EDITOR OF THE GUARDIAN, IS NOT IMPRESSED BY THE ARGUMENTS OF ROUGH-HEVN LARRY LAMB: "THIS IS NOT A STORY WHICH SHOULD HAVE BEEN SOLD. THE RESEARCH, THE DOCTORS, THE HOSPITAL, THE PATIENT'S OPERATION -- ALL WERE FUNDED BY THE TAXPAYER THROUGH THE HEALTH SERVICE. IT STICKS IN MY GULLET THAT

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PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS ARE NOW MAKING HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OUT OF THE DEAL. IT'S AS IF THE PRIME MINISTER SAID, FOR POUNDS THREE HUNDRED FIFTY QUID I'LL GIVE YOU A PRIVATE BRIEFING. THIS TEST TUBE AFFAIR, COMING AFTER THE JOYCE MCKINNEY EXCLUSIVE AND SOME OTHER DUBIOUS EPISODES, MAKES BRITISH JOURNALISM SMELL HIGH IN MY NOSTRILS."

PRESTON ALSO FEARS THAT CHECKBOOK JOURNALISM WILL DESTROY THE FREE PRESS IN BRITAIN. "WE ARE WITNESSING SOMETHING VERY DANGEROUS, SUBSTANTIONAL FIGURES BEING PAID FOR EXCLUSIVE RIGHTS ON AN IMPORTANT STORY. EITHER YOU HAVE A FREE PRESS AND BASIC NEWS IS AVAILABLE TO ALL OR YOU HAVE A SITUATION WHERE THE BIG BATTALIONS, FINANCED BY -- SAY -- OIL INTERESTS, CAN BUY UP CHUNKS OF THE NEWS AND CONTROL ITS PRESENTATION.

PRESTON BELIEVES THAT PAPERS SHOULD DISCLOSE IN PRINT HOW MUCH THEY PAY FOR ANY STORY. "READERS SHOULD KNOW ON WHAT TERMS PEOPLE ARE TALKING TO THE PRESS."

NEEDLESS TO SAY, THE TABLOID EDITORS DON'T BUY PRESTON'S LINE OF ARGUMENT. LAMB AND JAMESON CRITICIZE THE DAILY MAIL NOT RPT NOT FOR THREATENING THE FREE PRESS, BUT RATHER FOR NAIVELY BELIEVING THAT THE STORY COULD BE KEPT EXCLUSIVE. "IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO KEEP IT EXCLUSIVE," SAYS JAMESON. "THIS STORY IS BIGGER THAN MAN CONQUERING THE MOON. WE COULD GET BABY FARMS, MASS REPRODUCED KIDS, 1984 SIX YEARS EARLY. THE ONLY PARALLEL IS IN ABOUT 94 FRANKENSTEIN FILMS. FOR THE MAIL TO INSIST THEY HAD THE EXCLUSIVE--THAT'S LIKE BUYING UP LOUIS PASTEUR AND THEN SAYING YOU CAN ONLY BUY ANTISEPTICS THROUGH THE DAILY MAIL SYNDICATION DEPARTMENT EXCLAM"

LAMB AND JAMESON AGREE THAT THE MAIL WAS FOOLISH TO TRY PRESERVING ITS EXCLUSIVE STORY THROUGH STRONG-ARM TACTICS, I.E. GUARDS IN

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THE HALLS, CONTROL OF THE HOSPITAL TELEPHONES. "IF THE SUN HAD HAD THE STORY," INSISTS LAMB, "WE WOULD HAVE CALLED REGULAR PRESS CONFERENCES AND SAID 'THIS IS A STORY FOR EVERYONE, EXCEPT THAT WE KEEP THE RIGHT OF FIRST PICTURES AND THE FIRST INTERVIEW'."

THE DAILY MAIL, REPORTEDLY EMBARRASSED BY HAVING ITS TEST TUBE EXCLUSIVE SMASHED, IS REFUSING TO SAY MUCH OF ANYTHING. (THE MANAGING EDITOR IS CONSISTENTLY 'IN CONFERENCE' OR 'OUT OF THE OFFICE.')

THE SYNDICATION DEPARTMENT CONFIRMS THAT THE WORLDWIDE RIGHTS HAVE BEEN SOLD TO ASSOCIATED NEWSPAPERS GROUP LIMITED, BUT REFUSES TO GIVE ANY MORE DETAILS. LAMB, WHO IS EMPLOYED BY THE MURDOCK CHAIN, CLAIMS TO KNOW THAT THE WORLDWIDE SYNDICATION WAS SOLD FOR POUNDS THREE HUNDRED THOUSAND.

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