

Dear Ed,

2/24/98

Starrs has done what seems like really impressive work and I did not follow what he said about Hoover's death closely. I'd believed he referred to the possibility of foul play. My belief, which is devoid of evidence, is that anyone who would have killed Hoover had greater cause earlier in his life and that people do die of heart attacks.

I knew nothing about the Brudge report and am glad to have what you sent. Terrible business!

I hope he gets burned and that can be a lesson to so many!

I also hope that something is done about the Starr of the right political extreme who was appointed by a panel of Republican judges who had fired an earlier and not unsuccessful Republican special prosecutor to give that dirty works to Starr who was an ideologue when he was in DJ.

The more our system gets corrupted the greater the Founding Fathers look!

Thanks and best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to be 'Ed', written in dark ink.

2/18/98

Dear Hal,

Enclosed is a U.S. Money order for "Frame-up".

James Storer, Professor of Forensic Science at George Washington U. has gotten access to medical records that "could prove Hoover was murdered."

This journal was the basis for "Kudlum is Best" "The Chancellor Manuscript". The issue of the paper has on its cover, "Who Killed J. Edgar Hoover?"

This is an old journal. Supposedly Felipe De Diego told a Harvard Chimoon reporter that there were break-ins at Hoover's residence - then retracted his story. Summers deals with it theorizing Edgar could have been killed

by thisophote.

Is this another wild theory, Hal?

I enclose these Web stories to illustrate the power the internet has.

In young people's most popular show, "The X-Files," "Conrad Mann" kills both King and J.F.K. A lot of kids believe J.F.K. and R.F.K. were killed by misstate Government forces because they were about to go public on captured aliens. The program Dark Skies in a four hour program presents this as fact.

The X and Millennium generations should turn off the T.V. and go to the library.

In "Alien Agenda" Jim Mares implies Killgallon and Monroe were murdered because J.F.K. told Monroe about captured aliens.

In the revised photographic Whitewash you said young people's minds were being wiped off. This continues.

Jim Mares is a total but seriously successful white.

Sincerely,  
ED

# NEW MEDIA'S DARK STAR

Like it or not, Net gossip Matt Drudge has become a major player in the news food chain

BY STEVEN LEVY

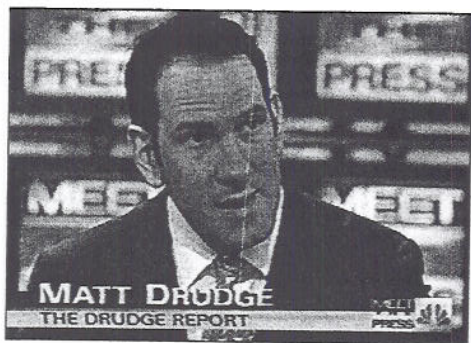
**M**ATT DRUDGE SHOULD have been the shining star of Internet journalism. He is living proof that the Net hysters are right: armed with little else than a Web site and a work ethic, an obscure outsider can steal click-throughs and mind share from Goliaths and even fulfill the American Dream, which is, of course, elevating one's moniker into a brand name. This he has done. The Drudge Report may be a garret compared to the virtual palaces of Big Media—it's a style-free zone that looks like he's banged his typewriter ribbon directly on the screen—but as his exclusives pile up, he is becoming the king of online scoops, the first real crossover from cyberspace to the mainstream. And, indeed, his Dickensian surname is as familiar to media junkies as Woodward and, um, Cokie.

But instead of being celebrated in a field where mavericks are revered, Drudge is viewed as the antichrist of HTML. Though he has been slapped with a \$30 million libel suit by a White House official, sympathetic voices are harder to find than prime-time phone connections to America Online. Even his mere appearance on a "Meet the Press" pundit panel was cited by media bigfeet as proof positive of an ethical apocalypse.

Is this a case of Old Media raging against a comet collision with New Media that will doom the former to the fate of dinosaurs? A left-wing reaction to a Starr-struck Clinton-hater? Neither. The harsh examination of Matt Drudge is a healthy process that indicates how readers will cope with a possible explosion of journalism in the 21st century.

It started with a great idea. Drudge, a nonentity who left his home in the D.C. suburbs for a small Hollywood apartment (closest thing to a media job: working in the CBS gift shop), knew the Net well enough to figure out how to get movers and shakers to read his work: he gave it prime position in a densely packed list of Web links to virtually all the major gossip, commentary and media columns available online. In true Web fashion, everything was free. His own dispatches, usually loaded with anti-Clinton scuttlebutt, began to draw readers. AOL circulated the column to its members and paid him a modest stipend. Drudge boasted of himself as a digital Walter Winchell, and was getting press as a plucky loner on the front lines of new media.

His defining moment came last summer, when he reported an



**Outta site:** History is made as a virtual journalist makes the panel on 'Meet the Press.' But does Drudge deserve the honor?

apparently false charge made by unnamed "top GOP operatives": journalist-turned-Clinton aide Sidney Blumenthal had covered up "a spousal-abuse past." Drudge published without talking to Blumenthal. It turned out that the "court records" mentioned in the story were nonexistent. Drudge retracted the item, but Blumenthal sued anyway.

The blunder would have hurt Drudge much worse were it not for the fortuitous emergence of Monica Lewinsky. With some solid sources feeding him (including whoever tipped him off that NEWSWEEK was close to breaking the story), he has made himself a genuine player in the unfolding crisis. Since the scandal has run largely on unrefined fuel—typically un-sourced leaks revealing hearsay evidence from one of the compromised figures in the pathetic pantheon of Kneepadgate—it is right up Matt Drudge's alley.

Now there are certain problems specific to Web journalism, no matter who does it. Because there's no fixed time to publish, there's pressure to go with stories *this minute*. This temptation has winged The Wall Street Journal and The Dallas Morning News in recent days, forcing them to retreat from articles perhaps too hastily posted on Web sites. So it's no surprise if Drudge is prone to this problem. But there are additional pitfalls for one-person, shoestring operations like Drudge's. No editors casting a skeptical eye over one's copy, no in-house counsel sweating over the possibility of lawsuits, no pub-

lisher worrying about confrontations with aggrieved sources at a dinner party. A journalist must have a strong ethical barometer to do without these.

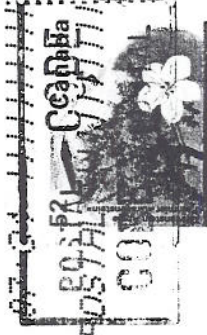
And there's the pity: Matt Drudge's barometer couldn't detect El Niño. When a source feeds him something smelly, he doesn't pause to sniff—he publishes. The rationale seems to be that unchecked allegations are news simply because they are alleged. This isn't good enough. On Friday, for instance, Drudge told a Penthouse Forum-like story about Clinton, Lewinsky, Dick Morris and Morris's hooker companion. From Drudge's sourcing it seems this "supposed sexual episode" came from "investigators," who allegedly heard it from Linda Tripp, who allegedly heard it from Lewinsky. Thus a thirdhand allegation weasels its way into the food chain.

Drudge's critics can also find fault in his accepting aid from the so-called Matt Drudge Defense Fund, backed by the conservative Center for the Study of Popular Culture, which gets funding from Richard Scaife, the deep-pocketed "Mr. Big" at the center of Hillary Rodham Clinton's so-called right-wing conspiracy. (David Horowitz, who heads the group, says that the decision to help Drudge was his own.)

So is The Drudge Report a disaster for cyberspace? Not really. As Drudge has become more prominent, so has the knowledge that one should not regard his scoops as gospel or disregard them totally. As we've learned to do with the tabloids. But the shame of it is that on the strength of his original bright idea, Drudge could have done it more carefully—and gotten some respect with his fame. As it is, cyberspace still awaits its first journalistic hero.

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# Web news: What's the

There's been quite a bit of excitement around this Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky thing.

Aside from the lurid allegations and hidden agendas on the part of the rumour mongers, the interesting part in all this is the changing nature of the "news game" in the Internet era.

American presidents and extramarital sexual relations are nothing new. There are tales of Bush and Johnson and Kennedy and Eisenhower and Roosevelt having quiet trysts. Though the traditional press certainly knew of these, it did not publish them. It adhered to a sort of "gentlemen's agreement" about such things.

Some news editors continue that exact agreement today. They ask what President Bill Clinton's sex life has to do with his job? Personally, I'd want to side with that phalanx of editors. Professionally, though, I'd be feeling the pressure to publish.

And that pressure is coming from a new sector of the journalism game: the Internet.

The World Wide Web, in particular.

Despite the noblest proclamations about not wanting to get involved in a person's private life, who has any choice if the public can get the story from small *but nonetheless international* publishers on the Web? What news editor is going to be able to ignore something that is all the rage online, attracting hundreds of thousands of readers by word of mouth alone?

The "gentlemen's agreement" is dead.

And the "Web as a news source" has arisen.

## THE DAILY DRUDGE

Basically, the allegations run like this: Clinton had sexual relations with a 21-year-old White House "intern" (entry-level staffer) named Monica Lewinsky. Furthermore, the president asked Lewinsky to lie about that affair if she were ever questioned by investigators.

Clinton unequivocally denies it all.

This was first reported in a Web-based gossip cyber-sheet called "the Drudge Report" ([www.drudgereport.com](http://www.drudgereport.com)).

Publisher Matt Drudge started the ball rolling on Jan. 17 when his Web site reported that *Newsweek* magazine knew about a taped Lewinsky phone call. Lewinsky, not knowing she was being taped, makes a great many allegations about sexual activity with Clinton. Drudge said *Newsweek* was sitting on the story.

Before the Lewinsky scandal came along, the Drudge Report had plodded



**NET DRUDGERY:** The Drudge Report Website broke the Clinton sex scandal, but it has also erred on several previous stories.

along. When noticed, it was often the butt of jokes for its scandal mongering. Like most scandal sheets, The Drudge Report could sometimes miss by a mile.

For instance, it repeated a rumour whispered in its ear about a White House aide having a history of wife beating. It was proven to be untrue, publisher Drudge apologized and claimed he'd been "set up" by people hostile to the White House.

Enter the Monica Lewinsky tale. Drudge reported it and every newspaper in North America seemed to pick the story up.

With the Lewinsky allegations, the Drudge Report suddenly became a hot item, the previous embarrassment forgotten.

Drudge's biggest day was Monday, Jan. 26, when it logged 349,075 "hits." Hits are a meaningless number, in terms of measurement. But that does seem to indicate a sevenfold increase in activity. It was reported that his Internet service provider had to move his site off the main server, to better handle the surge in traffic.

While it's certainly been boom time for Drudge's site, it appears the "crisis" has been good for all news sites as masses of online Americans logged in for the latest in the seemingly endless new "revelations" about Clinton's sexual activities.

Fox News Online said that a normal day would see 1 million pages visited by readers — it jumped to 2 million at the height of the Lewinsky affair. MSNBC reported a January increase of 150 per cent from December, 1997. The Associated Press online service — The Wire — claimed 200,000 pages were called up on Tuesday, Jan. 27 — as opposed to 80,000 the previous Tuesday.

It's like the Web and news suddenly came of age.

This sort of sudden "evolutionary

jump" is not unprecedented. CNN stumbled around for years after its 1980 inception, widely regarded as a "Cable 10" operation when compared to the networks. But the 1984 Libyan crisis and the 1991 Gulf War demonstrated to people that CNN's 24-hour coverage was unbeatable for rapidly developing blockbuster stories. And once people had gotten used to tuning in several days straight, CNN became part of their information-gathering activities.

Many think the Lewinsky affair may have a similar effect on this younger communications medium, the Net.

## A WEB OF LIES AND RUMOURS

For the Net to succeed as a news source, news organizations have to exploit the inherent nature of the medium. It must play up the speed of the Net, the accessibility of the Net (the info is there all the time), the depth of material offered (drilling down into databases, etc.), some interactivity and discussion areas.

All this can be delivered at a fraction of the cost of traditional news media.

Of course, there are still some serious problems — most notably bandwidth. Bandwidth is the amount of information that can be delivered at any given moment. If too many people try to access something on the Net, it can slow access down for everyone. Also, using regular telephone lines to travel the Net retards the development of visual tools. These problems have to be addressed.

But beyond the technical problem, from a journalistic perspective the biggest problem is the "plebian" character of the Net. *Anyone* can set up shop. That means there are people publishing who might not give much credence to the concept of "checking facts."

When the Net gets into an "info

TORONTO STAR 2/12/98

# scoop?

frenzy" it can be wilder than a stock-market crash. That and the Web's capacity to scoop all traditional print media might be causing editors to err on the side of haste.

For instance, the *Dallas Morning News* published that a Secret Service agent stumbled upon Clinton having sex on a table in some room in the White House. The Texas paper claimed this was a confirmed report. The story was picked up around the world. However, shortly thereafter the newspaper backpeddled and said the story was not true.

The press was saturated with crazy stories, adding to the "Playboy Mansion" aura the executive office was acquiring. There was supposedly a Lewinsky dress with semen stains that would prove to be Clinton's, taped phone sex between Clinton and Lewinsky, and a second White House intern ready to step forward and testify. None of these things has proven true.

Certainly there has been more "reporting on reports" than I've seen before. Everywhere I looked, news media were quoting competing publications, giving rumours greater spread. At one point, *Time* magazine even attributed bitter rival *Newsweek*.

They all feared being scooped on what seemed to be a fast-moving story, something with new allegations appearing hourly. If the president was actually going to *fall* over the story, who dared miss anything surrounding such an event?

Anyone who has regularly used the Internet for many years will attest to the fact that its greatest strength is also its greatest weakness. It can deliver information fast fast fast. Rumours can sweep the globe in hours.

But that also means people can react before thinking. I've seen many people with "itchy trigger fingers." They send out E-mails and public postings before they have taken a deep breath and thought things through. They often come to regret that. With time, these Internet newbies learn to weather the data frenzies that crop up like tropical storms online.

Likewise, it's great the news media are accepting that they have to get breaking news online and stop merely regurgitating the day's paper. But they also have to beware losing the most beloved of its professional ethics: the credibility that comes with checking facts, confirming sources and the like.

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