

LIKE A BUTTERFLY
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Marines are shot at in Kuwait. Almost 200 vacationers die on Bali. And a sniper terrorizes suburban Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia.

My children download a computer game. Beautiful, abstract images. Peaceful music.

Already, I like it.

Then I notice glowing objects drop from the monitor's sky. A mushroom of yellow erupts from the side of one of those abstract images. Sound effects of low rumbling.

Gotta keep a closer eye on downloads.

"Katie!" I hear 9-year-old Ben say. "Do you know what napalm is?"

I'm suddenly sick. What's on Ben's monitor is a big, pretty mass billowing yellow. But what's on my mind is the 1972 photo of children running from a napalm attack on the Vietnam village of Trang Bang.

"Napalm is really cool," Ben explains. "You drop it and it goes like this: kkkk, kkkk, kkkk." He makes a mild, fluttering gesture with his fingers.

And that's it. Napalm as a big, noisy butterfly.

I inch closer to my kids, not sure how to begin the intervention

"Guys, after dinner, we have to talk about downloads."

I email my younger brother who lives in Australia and vacations frequently in Bali. I write a single line. "Just tell me you weren't there."

Ominously, the email bounces back.

Sydney is on the opposite side of the world. When my kids were very little and first learned that the earth is round, they asked where they would end up if they dug straight down. “At Uncle Marty’s house,” I tell them.

Early tomorrow morning when the kids are asleep and it’s evening in Sydney, I’ll call my brother. Then I’ll read the *New York Times*—in good times and bad a point of stability for me. More news about the sniper, the Bali bombing, and the gunmen in Kuwait, no doubt. These days everything I read sounds like a call—either to arms or to arms control.

Our Congress has voted to support our President. Our President, it seems to many, wants war.

I don’t know what to believe.

I think of my brother, my children, and those little ones running from the village of Trang Bang in 1972.

Napalm is not a noisy, harmless butterfly, and neither is war. It’s music isn’t peaceful and its images aren’t abstract.

And I don’t want to download it.

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