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The Men Who Stare At Goats



Synopsis

Bizarre military history: In 1979, a crack commando unit was established by the most gifted minds within the U.S. Army. Defying all known laws of physics and accepted military practice, they believed that a soldier could adopt the cloak of invisibility, pass cleanly through walls, and "perhaps most chillingly" kill goats just by staring at them. They were the First Earth Battalion, entrusted with defending America from all known adversaries. And they really weren't joking. What's more, they're back—and they're fighting the War on Terror. An uproarious exploration of American military paranoia: With investigations ranging from the mysterious "Goat Lab," to Uri Geller's covert psychic work with the CIA, to the increasingly bizarre role played by a succession of U.S. presidents, this might just be the funniest, most unsettling book you will ever read—if only because it is all true and is still happening today.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Some reviewers have completely missed the point. This is the author's journey researching an inane army experiment, and what manifestations may remain. This book is no more an investigative proof than Ronson's last novel was an argument for joining extremists. This book is Errol Morris, not Art Bell. Wholly enjoyable and entertaining, it's hard to remember at times this is non-fiction, as some of the interviews seem insane. The presentation base comes from declassified government documents. However, they are not included, nor are there any footnotes, because Ronson is not trying to convince the reader of anything. He is writing about his interviews and conversations investigating the chronology of the "First Earth Battalion" manual. I believe Ronson started this

project intending it to be much funnier (he is a comedian after all), but some of the subject matter and personas he found, though entertaining, aren't laughable: staring at a goat trying to kill sounds funny, but imagine the views of a person who wishes they had the ability to kill people with their mind. So it is a perspective on the legacy of a few persons relieved of common sense, that were given a little power and a budget. You might enjoy this book if you: - Find Jon Stewart (The Daily Show) funny. - Like character documentaries, like those by Errol Morris. - Enjoy psychology. - Want a light introduction to a bizarre government-funded experiment. You probably won't enjoy this book if you: - Are looking for hard documentation on government conspiracy - Believe our government would never do bad things to people - Are uncomfortable with light criticism of George W. Bush

I had the hardest time deciding whether or not to read this book based on the various reviews. While I love a good conspiracy theory or two, I try to avoid books either written by conspiracy fanatics who have no objectivity, or conspiracy comics who treat the subject from a distance and use it to poke fun. As you can imagine, it's tough to find middle ground. Goats ends up being worth reading for fitting somewhere into my realm of acceptability, but sadly not enough to merit more than 3 stars. Ronson definitely keeps his distance during the first half of the book - as military men, some of whom are clearly unhinged to some extent, talk about crazy programs, Ronson makes it clear that he's not confirming or denying the allegations, merely quoting. And here, the book takes a comic tone and allows the reader to decide who to believe. On top of this, the book feels light, as if little research beyond interviews was done. Perhaps there's no other way to get this kind of information. Regardless, every chapter was more of a series of anecdotes than anything. For the second half, the tone turns more serious as it becomes clear that there is a spider web connecting many of the participants of various army plots, and here Ronson suddenly gets too serious without enough evidence. I was fine with the tone change, and the book does lead you on the same inner feeling: at first, "this is nuts" to "hey, maybe there's something seriously wrong going on." The problem is that this is where we needed a lot more hardcore research. And yet the book still felt light and airy. I mean, Ronson didn't even bother to look up the name of the song or band that features the words "Burn Motherfucker, Burn!" A small point, but one that will stand out to American readers as an obvious example of not doing all the homework. Also, the history of these programs is basically presented as Ronson discovered them, and the problem with this is that he backtracks and overlaps on himself a zillion times rather than present the material sequentially. Again, I see the reasons for taking us on the same path of discovery he did, but I'm not convinced it was for the best. I think that there's a better book that could've been written buried in here somewhere, and what

actually hit the page isn't necessarily bad. It just ultimately comes off as too light to be as important as it could have been. For those who were in my quandry of deciding whether to buy it, I recommend it, but I felt a lot better buying it used.

This is a fascinating tale about people who are completely nuts. Unfortunately, many of these people who are completely nuts hold or have held senior positions in the United States military. Ronson rarely writes a judgmental word, but allows his subject to speak for themselves--and hang themselves with their own words. (At least, that's the impression--obviously Ronson has selected which of their words to present.) Ronson looks at ideas for a "First Earth Battallion" by soldier-turned-newage-marketing-guru Jim Channon, who proposed in 1979 that the military put greater emphasis on influencing people with alternative weapons such as paranormal abilities and music. Ronson traces the use of music in warfare to the use of loud music by the FBI at the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas and as a torture technique used by the U.S. military at Guantanamo Bay and in Iraq. The book covers a wide-ranging territory of nuttiness, including Uri Geller (who is quoted in the book suggesting that he has been re-activated for use by the U.S. military), the remote viewers at Ft. Meade (Joe McMoneagle, Ingo Swann, Pat Price, Ed Dames, etc.), the non-lethal weaponry of UFO and paranormal investigator Col. John Alexander, the connections between the remote viewers and Courtney Brown--and then to Art Bell and Heaven's Gate, and the CIA's MKULTRA experiments and the death-by-LSD of Frank Olson and his son Eric's search for the facts about his death. The book is alternately amusing and horrifying. It would be funny if this craziness wasn't taken so seriously by high-ranking officials who have put it into practice, wasting tax dollars and occasionally producing horribly unethical outcomes. I highly recommend this book.

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