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Iraqi prisoners subjected to the theme for Barney the Purple Dinosaur? Stopping goats hearts by just staring at them? Bizarre yet wholly true, these are just some of the beliefs and activities held by the First Earth Battalion, a group currently within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the subject of Jon Ronson s entertaining book. Whatever your feelings about the "war on terror," this investigation into some strange military practices will leave you chuckling with bewilderment.

The Men Who Stare at Goats Details

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From Reader Review The Men Who Stare at Goats for online ebook

Aaron says

Jon Ronson is a bloody mad man willing to research the most interesting topics. He will go from telling a Grand Wizard of the KKK to the head of intelligence for US Army to shove it up his jacksy. Throughout this book I once again realized why I became a social worker and not a soldier. I do not deal well with pain or super jocks who like to wrastle to prove their virility. I'm more like a nebbishy nerd who would rather read than inflict PSYOPS, physical torture and kill people in the name of freedom. However I would like to get down on the Jedi Warrior program. I am pretty sure I could cloud burst and drop goats with my mind already and growing up taking mail order ninja classes I have mastered invisibility.

Melki says

... America, the great superpower, needed to be defended by people who actually had superpowers ...

When it comes to cockamamie plots and plans to make America great again, *nothing* our government and the US military cooks up should surprise you. Experiments in mind control, and yes, even "psychic assassins" seem pretty much par for the course. Ronson, a British journalist who has made his name exposing the weird and the wacky, here presents several of the more hare-brained schemes once considered, and/or implemented in the war against our enemies.

Warrior Monks, brown notes, the horrors of Celine Dion and Barney are all covered here.

My favorite line?

I couldn't decide if Jim was being delightfully naive, infuriatingly naive, or sophisticatedly evasive.

One side note: Fort Bragg's Goat Lab is no more - <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/artic...>

At least that's the *official* story . . .

My four-star review should in no way be taken as a recommendation. It seems as though plenty of people actively hate this book. And, indeed, much of the information presented exists in a purely believe-it-or-not realm; evidence is scant, eyewitnesses shadowy. (Well, would *you* admit to participating in any of this crap?) I, however, found it to be an entertaining read that left me shaking my head while reaching for a bottle of gin, mumbling aloud something along the lines of "Our tax dollars at work . . ."

Nicole says

I had this book on my radar because of a review I saw soon after it came out, long before they made the movie. But I saw the movie before I got around to buying the book. I like the movie a lot; it makes me laugh. [later] I felt compelled to do some research while reading this book. I looked at Jim Channon's and Lyn Buchanan's websites; got Google pages full of results for "remote viewing", "PsyOps", and other terms and people; and saw that Amazon sells copies of Lyn Buchanan's and Joe McMoneagle's books, as well as what's

supposed to be a printout of Jim Channon's "First Earth Battalion" report to the Army.

Any good idea can possibly be warped into something dangerous. There are always people within any large group who are willing to try anything, so I believe that people within the government and the military have considered an idea like remote viewing for their arsenals. I know how certain sounds I consider unpleasant affect me, so I believe that prisoners have been subjected to sounds or music. But there are a lot of things that no one can prove or disprove in the book. Channon, Buchanan, and others may be sincere...or they may be crazy...or they may be con artists. While there is a weird fascination factor to reading the stories of people far out in left field, we can't know if they're true; and many of the folks featured in the book are downright shifty. There are people who believe in remote viewing even though none of the visions they, or people they know, have had ever came true. There is no proof that anyone ever stared a goat--or even a hamster--to death. It's like any other matter of faith--it requires faith, because you can't prove it.

While Ronson's attempt to tie certain events to Channon's "FEB" writings is interesting, I think he spent too many pages on the mystery of what happened to Eric Olson's father. Ronson certainly showed how Eric's life had been taken over by the mystery; but the teenage bike trip story and some of the rest of it seemed more like a tangent. The end of the book sort of fizzles out.

About the movie: Consider the movie "inspired by" the book. Certain parts of the book--mostly the funnier incidents--were incorporated into the movie's plot. People's names were changed in some way; people's actions and attributes were blended to create movie characters; and events were created to further the plot. Ronson never got to tag along with anyone on a trip to Iraq and never engaged in any daring escape attempts.

Nick Davies says

This fell a little flat for me. Despite Jon Ronson's writing being approachable and not without humour, despite here him investigating an apparently interesting subject and putting in a lot of research, despite having enjoyed two other books of his about psychopathy and social media shaming, this was a bit disappointing.

I put this down to the subject, not the author. A book about the US military/authorities attempts to harness psychology in terms of warfare and covert operations etc. did 'on paper' sound interesting to me. However I am not that concerned about conspiracies, about the morality or immorality of authority, and I don't waste much effort assuming there are things being hidden from me by those in power. A lot of the aspects of what is discussed here just sound utterly misguided and stupid when examined, and in the end it all came over like the author wrote a book about a small number of people who for a time believed crackpot theories. A bit like someone telling you about this thing they once heard from a bloke down the pub...

brian says

during the cold war the cia was engaged in some strange strange shit -- psychic spies and remote viewings and lots more: agents staring at goats all day long trying to make their hearts explode (some of the higher ups claim to have seen it happen), agents (with badly scuffed noses and foreheads) trying to walk through walls, dosing people with lsd, playing music with subliminal messages, entering the bad guy's lair while cradling a baby lamb in one's arms as a means to overpower the enemy with symbols of pure kindness & goodness... but this was all dropped in the 90s and then - surprise! - picked up again in our War on Terror. uh-huh. where do you think naked pyramids and forced listenings to the theme song from Barney comes from? the marriage of cold war psyops and blackops with a sprinkling of 70s new age nuttiness. gotta love it. a fascinating book.

Kemper says

After watching the movie version of *The Men Who Stare At Goats*, I figured that there must be a kernel of truth to it coated with several layers of Hollywood bullshit so I read the book to get an idea of what the real story was. I thought I'd get a funny story about some stupid things the military did once upon a time. Instead, the book turns into a template for starting conspiracy theories that really pissed me off.

Oddly enough, the really weird stuff that happened in the film version is the stuff that probably actually happened, but I understand why Hollywood had to wrap that in a fictional storyline because the book wanders around and becomes just a series of odd anecdotes and wild speculation about weird things that the U.S. military and intelligence communities may or may not have done.

An army officer named Jim Channon went to Vietnam and realized that most soldiers really don't want to kill anyone. On returning home after the war, he somehow talked the army into financing a research project where he experimented with several new age movements and techniques. He wrote a manual based on his experience calling for a new type of unit, the First Earth Battalion.

Channon's manual called for incorporating several flower child ideas into the army. For example, when approaching natives in occupied territory the soldiers would have speakers hanging around their necks that played peaceful music, and hold flowers and small animals to show good intentions. Channon also theorized that the FEB could become a class of Warrior Monks, complete with psychic powers like remote viewing, walking through walls, and invisibility.

Amazingly, Channon was taken somewhat seriously and offered a small command to implement his ideas. Channon refused because he now claims that he didn't actual believe any of the psychic power ideas were really possible, that he was just trying to get the army to open its collective mind to some new ways of doing business. (I think that Channon may have conned the army into funding an extended vacation and then turned in something he never dreamed would be taken seriously.)

However, the FEB manual eventually found it's way into the hands of General Stubblebine, the head of army intelligence in the early 80's and a believer in the paranormal. Stubblebine was a proponent of it and tried to interest the Special Forces in it, but they were already aware of it and trying to adapt some of the techniques without all the hippie crap. One of their big experiments was trying to stop the hearts of goats by staring at them. Stubblebine had to settle for setting up a small office with several soldiers trying to develop remote viewing and other psychic powers.

The author interviewed Channon, Stubblebine and several other folks who participated in several programs related to the FEB manual, and all of them freely admit that this happened and provided a lot of the material in the early chapters. That's a pretty amusing story, but it comes across that these were just some loopy ideas that the military tried on a very small scale but were eventually phased out.

Where the book goes off the rails is when the author tries to say that Channon's FEB ideas were possibly more widely adopted and in use today. That's where it turns into a collection of oddball stories related by a variety of unreliable sources, with no other research done that is documented in the book.

The author gets obsessed with the notion that Channon's idea of using music as part of the FEB was modified and used as torture techniques in Iraq on prisoners by playing songs from the Barney kids show over and over at high levels or that the military/intelligence community is experimenting with subliminal messaging. He also notes how the government has used loud music at other times to try and drive people out of siege situations and ties that back to the FEB. Then he theorizes that the FBI bombarded the Branch Davidians in Waco with subliminal messages based on pure speculation.

First, I don't think that the idea of playing really loud music is an offshoot of the original FEB manual. I think the military and government, like most of us, realize that playing annoying music at really loud levels makes people crazy. You just have to live in an apartment with thin walls and have a heavy metal fan for a neighbor to figure that one out. And I'm more than willing to believe that the government has fooled around with subliminal messaging, but saying that it was used at Waco without a shred of proof is the kind of reckless speculation that starts a lot of the conspiracy theory nonsense that floats around today.

It isn't the only things in the book that seem like blue-sky bullshitting. There's a section where the author outlines how one of the former recruits in Stubblebine psychic program started going on the Art Bell show after retirement, blabbed about the whole thing and then became a regular guest by making a series of wild predictions about the end of the world.

The author ties some of the comments that this guy made to comments that other guests made regarding the Hale-Bopp comet that were then linked to the Heaven's Gate suicide cult. Uh....why? Just because one nutjob who used to be in a military program went on a radio show hosted by a nutjob who interviewed some other nutjobs that might have influenced some other nutjobs isn't really a link to anything. It's ironic that the author mocks Art Bell and then uses Art Bell methodology for the rest of the book.

There's a lot of this kind of crap with various people making claims about how some of the old psychic spy programs are still being used, but again, there isn't a shred of proof. The only thing close to a fact is that he notes how much Bush increased the intelligence budget. Duh. I'm not a Bush fan but a country that suffered a devastating terror attack and then got into two wars is going to increase its intelligence budget. It doesn't mean the money is going to psychic spy programs.

Adding to the conspiracy theory vibe, there's a long story at the end of the book that tries to tie the documented MK-ULTRA program the CIA ran where it doped unsuspecting people with LSD in 1950-60s to even darker claims about murder and potential torture techniques used by the military/intelligence community today. It's certainly within the realm of possibility, but again, there's no real proof presented, just interviews and theories of a couple of people who claim to have researched it.

This whole book left me baffled. I wouldn't be surprised if the U.S. does look into using new age or psychic spy ideas in military or intelligence programs today, but trying to tie it all back to the FEB is a stretch. Especially since he doesn't prove that anything like it does actually exist today. Here you've got a story about the military doing something kind of crazy, but then the author went off on these even crazier and unsubstantiated tangents that make trying to kill goats by staring at them seem rational by comparison.

Nandakishore Varma says

This started out as a hilarious read but soon degenerated into an unfocused ramble. Did not finish it.

Mizuki says

I think this book actually is very funny, with a lot of *'maybe it's true, or maybe not so true'* interesting information and details in it.

The book also points out how easily it can be for us to fall under the control of powerful suggestions, mind-

control and other shit. People, be alerted!

added thoughts after re-reading@14/01/2015

I still think the author has a healthy sense of humor and the story is funny, but once the author starts telling us how music can be used to torture war-prisoners and terrorism-suspects, and how the army/government would assassinate people/eyewitnesses in order silence them...things really become very un-funny. *shivers*

re-reading@25/08/2018: I still really enjoy this book very much!!! And...just look at this trailer!!!!
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GC2Tz...>

Petra X says

It's hard to know what to say about this book as it's a light-hearted, somewhat mocking look at the various nefarious schemes of the American Military, or at least of some of the specialised recherche departments of Intelligence. However, the subject is deadly serious and what seems funny on the surface - bombarding Iraqi prisoners with an endless loop of the Barney song, 14,000 renditions over three days - really isn't when you consider that this 'information' was probably released deliberately so the media could do a nice, feel-good, hahaha piece and be put off delving deeper, at least for a while.

It's an interesting, perhaps even necessary, book for all Americans, and citizens of its allies and satellite countries, who want to know of the less-obvious methods used in the defence of the US and free world. We all know about military offensives, about assassinations and torture, both always denied, but really though, what do we know about psychological warfare?

It seems to have developed from the original barmy colonel whose thought-process went something like this: this wall is primarily composed of atoms, and atoms are primarily composed of space. I am primarily composed of atoms, and therefore I should be able to walk right through that wall if I only have the right frame of mind. Result: bruised nose and the development of a new Intelligence unit for the US Military and a new way to divert tax dollars into the hands of the less-than-mentally competent who had such seniority no one could question one or their methods. Including staring at goats.

It's a fast read, well-written in a journalistic style with plenty of moments when you'll want to look up from the book and share what you've just read with anyone around.

Rewritten 24 July, 2016 on rereading Them: Adventures with Extremists

Ensiform says

The documentarian examines how the US military intelligence community has attempted to make use of paranormal and extra-sensory techniques and how this has impacted the war on terror today. Ronson shows how Jim Channon, a US Army colonel, who wrote the "First Earth Battalion" manual which attempted to reorganize the military along non-lethal, New Age ideals such as pacifying the enemy with indigenous music, positive energy, or discordant sounds. He interviews people such as Guy Savelli, martial arts teacher who claims to have the Death Touch and to be able to kill goats by staring them to death, and who works with the US military. He talks with former members of the Stargate Project, a US-funded program that attempted to develop telepathy. He interviews General Albert Stubblebine, who apparently firmly believes

that walking through walls is possible with the right mindset. He talks with guards at Abu Ghriab, and with detainees who have been blasted by US officials with inane pop songs and strobe lights, and possibly with music with subliminal messages (the “torture lite” that Tony Lagouranis details in Fear Up Harsh). He looks into the very dark secrets of MK-ULTRA (specifically Operation Artichoke, which attempted to subvert wills through forced drug use and hypnosis), and interviews a man who believes his brother, Frank Olson, was murdered over fears he would reveal it to the press.

Like Ronson’s previous book, *Them: Adventures with Extremists*, this is an alternately hilarious and deeply disturbing book; if even half of the things Ronson details are true (and there’s no reason to think that any part is false or exaggerated), America’s intelligence community was or is festooned with people who are not only amoral – that’s to be expected – but passionately ignorant. Basically, despite Ronson’s smooth prose, dry wit, and chummy writing style, this is a damn scary book.

Erik Graff says

Every year a friend of my roommate comes here from Canada to attend a bookseller's convention downtown and every year he brings the two of us books from his store in Manitoba. One of them this year was Ronson's *The Men Who Stare at Goats*.

Even though I'd seen the movie, I hadn't known there was a book behind it nor that its author, Jon Ronson, had also authored the book on political extremism that Mike Miley had had me read a couple of years ago while visiting him in California. Like *Them: Adventure with Extremists*, *The Men Who Star at Goats* skirts serious issues with humor and irony. Like the former, this recent book is an historical account, not of its ostensible subject, bur of the author's own investigation.

The subject of this book is PsychOps, the substantially black-budget governmental experiments with mind control and psychological warfare which extend back as far as the early CIA in the fifties and which continue today, most notably in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Ronson's particular foci are the persons and events featured in the much truncated movie based on this book, events going back to the seventies, and on U.S. Army PsychOps in Iraq at the time of composition. The book begins with silliness, with attempts to walk through solid objects and to become invisible, but ends with the very serious business of contemporary torture and mass-manipulation practices. In between there is considerable discussion of actual remote viewing studies, of subliminal attitude adjustment techniques, of crowd control methods, of the governmentally sanctioned murder of an Army/CIA agent in the mid-fifties, of the mass murder of the families in Waco in the nineties and of the dubiously sophisticated torture techniques employed by the United States in Iraq and Cuba. While often funny, Ronson does occasionally reflect upon the material he uncovers with earnest intention, particularly as regards how the enormity of many governmental practices is concealed even when it is revealed.

Having read many books about the subjects Ronson covers, I found little that I didn't already know. Yet in some cases Ronson, who conducted many interviews of principals, comes up with details I'd not seen previously published.

This book is strongly recommended as an easy-to-read introduction to the topics discussed. I finished the thing in two sittings and could have finished it in one, finding it actually much more "entertaining" than the motion picture and, while equally funny, much more provocative.

Kim says

I first heard about this book back before the movie was announced. I have always had a slight, very cynical, interest in the paranormal/supernatural/mystic bullshit. So when I was told about this book I had to read it. Just for the title alone. It took a long time, always seemed to fall to the bottom of the pile, but finally I read it.

It was not quite what I was expecting but it wasn't bad. The fact that the US military and intelligence organisations (and most likely a lot of other countries, possibly including my own) have been doing serious tests and investigations into this for decades was astounding. So many of the things in the book I just have to laugh it but I can believe the government would try it.

It was an interesting read and now I'm curious to see how they made a movie out of it.

Russell says

So here's my problem with this book. The author manages to string together a long series of random tidbits in what appears to be a coherent manner, but ultimately there was no point to anything we as readers have learned. "Hey everyone, look at all of the weird things our armed forces experimented with during the war on terror! They played a Barney song over and over! They played a Sesame Street song and the composer tried to sue for royalties! Maybe the CIA killed someone once or maybe they gave them LSD in an experiment and they lost their shit."

It's all sort of fascinating in its premise (did the secretary of the armed services really believe that he could walk through walls? can you really kill gerbils with your impure thoughts?) , but when I was done reading I wasn't sure what the point was. Sometimes the author is praising the idea of alternative battle methods. Sometimes he's mocking. Sometimes he's indifferent as a reporter. Sometimes he is actively goading people into delivering absurd information.

It was entertaining, but by and large it didn't really deliver on its promise as an absurdly entertaining collection of information with a defined message of some sort.

Mitch says

This book worked hard to earn, decisively, its crop of zero stars.

It is about what supposedly happens when new age super-abilities (flying, invisibility, the power to stop a goat's heart by staring at it...) meet the oh-so-impressive military mind.

Since the military exists to destroy people and property, guess what they experiment with in attempts to gain these powers and apply them?

Allegedly.

All kinds of names, dates, people and conversational bits are used to 'verify' the wildly gyrating content of the book. As with all new age material, though, nothing at all is verified. Not only that, but I resent the

author's ham-fisted attempts to tantalize the reader with scraps of information followed by a quick "I can't tell you any more." Completely and obviously manipulative.

The greatest mystery here is that this type of idiotic garbage ever got made into a movie. I hear it bombed and that just feels so very, very right.

I'd write more about the book, but I'm absolutely convinced they're monitoring my goodreads account...

Pink says

So many emotions. This book wasn't quite what I thought it would be...a humorous account of crackpot guys doing crazy things, such as trying to stop a goat's heart by the power of the mind. Okay well it was that. It also detailed events surrounding Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo Bay, 911, Waco, MK-ULTRA and the 'War on terror'. Jon Ronson wrote this in 2004 at a time when Iraq was just being handed back from coalition forces to the new Iraqi government (which of course has been a great success on all sides and everyone has moved on rapidly since then) This was also a time when recent press stories had circulated photos showing U.S. soldier Lynndie England parading an Iraqi prisoner naked by a dog leash. This book delves a little deeper, not so much into the rights or wrongs of the war, or the conspiracy theories, but into the bizarre tactics used by special forces within the U.S. Army, which may have led to such events. All of which is of course highly hush hush and top secret. However Jon Ronson has interviewed many people for the book, from several retired military servicemen to an innocent Guantanamo Bay detainee, as well as others and they all have incredible stories. Obviously some were more tight lipped than others.

For me this book ended up not being the amusing read I was expecting, but it was definitely intriguing, shocking and fascinating. On the whole though it has left me feeling quite angry (but take note, if your allegiance is more right wing and pro war on terror, this book may annoy you for completely different reasons than it does me)

It has also increased my understanding of why so many people develop conspiracy theories.

I'll leave this review with a great quote from near the end of the book -

'Remember that the crazy people are not always to be found on the outside. Sometimes the crazy people are deeply embedded on the inside. Not even the most imaginative conspiracy theorist has ever thought to invent a scenario in which a crack team of Special Forces soldiers and major generals secretly try to walk through their walls and stare goats to death'

Thomas Edmund says

The Men Who Stare at Goats is a 'mockumentary' claiming to expose the exploits of the American Government's attempts to utilize psychic phenomenon to further their war efforts.

The book is journalist/biography style with the author making contact with numerous military figures all somehow linked to 'psy-ops'. Rather than covering a coherent story format this book reads as a series of gags and irony ridden tales of the military's attempts to train their own X-men.

Ronson crafts a bizarre conspiracy, linking 'psy-ops' to the Abu Gharib prison photos, the 9/11 terrorist attacks and Vietnam. And while I respect his quirky semi-intellectual humour, I couldn't help but consider Ronson's book mildly insensitive. Certainly I realise that I'm not meant to take these ideas seriously, but I can't help feeling Ronson has had some half-baked ideas that are propped up by adding a bit of real life tragedy.

The Men Who Stare at Goats is a good airplane, or bus stop read, but without a real central story, and lacking real depth it might be better spending your time reading *Bad Science* or *The Daily What* for the same level of material, with some genuine learning involved.

Jim says

Jon Ronson looks at army intelligence experiments in psychic phenomena. One of these experiments, referred to in the title, was to try to kill goats by concentrating on them, *real* hard. Ironically, much of this stuff had its origins in the army's post-Vietnam funk, when *esprit de corps* was at its lowest ebb. A young colonel convinced his chain of command to allow him to study hippy philosophy as a potentially new ethic for a revived Army. All that came of this was a field manual for something called the "First Earth Battalion," which emphasized peace and love, empathy and psychology, over force; it also incorporated the new age psychic and therapeutic practices which had entered the popular culture of the 60s and 70s.

While top commanders took a pass, a few people, mainly in intelligence and special operations circles, were fascinated. This interest was indirectly given a boost by George Lucas. Some of the soldiers and veterans Ronson spoke with likened themselves to Jedis.

Like a lot of Ronson's work, this book uses humor to draw the reader into some serious areas. The general who practices walking through walls (with predictable results) is amusing. Military interrogators, playing the Barney theme song ("I love you, you love me...") to Iraqi detainees is surreal. It's funny, but things get subtly and progressively disturbing, until we find ourselves in Abu Ghraib, and suddenly it's not funny at all. Ronson relates how the hippy-dippy approach to winning hearts and minds evolved into an emphasis on interrogation and brainwashing, using loud music, subliminal messages, psychological humiliation, psychotropic drugs, and far, far worse.

One might ask, if a self-described British humor journalist can ferret out this stuff, why can't the big-time, serious journalists do it, too? Granted, some of Ronson's story is wide open to interpretation. Some of it is just beyond bizarre, and in that may lie the answer to the question. Reporting on intelligence and national security matters is difficult. Legitimate intelligence is not conducted in the open, and so-called black ops, even less so. Plus, there are laws governing the dissemination of classified material. Yet, some of the awfulness of Abu Ghraib was photographed by the perpetrators and splashed all over the media; some of the unpleasantness at the detention center at Guantanamo has been hinted at. It makes a sensation, and then goes away.

Part of the difficulty in reporting this is the problem of defining torture. Are stress positions torture? Loud music? Solitary confinement? The fact that we use these techniques to train our own special forces soldiers further complicates the question. Also, given the past actions of some captives, it's sometimes tempting to deny pity for them. It's relatively easy to label as torture the infliction of pain and write about it. But what about a feeling of hopelessness arising from not knowing whether one will ever be released? That's harder to convey in a soundbite.

Ronson brings up a particularly insightful point when he states that, when confronted with challenging

revelations, we fit it into what we already know (or think we know); what doesn't fit, we discard. We all do it to some extent, and journalists are no exception. Many of the journalists I have known are a little lazy in their jobs (like many of us), and would prefer to go for the easy cliché than anything challenging a preconceived worldview.

Ronson points out that we already accept the concept that the CIA does nasty things, that war brings out the worst in some people. We "know" this because we've already read Tom Clancy and John LeCarre. We are appalled by the idea of torture, but we've seen it on *24* with that hunky Jack Bauer, so it doesn't appall us *that* much. This demonstrates that a story will be subsequently shaped by the way in which it is first spun. Also, when reporters found out that the Barney song was part of the supposed torture, it all seemed too funny to be taken seriously. We *like* the idea of terrorists being subjected to the purple dinosaur; after all, our kids have made us sit through it.

Atila Iamarino says

Esse livro tem tanta coisa bizarra que parece mentira, mas o pior é que é verdade, pelo menos em grande parte. Um relato sobre as várias tentativas do exército e da CIA americanos de fazer soldados com habilidades além das normais. Como atravessar paredes, fazer projeção astral (eles chamam de visão remota) e matar cabras com o poder da mente (daí o título). O que realmente aconteceu. O que não parece ser verdade é que a cabra morreu. Mas o ponto todo do livro não é de longe se dava certo ou não (Ron Jonson não parece dar muita atenção para o quão plausíveis são os poderes), mas sim o que e como tentaram, o que só reforça o tom bizarro da situação. Rápido de ler (ouvir pelo menos) e bem curioso. Só preciso ver o filme para saber o quão bem adaptado foi.

S. says

My father was a nuclear weapons engineer during the cold war. Think about the levels of fear and anger and about the hyper-vigilance required to be someone planning on killing half of the planet all of the time. Thus in my experience it makes perfect sense to assume that there are paranoid nut jobs running the defense department..."Like a snail.. crawling on the edge...of a straight razor.." (Apocalypse Now.) Every surreal anecdote relayed here is perfectly plausible. Check out the "Duck and Cover" propaganda films of the 1950's (collected in "Atomic Café") to get a feel for the Disney-meets-Orwell hypnosis techniques the US was numbing brains with to understand how people can achieve this level of nutballiness. While Ronson wrote this in a dry, sardonic voice that made me hoot/cackle every 12 pages, I'm sorry that he didn't set a more serious tone and document his sources more thoroughly because people really don't WANT to believe that people like Colonel Kurtz (Apocalypse Now again, I'm obsessed)are "protecting and defending" us. The perfect absurdity of the cyclic thought process that is triggered by those living in constant fear is what fuels DARPA and keeps us from spending those billions of dollars on...say... educating and insuring our children. Wow, what an innovative way to "protect and defend" the future of the nation: education and adequate health care for the kids.

Michael Mills says

3.5 stars

Some interesting and in some cases harrowing stories, but Ronson's usual desire for the big claim – the grand wild narrative – leads to some pretty bold assertions that really aren't supported.

Taken with a pinch of salt and on a case by case basis, it's still worthwhile.
