

# 'Kid Nation' exploits youth for TV drama

BY FRANKLIN CLINE  
Reviewer

"Kid Nation" seemed nightmarish, manipulative and soulless from the very beginning.

The show works like this: 40 children's lives have been signed away to CBS by money-grubbing parents for 40 days. The kids, whose ages range from eight to 15, are placed in Bonanza City, an abandoned desert town in New Mexico, with (reportedly) no adult intervention or supervision other than the cameraworkers.

The kids are divided into four teams of 10 and compete against the others in various trials. Jobs are determined by the teams' ranking in these games, and the winners receive "upper class" status, followed by "merchants," "cooks" and "laborers." The town is run by a town council consisting of four kids who also serve as team leaders.

Don't worry. It's not as embarrassing and demoralizing as it seems — these kids are learning! Laughing! Playing!

Who cares if they're being introduced to difficult problems that they simply are too young to deal with (who's going to stop the pissed-off 15-year-old from shouting obscenities and locking himself in one of the four bunks? No one!)? If these kids' genuine fear, alienation and homesickness is being capitalized on by a heartless network and eaten up by a large percentage of American viewers, who actually

believes this experience is going to do something for these kids other than make them misfits?

One of the prime draws of this show is that it involves little kids acting like grownups: Aw, look, they're cooking and cleaning and operating businesses and forming social networks and embracing class divisions just like big people! However, the overly manipulative way in which this show is edited treats the viewer like a child — viewers know they should feel sad when the strings come on and they're confronted with a close-up of a child crying for one of multiple reasons, or elated when the joyous Wagnerian victory music accompanies children cheering and laughing. Really, the way in which "Kid Nation" so blatantly manipulates the viewer is to the point of condescension.

The most unfortunate aspect is how easily so many viewers are manipulated. The majority of participants on the "Kid Nation" message board at the official Web site of the show offer great praise for the show.

The most amusing part of the show is the frequency with which power struggles occur, most often between the oldest, biggest, toughest and meanest participant, 15-year-old Greg, and the town council, whose ages range from 10 to 12. Greg's presence in the town is a blessing and a curse for these kids: on one hand because he's so much bigger than everyone else, he's the most



"Kid Nation," CBS' newest reality TV show, features 40 children whose ages range from eight to 15. The kids compete in grown-up activities to win an authentic gold star. Photo courtesy of CBS Primetime

capable at tasks that require strength, like lifting up outhouses that have been blown over during a dust storm. As a sidenote, two of those outhouses were leaking out waste. On the other hand, everyone in the town is afraid of him, and he not only recognizes this fear but he capitalizes on it.

For instance, on the eighth day, when breakfast was not served until noon, Greg responded by throwing a ridiculous, obscenity-laden temper tantrum and locking himself in his team's bunk, completely disrupting the town and preventing anyone from getting any work done. The producers of this show clearly picked Greg because he's got a real streak of bully in him, and they believed it would make for some dramatic and interesting television.

Unfortunately, it doesn't. Even if

"Kid Nation" wasn't totally dominated by candy-coated editing practices and an unsettling overtone of manipulation of children, it would still be pretty boring. Yes, there is a remarkably high cute-factor that will pull in the soccer moms, but "Kid Nation" lacks both dramatic storytelling and interesting characters. Kids are predictable and are not engaging to watch.

It boils down to a very boring scientific experiment done not in the name of science but of profit. And CBS is profiting indeed. According to a New York Times article published Aug. 23, the parents signed away their children's life stories to CBS "in perpetuity throughout the universe."

"Kid Nation" is an artless and heartless television show, regardless of the warm-and-fuzzy spin CBS has slathered all over it.

## TV Review

### Kid Nation

Wed. at 7 p.m.  
CBS  
Premiered: Sept. 19

Rating  
no stars

# Star-studded flick triumphs culturally

BY BEN YARNELL  
Index Staff

Fall is in the air, and just as the leaves start to gather on the ground, so, too, are movie studios starting to get serious about their films.

This time of the year, we begin to see the movies that will end up in award ceremonies in a few months. And so, the first hat is thrown into the ring for the new movie "The Kingdom."

The plot sounds as though it could have been lifted from CNN. A band of radical Muslims attacks a compound in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The compound houses Americans who work for an oil company.

The American government says sending more Americans to investigate only would worsen the situation. However, a small team of FBI agents, led by Special Agent Ronald Fleury (Jamie Foxx), finds a way to get into the fray and help track down the mastermind behind the massacre.

One of the most interesting points is that so many faces are going to be familiar to the

average viewer. Foxx's team comprises of only three agents. The first is played by Jason Bateman from "Arrested Development." Then there is Chris Cooper. The name probably doesn't ring a bell, but you've see him in films such as "October Sky," "The Patriot" and "Seabiscuit." And rounding out the team is Jennifer Garner, bearing a rough resemblance to her character from her previous TV series, "Alias."

You would think so many familiar faces would be distracting, leaving the viewer watching the stars rather than their characters. And yet everyone, all the way up to mega-celebrity Foxx, sells it.

Part of the sell has to do with the refreshingly inspired script. It would have been easy for this

## Movie Review

### "The Kingdom"

Directed by Peter Berg  
Universal  
Released: Sept. 28

#### Rating



to become a pro-America, anti-Middle East film, but the writers are more culturally sensitive than that. The audience members will find themselves caring just as much for the Saudi police officers helping the team of agents as for any American character.

The measures taken to show that many Saudis are just normal people like any of us are more noticeable. The film goes a long way in preventing the general vilification of

pace of the film easier to handle.

For all of its great points, however, the film does come with a few flaws. Its R-rating is deserved. There are times when the graphic nature of the violence is more than disturbing. The realism can be a bit much. Imagine the grossest episode of "CSI," and that's about on par with "The Kingdom."

Also, those who get motion sickness easily will want to take a Dramamine. The camera work goes a little light on the steady-cam technique, leaving viewers feeling jostled. In fact, those familiar with the camera stylings of "Friday Night Lights" will find this very familiar, especially because director Peter Berg directed both movies.

Both of these points help contribute to the overall realism of the movie, but viewers should be prepared for just how real it can get.

Still, if you can stomach those flaws, "The Kingdom" definitely is worth shelling out the cash. As for how well it will do in the awards, it has the potential, but it is all going to depend on the competition to come.

# First-time novelist hits the mark with Iraq War satire

BY MARK COUCH  
Reviewer

Nicholas Kulish's debut novel, "Last One In," follows the adventures of a celebrity gossip columnist sent off to the front lines of the Iraq War and embedded with a squad of Marines.

Set in 2003 during the invasion of Iraq, "Last One In" is a humorous and biting satire of the war and a press corps that excitedly went along for the ride.

Spending hours riding in cramped Humvees with foulmouthed Marines and dealing with desert sand is not Jimmy Stephens' specialty. Before being shipped off to the deserts of Iraq, Stephens enjoyed a comfortable metropolitan lifestyle, dining in nice restaurants and writing gossip columns about celebrities for the New York Daily Herald. But after authoring an erroneous article about a major celebrity cheating on his wife, he finds himself facing a lawsuit and the possibility of losing his job at the Herald.

All hope is not lost for Stephens, however.

The Iraq War is about to begin, and the Herald's veteran war correspondent is unable to work after being hit by a truck in New York. Stephens' boss is in dire straits and desperately needs a replacement for the position. Faced with losing his job, Stephens has no choice but to bite the bullet and go to Iraq.

From New York, Stephens is flown to Kuwait for training, where he feels out of place among many experienced war correspondents who actually know what they're getting into.

He later meets the group of Marines he's embedded with, sharing a large sleeping quarters strewn with dirty magazines.

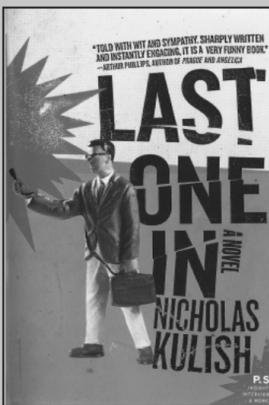
Throughout the novel, readers meet hardened war correspondents, rowdy

## Book Review

### "Last One In"

by Nicholas Kulish  
Ecco/Harper Perennial  
261 pages  
Released: June 26

#### Rating



Marines, uptight military officers and even a few Iraqis. Kulish's characters are genuinely human, and the sharp, witty dialogue reflects the realities of war and the personalities of people coping with such stressful situations.

Kulish's journalistic instincts yield an excellent focus on detail, drawing upon actual experiences as an embedded reporter with a Marine helicopter squadron for the Wall Street Journal.

The Marines themselves are by far the most likable characters the novel has to offer. In a fit of laughter and locker-room immaturity, several Marines armed with a camcorder play a prank at night on an easily frightened Stephens, yelling, "Gas!" and throwing him outside the tent.

"Last One In" reveals the human aspect of the Marine Corps, as readers get to know the Marines as more than just tough teenagers with a taste for machine guns, dirty magazines and bootlegged alcohol. Stephens witnesses the deep camaraderie

among the troops and eventually becomes accepted by the Marines through time spent in long Humvee rides, talking about celebrities and enduring the more turbulent events of war.

The tragic, heart-rending climax of the novel brings a somber tone to this otherwise tongue-in-cheek satire, reminding us of the seriousness of war. Far from spoiling the book's overall humorous nature, it rather complements it in an emotional blend of lightheartedness and grief, giving depth to the novel and revealing the characters' strong bonds.

"Last One In" is a humorous adventure full of memorable, laugh-out-loud moments, but it also illustrates some of the darker realities of war.

It may not measure up to the scope of Joseph Heller's "Catch-22" (which Kulish describes "as close to perfect as any novel ever written"), but it's still an excellent read and a sharp satire on the Iraq War and our culture in these times.

## What's on your

# iPod?

