

# 'Men Who Stare' satirizes war



BY ANDY MOORE  
Reviewer

"The Men Who Stare at Goats" shows how reality sometimes is stranger than fiction. At the beginning of the movie, text appears on the screen stating this film is more real than you will believe.

Grant Heslov, nominated for an Academy Award for "Good Night and Good Luck" in 2003, makes his directorial debut in this absurd dark comedy. Based on a book by journalist and documentary filmmaker Jon Ronson, "The Men Who Stare at Goats" tells the true story of the U.S. Army's application of mind powers in warfare.

Set during the current Iraq War, the movie tells the story of young reporter Bob Wilton, played and narrated by Ewan McGregor, who meets special forces agent Lyn Cassady, played by

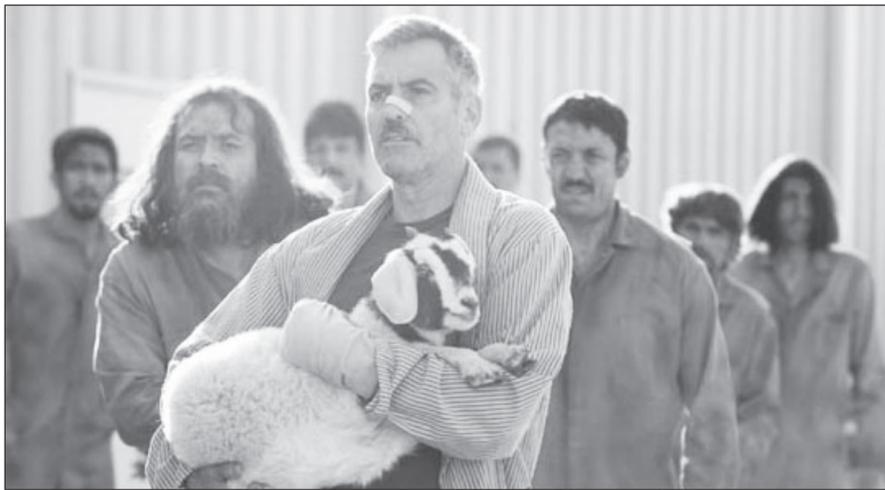


Photo provided by rottentomatoes.com

George Clooney. As Cassady, Clooney shows the same dry sense of humor and self-assurance seen in "O Brother, Where Art Thou."

He claims to have participated in an experimental, classified military unit called the New Earth Army, a unit of warrior monks who are basically real-life versions of Jedi Knights. This unit uses such powers as invisibility, remote viewing, seeing into the future, telepathy and telekinesis. Wilton sees this as the story of a

lifetime and follows Cassady to Iraq on a mission.

With a completely straight face and utter certainty, Cassady tells the reporter he is a Jedi warrior. The irony in casting Clooney, the self-proclaimed Jedi, alongside a bewildered McGregor is that it was actually McGregor who played the young Obi-Wan Kenobi in the latest "Star Wars" prequels.

This is one of Clooney's three movies being released this year, including "Fantastic Mr. Fox"

and "Up in the Air," still pending release. The film's all-star cast includes Kevin Spacey as a gifted but obnoxious recruit who soon becomes the antagonist. Jeff Bridges plays Bill Django, the man who founded the New Earth Army after his experiences in the Vietnam War led him to embrace new age philosophies of the 1960s and 1970s. Django is an extremely laid-back military hippie with an obscenely long ponytail draped over his shoul-

der, and looks like an Army version of The Dude from "The Big Lebowski."

Describing this very peculiar film is difficult, but it is based on the life and work of retired Lt. Col. Jim Channon and his First Earth Battalion. In 1978, he wrote a 150-page illustrated manual called "Evolutionary Tactics," with instructions on using extra-sensory abilities in combat, based on the philosophy that there are no limits to human capabilities. In other words, "Be all that you can be."

Despite the fact that this was a real program with extremely noble objectives, the film turns its whole history into a satire that mocks warfare in general. Bridges said in an interview with the Los Angeles Times that although Channon's proposed methods seem outlandish, they are a superior alternative to modern warfare.

"A lot of the stuff is far-fetched and easy to laugh at but in my own personal view, it's headed in the right direction," Bridges said. "We have to find some way besides killing each other."

"The Men Who Stare at Goats" bravely retells the bizarre story of defying conventional warfare for the sake of human evolution. The conjectural history behind the film can be found at neweartharmy.com and firstearthbattalion.org.



Photo provided by abc.go.com

## Aliens invade prime time

BY BRENNA MCDERMOTT  
Opinions Editor

ABC's new sci-fi drama features aliens, reptiles, politics, religion and universal health care. "V" the cult sci-fi franchise of the 1980s, chronicled the arrival of the Visitors, also known as the Vs. This 2009 adaptation debuted Nov. 5 to 13.9 million viewers and a whole new generation of sci-fi nerds.

"V" airs Tuesday nights at 7 p.m. Central Standard Time on ABC.

One morning, alien ships arrive and hover over the world's major cities, predictably inciting fear and awe. The ships soon reveal themselves as "Visitors" and appear to be human. High Commander Anna, played by the Audrey Hepburn-esque Morena Baccarin, who seems inhumanly beautiful, apologizes for scaring all of humanity and says to the world, "We are of peace. Always." The world erupts in applause. And all I can think is, "You idiots!"

The rest of the ensemble cast, untrusting priest Jack Landry played by Joel Gretsch, single-mom/FBI agent Erica Evans played by the fantastic Elizabeth Mitchell of LOST, her son Tyler played by Logan Huffman, frustrated news anchor Chad Decker played by Scott Wolf and many others, try to make sense of the arrival of the Vs, as they are affectionately nicknamed (because our news outlets can't resist giving nicknames to everything and everyone). And though "V" may seem like a show only for the Star Trek crowd, the underlying message is universal.

All the characters have to ask themselves whether they like new things — we all deal with change on a regular basis. The show seems pretty evenly divided between those who distrust the Vs and those who welcome the Vs with open arms and freely accept their healing methods with no questions asked, like Tyler, who visits the Vs' "mother ship" and becomes a "peace ambassador" to the Vs. The cynics are more hesitant to accept the Vs, like Father Landry, who cautions his church (suddenly full of patrons) to ask questions, or the mysterious Ryan Nichols, played by Morris Chestnut, who seems to have a past involving the Vs.

Those who get pulled into the free health care and the seemingly human visitors seem to have no paranoia or cynicism. How do visitors from across

the universe speak all of Earth's languages? How do they know our customs? They vaguely avoid questions about their home planet. Their leader, Anna, claims that their race has learned to expel all negative feelings. Most frightening of all: They know how to manipulate the media. As Anna says before her live interview with Chad, "Just be sure not to ask anything that would paint us in a negative light." Shudder. And after providing free medical care and sharing their advances in technology, they want absolutely nothing? Now I know they aren't human.

The cynics (and boy, would I be in with this crowd) find out the conspiracy behind it all: The Vs have been living among humanity for sometime, but they aren't really human. They are reptilian creatures hiding in human suits that plan to enslave the entire world. And I mean reptilian — green skin, yellowish eyes and all. If you're like me, you wonder where they put their tails in their human suits.

As Anna says during her interview with Chad, "Embracing change is never easy. But the reward for doing so can be far greater than anything you can imagine." It might seem like a far-fetched drama for a major broadcasting network like ABC, but I applaud ABC for taking some creative risks in recent years with programs like LOST, Flash-Forward and V. The resistance, the humans who know the truth, now have to decide who to trust, because they know anyone can be a nasty reptile in a human suit.

The real question, though, is whether we as an audience will trust the show to take us to an interesting place. Although it seems like many themes in the show already have been done (alien ships lighting up over major cities a la "Independence Day," aliens wishing to enslave humanity a la every alien invasion movie ever made), it was a suspenseful and eerie hour of television. Although it might seem like "V" will have a difficult time going anywhere original, it's worth jumping on for the ride. With this invasion of unique television programming, where bland comedies or more medical dramas might pop up, giving this kind of alien, interesting and unique show a chance is definitely a good idea.

## Weezer morphs again



BY COREY BOMMEL  
Reviewer

They're easily accessible, fun to sing along to and a great companion on the dance floor. They dominate the radio waves so that you can't escape their grasp. This review examines rock albums with a healthy heaping of pop, and this week's newest pop-rock gems come from Weezer and Say Anything.

Weezer's seventh album, "Raditude," continues the band's trend of shying away from their past sounds, possibly alienating hardcore fans. Gone are the introspective confessions penned for their breakout albums such as "Pinkerton," or the first two self-titled albums. It has become harder to tell if songs are written ironically or just to sell albums to the lowest common denominator — a question longtime followers and critics are bound to debate on Internet forums for weeks to come.

Although Weezer's last release saw front man Rivers Cuomo coming to terms somewhat with his midlife crisis, "Raditude" is written nostalgically through the eyes of an awkward horny teenager. This is the album my generation listened to in high school, complete with pop-rock hooks, sophomoric lyrics about lust and awkwardness and raging pubescent hormones.

The opening song "(If You're Wondering If I Want You To) I Want You To," a peppy song about awkward dates to Best Buy and watching "Titanic," kicks off with this concept. It ends up being the most focused, likeable song on "Raditude." "I'm Your Daddy," which is creepy coming from Cuomo's middle-aged lips, sounds almost like a Killers song. He is too old to be selling us lines like "You are my baby tonight / And I'm your daddy."

"Can't Stop Partying" probably will be the track everyone talks about. Diehards will hate it for its content, but others will add it to their party mixes. Weezer enlisted the help of Lil' Wayne to rap about girls, dancing and Patron. It's hard to tell if this song should be taken as ironic or not. This album loses its focus from the point on — slow jams mix with upbeat songs, and the flow



Photo provided by myspace.com/weezer

is broken. Weezer threw in a sitar-infused "Love is the Answer" and a song about teens hanging out at the mall, aptly titled "At the Mall." Lyrics don't have any real meaning in most of these songs — "take the elevator to the escalator ride it down and start again!" is sung with no real point.

"I Don't Want to Let You Go" spoke personally to me despite its simple lyrics and closes the album on a soft note. For a little extra content, splurge on the deluxe edition of the album for four bonus tracks. These four tracks bring a much harder sound and would have been a welcome addition

to the standard release. "Raditude" does have its shining moments if the band is not considered pre-millennium Weezer but rather just a band having fun with their music. It's fun to listen to if pop-rock is what you are looking for, but look to earlier Weezer releases for a more mature sound.

Los Angeles rockers Say Anything released their self-titled album this week, marking their fourth release. This album is an attempt at a more pop-friendly sound but comes out much more punk. Sure, the songs are catchy and radio friendly, but the amount of angst spewed brings the pep factor down.

Max Bemis, Say Anything's lead singer, projects his unique voice, rhyming unique lyrics in an

unmatched style.

"Fed to Death" draws you in with acoustic guitar before becoming much grittier, culminating in a melodic piano outro. It has the perfect catchy hooks to draw interest to the rest of the album.

"Hate Everything" has a verse structure similar to the Clash's version of "I Fought the Law." This song's lyrics are filled with hatred: Bemis spits "I hate everyone / upon this cursed Earth."

The pop verses can be found in the hand claps and background string accompaniment on "Do Better," or the slow guitar strums of "Cemetery." Say Anything's harder side shows with "Mara and Me" and "She Won't Follow You," where callous lyrics and abrasive guitar solos rule.

There are some humorous breaks in some of the songs, such as "Property," that bring out the band's lighter side. It is a politically incorrect song about a girl being owned by the man she's with, complete with a lyrical interlude that would make feminists rage. The man puts his band's fame before the girl, telling her "If you do have to sell your body, once or twice or seven times, it'll be worth it."

The final track, "Ahhh ... Men," closes the album with a bitter-sweet note, starting slow and building to an epic ending, arguably one of the best tracks on the album. I had never heard anything from this band before reviewing this, but I was impressed. "Say Anything" is a great CD with passionate lyrical content, fused with a catchy alternative pop-rock style.