

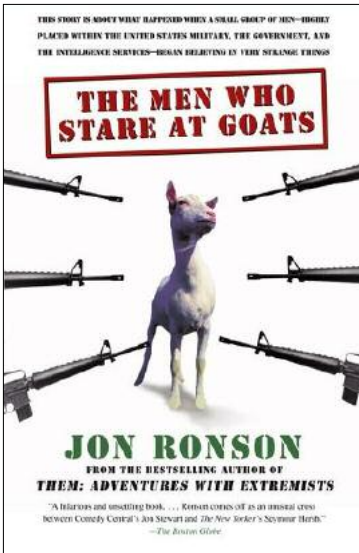


**Jon  
Ronson**

**The  
Road  
To  
Abu  
Ghraib**

**ColdType**

AN EXCERPT FROM HIS BOOK  
**THE MEN WHO  
STARE AT GOATS**



AN EXCERPT FROM

# THE MEN WHO STARE AT GOATS

Published by Simon & Schuster New York  
Originally published by Picador, London

ISBN 0743270606

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## THE AUTHOR

**Jon Ronson** is a writer and documentary film maker. His book, **The Men Who Stare At Goats** was a UK bestseller and is now available in North America in paperback. His previous book, *THEM: Adventures With Extremists* was longlisted for The Guardian newspaper's First Book Award, until it was disqualified for not being, strictly speaking, his first book.

He grew up in Cardiff and began his journalistic career as an award-winning columnist for the magazine *Time Out*. He also wrote the popular *Human Zoo* column for *The Guardian* and produced the BBC Radio 4 documentary *Hotel Auschwitz*. For Channel 4, Jon has made the five part series *the Secret Rulers of the World*, multi award-winning *Tottenham Ayatollah*, *New Klan*, *New York to California (A Great British Odyssey)*, *Dr Paisley, I Presume*, the four-part series *Critical Condition*, and the late-night chat show *For The Love Of...* For BBC2 he made the six part series *The Ronson Mission*. In the US, he is a contributor to National Public Radio's *All Things Considered* and *This American Life*.

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*In the wake of Vietnam, the US military was demoralised and prey to some fairly crazy ideas, including thinking that they could train ‘super soldiers’ with psychic powers ...*

**I**t is the summer of 1983. Major General Albert Stubblebine III is sitting behind his desk in Arlington, Virginia, and he is staring at his wall, upon which hang his numerous military awards. They detail a long and distinguished career. He is the US army’s chief of intelligence, with 16,000 soldiers under his command. He controls numerous covert counter-intelligence and spying units, scattered throughout the world. He would be in charge of the prisoner-of-war interrogations, too, except this is 1983, and the war is cold, not hot.

He looks past his awards to the wall itself. There is something he feels he needs to do even though the thought of it frightens him. He thinks about the choice he has to make. He can stay in his office or he

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can go into the next office. He has made his decision. He is going into the next office. He stands up, moves out from behind his desk and begins to walk. He thinks to himself, what is the atom mostly made up of anyway? Space!

He quickens his pace.

What am I mostly made up of? Atoms!

He is almost at a jog now.

What is the wall mostly made up of, he thinks. Atoms! All I have to do is merge the spaces. The wall is an illusion.

Then General Stubblebine bangs his nose hard on the wall of his office.

He is confounded by his continual failure to walk through his wall. There is no doubt in his mind that the ability to pass through objects will one day be a common tool in the intelligence-gathering arsenal. And when that happens, well, is it too naive to believe it would herald the dawning of a world without war? Who would want to screw around with an army that could do that?

These powers are attainable, so the only question is, by whom? Who in the military is already geared towards this kind of thing? And then the answer comes to him. Special Forces! This is why, in the late summer of 1983, General Stubblebine flies down to Fort Bragg in North Carolina.

Fort Bragg is vast – a town guarded by armed soldiers, with a mall, a cinema, restaurants, golf courses, and accommodation for 45,000 soldiers and their families. The general's meeting is in the Special Forces Command Centre. "I'm coming down here with an idea," he

begins. The commanders nod.

“If you have a unit operating outside the protection of mainline units, what happens if somebody gets wounded?” He surveys the blank faces around the room. “Psychic healing!” he says. “If you use your mind to heal, you can probably come out with your whole team alive and intact.”

The Special Forces commanders don’t look particularly interested in psychic healing.

“OK,” says General Stubblebine. The reception he’s getting is really quite chilly. “Wouldn’t it be a neat idea if you could teach somebody to do this?” General Stubblebine rifles through his bag and produces, with a flourish, bent cutlery.

Silence. He tries again.

“Animals!” says General Stubblebine.

The Special Forces commanders glance at one another.

“Stopping the hearts of animals,” he continues. “Bursting the hearts of animals. This is the idea I’m coming in with. You have access to animals, right?”

“Uh,” say Special Forces. “Not really ...”

General Stubblebine’s trip to Fort Bragg was a disaster. It still makes him blush to recall it. He ended up taking early retirement in 1984. His doomed attempt to walk through his wall and his seemingly futile journey to Fort Bragg have remained undisclosed until the moment he told me about them in the Tarrytown Hilton in upstate New York on a cold winter’s day two years into the war on terror. “You know,” he said, “I really thought they were great ideas. I still do.”

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What the general didn't know, as he proposed his clandestine animal heart-bursting programme, was that Special Forces were concealing the fact that they did have access to animals, there were a hundred goats in a shed just a few yards down the road.

General Stubblebine, I discovered, had commanded a secret military psychic spying unit between 1981 and 1984. The unit wasn't quite as glamorous as it might sound, he said. It was basically half a dozen soldiers sitting inside a heavily guarded, condemned clapboard building in Fort Meade, Maryland, trying to be psychic. Officially the unit did not exist. The psychics were what is known in military jargon as Black Op. When one of them got a vision – of a Russian warship, or a future event – he would sketch it, and pass the sketches up the chain of command. And then, in 1995, the CIA closed them down.

I tracked down a former Special Forces psychic spy to Hawaii. Glenn Wheaton, retired sergeant first class, was a big man with a tight crop of red hair and a Vietnam-vet-style handlebar moustache. He told me how in the mid-1980s Special Forces undertook a secret initiative, codenamed Project Jedi, to create super soldiers – soldiers with super powers. One such power was the ability to walk into a room and instantly be aware of every detail; that was level one.

Level two, he said, was intuition – making correct decisions. “Somebody runs up to you and says, “There's a fork in the road. Do we turn left or do we turn right?” And you go” – Glenn snapped his fingers – “We go right!”

“What was the level above that?” I asked.

“Invisibility,” said Glenn. “After a while we adapted it to just finding

a way of not being seen.”

“What was the level above invisibility?” I asked.

“Uh,” said Glenn. He paused for a moment. “We had a master sergeant who could stop the heart of a goat ... just by wanting the goat’s heart to stop. He did it at least once.”

“Where did this happen?” I asked.

“Down in Fort Bragg,” he said, “at a place called Goat Lab.”

Goat Lab, which exists to this day, is secret. Most of the soldiers who live and work within Fort Bragg don’t even know of its existence. Those military personnel not in the loop, said Glenn, assume that the rickety clapboard hospital buildings dating from the second world war, are derelict. In fact, they are filled with one hundred de-bleated goats.

Goat Lab was originally created as a clandestine laboratory to provide surgical training for Special Forces soldiers. During this more conventional phase of the goats’ lives, each one was taken through a soundproofed door into a bunker and shot in the leg using a bolt gun. Then the Special Forces trainees would rush the goat into an operating theatre, anaesthetise it, dress the wound and nurse it back to health. Goat Lab used to be called Dog Lab, but it turned out that nobody wanted to do all that to dogs, so they switched to goats. It was apparently determined within Special Forces that it was just about impossible to form an emotional bond with a goat.

I pressed Glenn: “Whose original idea was the goat staring?”

Glenn sighed. He said a name. Over the next few months, others gave me the same name. It kept coming up. It is a name few people



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outside the military have ever heard. But this one man, armed with a passion for the occult and a belief in superhuman powers, has had a profound and hitherto unchronicled impact on almost every aspect of US army life. General Stubblebine's doomed attempt to pass through his wall was inspired by this man, as was – at the other end of the scale of secrecy – the US army's famous TV recruitment slogan, "Be All You Can Be".

The man was named Jim Channon, and he, too, lives in Hawaii.

Lieutenant Colonel Jim Channon (retired) remembers exactly how it all began, the one precise moment that sparked the whole thing off. It was his first day in combat in Vietnam, and he found himself flying in one of 400 helicopters, thundering above the Song Dong Nai river, towards a place known to him as War Zone D. They landed among the bodies of the Americans who had failed to capture War Zone D four days earlier.

"The soldiers," said Jim, "had been cooked in the sun and laid out like a wall."

An American soldier to Jim's right jumped out of his helicopter and began firing wildly. Jim shouted at him to stop but the soldier couldn't hear him. So Jim leapt on him and wrestled him to the ground.

And then a sniper fired a single shot at Jim's platoon. Everyone just stood there. The sniper fired again, and the Americans started running towards the one and only palm tree in sight. Jim was running so fast that he skidded face first into it. He heard someone behind him shout: "VC in black pyjamas one hundred metres."

About 20 seconds later, Jim thought to himself, Why is nobody

shooting? What are they waiting for? They can't be waiting for me to instruct them to shoot, can they?

“TAKE HIM OUT!” screamed Jim.

And so the soldiers started shooting, and when it was over a small team walked forward to find the body. But, for all the gunfire, they had failed to hit the sniper. Moments later, the sniper killed one of Jim's soldiers with a bullet through his lungs. His name was Private First Class Shaw.

When he returned to the US, it was Jim's job to drive around the country to meet parents and give them citations and the personal belongings of their dead children. It was during these long drives that Jim replayed in his mind the moments that had led to the death of Private First Class Shaw. Jim had yelled for his soldiers to kill the sniper, and they had all, as one, and with every shot, fired high. “This came to be understood as a common reaction when fresh soldiers fire on humans,” Jim said. “It is not a natural thing to shoot people.”

(What Jim had seen tallied with studies conducted after the second world war by the military historian, General SLA Marshall. He interviewed thousands of American infantrymen and concluded that only 15-20% of them had actually shot to kill. The rest had fired high or not fired at all, busying themselves however else they could.)

It was heartbreaking for Jim to realise that Private First Class Shaw had died because his fellow soldiers were impulsively guileless and kind-hearted, and not the killing machines the army wanted them to be. “The kind of person attracted to military service has a great deal of difficulty being ... cunning. We suffered in Vietnam from not being

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cunning. We just presented ourselves in our righteousness and we got our butts shot off.”

And so, in 1977, Jim wrote to the vice chief of staff for the army in the Pentagon, saying he wanted the army to learn how to be more cunning. He wanted to go on a fact-finding mission. The Pentagon agreed to pay Jim’s salary and expenses.

It was early in Steven Halpern’s career as a composer of a series of meditation and subliminal CDs (titles include *Achieving Your Ideal Weight* and *Nurturing Your Inner Child*) that he met Jim Channon in 1978 at a New Age conference in California. Jim said he wanted somehow to use Steven’s music to make the American soldier more peaceful, and he also hoped to deploy Steven’s music in the battlefield to make the enemy feel more peaceful too. “He said he needed to convince the higher-up military brass; the top ranks,” said Steven. “These are people who had never known a meditative state. I think he wanted to get them into it without naming it.”

Or maybe hypnotise them with subliminal sounds?

Steven told me a little about the power of subliminal sounds. One time, he said, an American evangelical church blasted the congregation with silent sounds during the hymns. At the end of the service, they found their donations had tripled.

Almost all the people Jim visited during his two-year journey were, like Steven Halpern, Californians. Jim went through Reichian rebirthing, primal arm-wrestling, and naked hot-tub encounter sessions at the Esalen Institute. He saw it as America’s role “to lead the world to paradise”.

He returned from his journey in 1979 and produced what he called *First Earth Battalion Operations Manual*. The manual was a 125-page mixture of drawings and graphs and maps and polemical essays and point by point redesigns of every aspect of military life. The new battlefield uniform would include pouches for ginseng regulators, divining tools, foodstuffs to enhance night vision and a loudspeaker that would automatically emit “indigenous music and words of peace”. Soldiers would carry with them into hostile countries “symbolic animals” such as lambs. The soldiers would learn to give the enemy “an automatic hug”.

There was, Jim accepted, a possibility that these measures might not be enough to pacify an enemy. In that eventuality, the loudspeakers attached to the uniforms would be switched to broadcast “discordant sounds”. Bigger loudspeakers would be mounted on military vehicles, each playing acid rock music out of synch with the other to confuse the enemy.

Back on base, robes and hoods would be worn for the mandatory First Earth Battalion rituals. The misogynistic and aggressive old chants (“I don’t know but I’ve been told, Eskimo pussy is mighty cold ...”) would be phased out and replaced by a new one: “Om.”

First Earth Battalion trainees would “attain the power to pass through objects such as walls, bend metal with their minds, walk on fire, calculate faster than a computer, stop their own hearts with no ill effects, see into the future, be able to hear and see other people’s thoughts”.

Now all Jim had to do was sell these ideas to the military.

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He presented his great plan to his commanders at the officers' club in Fort Knox in the spring of 1979 – four-star generals and major generals and brigadier generals and colonels – and he had them captivated. Word spread.

General Stubblebine was a West Point man with a master's degree in chemical engineering from Columbia. He learned about the First Earth Battalion when he was stationed at the army's Intelligence School in Arizona. Stubblebine's tenure as commander of Military Intelligence coincided with huge slashes in his budget. These were the post-Vietnam “draw down” days, and the Pentagon wanted their soldiers to achieve more with less money. Learning how to walk through walls and the like was an ambitious but inexpensive enterprise. And so it was that Jim Channon's madcap vision, triggered by his post-combat depression, found its way into the highest levels of the US military.

In May 2003, shortly after President Bush had announced “the end of major hostilities” in the war in Iraq, a little piece of the First Earth Battalion philosophy was put into practice by PsyOps (US army Psychological Operations) behind a disused railway station in the tiny Iraqi town of al-Qa'im, on the Syrian border. The people of al-Qa'im did not know that Baghdad had fallen to coalition troops, so Sergeant Mark Hadsell and his PsyOps unit were there to distribute leaflets bearing the news. Adam Piore, a *Newsweek* journalist, was tagging along, covering the “end of major hostilities” from the PsyOps perspective.

At that time it was pretty calm in al-Qa'im. By the end of the year, US

forces would be under frequent guerrilla bombardment in the town. In November 2003, one of Saddam Hussein's air defence commanders – Major General Abed Hamed Mowhoush – would die under interrogation right there at the disused train station. (“Natural causes,” said the official US military statement. “Mowhoush's head was not hooded during questioning.”)

One night, Adam was hanging out in the squadron command centre when Sergeant Hadsell wandered over to him. He winked conspiratorially and said, “Go look out by where the prisoners are.” Adam knew that the prisoners were housed in a yard behind the train station. The army had parked a convoy of shipping containers back there, and as Adam wandered towards them he could see a bright flashing light. He could hear music too. It was Metallica's *Enter Sandman*. From a distance it looked as though some weird and slightly sinister disco was taking place.

A young American soldier was holding a really bright light and he was flashing it on and off, on and off, into the shipping container. *Enter Sandman* was echoing violently around the steel walls. Adam stood there for a moment and watched. The song ended and then, immediately, it began again.

The young soldier holding the light glanced over at Adam. He carried on flashing it and said, “You need to go away now.”

“Did you look inside the container?” I asked Adam when he was telling me this story two months later, back in the *Newsweek* offices in New York.

“No,” said Adam. “When the guy told me that I had to go away, I

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went away.” He paused. “But it was kind of obvious what was going on in there.”

Adam called *Newsweek* from his cellphone and pitched them a number of stories. Their favourite was the Metallica one. “I was told to write it as a humorous thing,” said Adam. “They wanted a complete play-list.” So Adam asked around. It turned out that songs blasted at prisoners included the soundtrack to the movie *XXX*; a song that went *Burn Motherfucker Burn*; and, rather more surprisingly, the *I Love You* song from Barney the Purple Dinosaur’s show, along with songs from Sesame Street.

I first learned about the Barney torture story on May 19, 2003, when it ran as a funny, “And finally”-type item on NBC’s Today show:

Ann Curry (news anchor): US forces in Iraq are using what some are calling a cruel and unusual tool to break the resistance of Iraqi POWs, and trust me, a lot of parents would agree! Some prisoners are being forced to listen to Barney the Purple Dinosaur sing the *I Love You* song for 24 straight hours ...

NBC cut to a clip from Barney, in which the purple dinosaur flopped around amid his gang of ever-smiling stage-school kids. Everyone in the studio laughed. Ann Curry put on a funny kind of “poor-little-prisoners”-type voice to report the story.

It’s the First Earth Battalion, I thought.

I had no doubt that the notion of using music as a form of mental torture had been popularised and perfected within the military as a distortion of Jim’s manual. Before he came along, military music was confined to the marching-band-type and other rousing music to fire up

the troops. It was Jim who came up with the idea of using loudspeakers in the battlefield to broadcast “discordant sounds” such as “acid-rock music out of synch” to confuse the enemy, and the use of similar sounds in the interrogation arena.

I called Jim right away.

“They’re rounding people up in Iraq, taking them to a shipping container, and blasting them repeatedly with children’s music while repeatedly flashing a bright light at them,” I said. “Is that one of your legacies?”

“Yes!” Jim said. He sounded thrilled. “I’m so pleased to hear that!”

Why?

“They’re obviously trying to lighten the environment,” he said, “and give these people some comfort, instead of beating them to death!”

I think Jim was imagining something more like a crèche than a steel container at the back of a disused railway station. “I guess if they play them Barney and Sesame Street once or twice,” I said, “that’s lightening and comforting, but if they play it, say, 50,000 times into a steel box in the desert heat, that’s more ... uh ... torturous?”

“I’m no psychologist,” said Jim, a little sharply.

“But the use of music ...” I said.

“That’s what the First Earth Battalion did,” said Jim. “It opened the military mind to how to use music.”

Barney had become the funniest joke of the war. Within hours of Adam Piore’s Newsweek article appearing, the internet was aflame with Barney torture-related wisecracks such as “An endless loop of the theme song from Titanic by Celine Dion would be infinitely worse!



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They'd confess everything within 10 minutes!"

Adam himself had told me that he was finding the impact of his Barney story quite baffling. It was picked up everywhere, and was invariably treated as a humorous story. "It was sort of outrageous to be in this shit hole up on the border in an abandoned train station, totally uncomfortable, unable to take showers, sleeping on cots, and when we finally got cable a couple of days later, scrolling across the screen is this ... Barney story."

Kenneth Roth, of Human Rights Watch, was clearly sick of talking about Barney by the time I caught up with him. "They have," said Kenneth, "been very savvy in that respect."

"Savvy?" I said.

He seemed to be implying that the Barney story had been deliberately disseminated just so all the human rights violations being committed in post-war Iraq could be reduced to this one joke.

When I returned to the UK, I found I had been sent seven photographs. They were taken by a *Newsweek* photographer, Patrick Andrade, in May 2003, and captioned, "An escaped detainee is returned to a holding area in al-Qa'im, Iraq." There is no sign of loudspeakers, but the pictures do show the interior of one of the shipping containers behind the disused railway station.

In the first of the photographs, two powerfully built American soldiers are pushing the detainee through a landscape of corrugated iron and barbed wire. He doesn't look hard to push. He is as skinny as a rake. A rag covers his face. One of the soldiers has a handgun pressed to the back of his neck. In all the other photographs, the

detainee is inside the shipping container. He is barefoot, a thin plastic strap binds his ankles and he's crouched against the silver corrugated wall. The metal floor is covered with brown dust and pools of liquid. Right at the back of the shipping container, deep in the shadows, you can just make out the figure of another detainee huddled on the floor, his face masked by a hood.

Now the rag only covers the first man's eyes, so you can see his face, which is lined, like an old man's, but his wispy moustache reveals that he's probably about 17. There's an open wound on one of his skinny arms. He might have done terrible things. I know nothing about him other than these seven fragments of his life. But I can say this. In the last photograph he is screaming so hard it almost looks as if he's laughing.

A week or two passed. And then the other photographs appeared. They were of Iraqi prisoners in the Abu Ghraib jail on the outskirts of Baghdad. A 21-year-old US reservist called Private Lynndie England had been snapped leading a naked man across the floor on a leash. She featured in many of the photographs. It was she who knelt laughing behind a pile of naked prisoners. They had been forced to build themselves into some kind of human pyramid. The pictures could hardly have been more repulsive. Here were young Muslim men – captives – being humiliated and overwhelmed by what looked like grotesque US sexual decadence. It struck me as an unhappy coincidence that Lynndie England and her friends had created a tableau that was the epitome of what would most disgust and repel the Iraqi people, those people whose hearts and minds were the great

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prize for the coalition forces – and also for the Islamic fundamentalists.

The US Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, flew to the jail. He told the assembled troops that the events shown in the pictures were the work of “a few who have betrayed our values and sullied the reputation of our country. It was a body blow to me. Those who committed crimes will be dealt with, and the American people will be proud of it, and the Iraqi people will be proud.”

Lynndie England was arrested. By then she was back in the US, five months pregnant, performing desk duties at Fort Bragg. Then word got out through Lynndie England’s lawyers that her defence was that she had been acting under orders, softening up the prisoners for interrogation, and that the people giving the orders were none other than Military Intelligence, the unit once commanded by Major General Albert Stubblebine III.

It was sad to remember all that nose-banging and cutlery-bending, and see how General Stubblebine’s good intentions had come to this. I called the general and asked him, “What was your first thought when you saw the photographs?”

“My first thought,” he said, “was ‘Oh shit!’”

“What was your second thought?”

“Thank God that’s not me at the bottom of that pyramid.”

“What was your third thought?”

“My third thought,” said the general, “was ‘This was not started by some youngsters down in the trenches. This had to have been driven by the intelligence community.’ Yep. Someone much higher in

intelligence deliberately designed this, advocated it, directed it, trained people to do it. No doubt about it. And whoever that is, he's in deep hiding right now."

"Military Intelligence?" I asked. "Your old people?"

"It's a possibility," he said. "My guess is no."

"Who then?"

"The Agency," he said (meaning the CIA).

"In conjunction with PsyOps?" I asked.

"I'm sure they had a hand in it," said the general. "Sure. No doubt about it. You know, if they'd just stuck to Jim Channon's ideas ... "

"By Jim Channon's ideas, do you mean the loud music?" I asked.

"Yeah," said the general.

"So the idea of blasting prisoners with loud music," I said, "definitely originated with the First Earth Battalion?"

"Definitely," said the general. "No question. So did the frequencies." Frequencies, he said, dis-equilibrate people. "There's all kinds of things you can do with the frequencies. Jesus, you can take a frequency and make a guy have diarrhoea, make a guy sick to the stomach. I don't understand why they even had to do this crap you saw in the photographs. They should have just blasted them with frequencies!"

On May 12, 2004, Lynndie England gave an interview to the Denver-based TV reporter Brian Maas:

Maas : There's a photograph that was taken of you holding an Iraqi prisoner on a leash. How did that come about?

England : I was instructed by persons in higher rank to "stand there,

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hold this leash and look at the camera”. And they took a picture for PsyOps and that’s all I know ... I was told to stand there, give the thumbs-up, smile, stand behind all of the naked Iraqis in the pyramid [have my picture taken].

Maas : Who told you to do that?

England : Persons in my higher chain of command ... They were for PsyOps reasons and the reasons worked. So to us, we were doing our job, which meant we were doing what we were told, and the outcome was what they wanted. They’d come back and they’d look at the pictures and they’d state, “Oh, that’s a good tactic, keep it up. That’s working. This is working. Keep doing it, it’s getting what we need.”

I was beginning to wonder whether the scenarios had, in fact, been carefully calculated by a PsyOps cultural specialist to present a vision that would most repel young Iraqi men. Could it be that the acts captured in the photographs were not the point, and that the photographs themselves were the thing? Were the photographs intended to be shown only to individual Iraqi prisoners to scare them into cooperating, rather than getting out and scaring the whole world?

Joseph Curtis (not his real name) worked the night shift at the Abu Ghraib prison in the autumn of 2003. When I talked to him he had been exiled by the army to a town in Germany. The threat of a court martial hung over him. He had previously given an interview about what he had seen to an international press agency, thus incurring the wrath of his superiors. Even so, against his own better judgement, and against his lawyers’ advice, he agreed to meet me, secretly, at an Italian restaurant in June 2004.

We sat on the balcony of the restaurant and he pushed his food around his plate. “You ever see *The Shining*?” he said.

“Yes,” I said.

“Abu Ghraib was like the Overlook Hotel,” he said. “It was haunted.”

I assumed Joseph meant the place was full of spooks: intelligence officers – but the look on his face made me realise he didn’t.

“It was haunted,” he said. “It got so dark at night. So dark. Under Saddam, people were dissolved in acid there. Women raped by dogs. Brains splattered all over the walls. This was worse than the Overlook Hotel because it was real.

“It was like the building wanted to be back in business,” he said.

Joseph remarked that he couldn’t believe how much money was floating around the army these days. These were the golden days, in budgetary terms. This was not a side issue. In January 2004, the influential think tank and lobbying group, GlobalSecurity, revealed that George W Bush’s government had filtered more money into their Black Budget than any other administration in American history. Black Budgets often just fund Black Ops – highly sensitive and deeply shady projects such as assassination squads, and so on. But Black Budgets also fund schemes so bizarre that their disclosure might lead voters to believe their leaders have taken leave of their senses. Bush’s administration had, by January 2004, channelled approximately \$30bn into the Black Budget – to be spent on God knows what.

“Abu Ghraib,” Joseph was telling me, “was a tourist attraction. I remember one time I was woken up by two captains. ‘Where’s the death chamber?’ They wanted to see the rope and the lever. When

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Rumsfeld came to visit, he didn't want to talk to the soldiers. All he wanted to see was the death chamber."

Joseph took a bite of his food.

"Yeah, the beast in man really came out at Abu Ghraib," he said.

"You mean in the photographs?" I asked.

"Everywhere," he said. "The senior leadership were screwing around with the lower ranks ... "

I told Joseph I didn't understand what he meant.

He said, "The senior leaders were having sex with the lower ranks. The detainees were raping each other."

"Did you ever see any ghosts?" I asked him.

"There was a darkness about the place," he replied.

Joseph was in charge of the super-classified computer network at Abu Ghraib. His job didn't take him into the isolation block, even though it was just down the corridor, but on one occasion he was invited to see the model planes someone had made – and also to take a look at the "high values". (The "high values" were what the US army called the suspected terrorists, insurgent leaders, rapists or child-molesters.) He accepted the invitation.

The isolation block was where all the photographs were taken – the human pyramid, and so on. Joseph turned the corner into the block.

"There were two MPs there," he told me. "And they were constantly screaming. 'SHUT THE FUCK UP!' They were screaming at some old guy, making him repeat a number over and over.

"'156403. 156403. 156403.'"

"The guy couldn't speak English. He couldn't pronounce the

numbers.

“‘I CAN’T FUCKING HEAR YOU.’

“‘156403. 156403.’

“‘LOUDER. FUCKING LOUDER.’

“‘Then they saw me. ‘Hey, Joseph! How are you? I CAN’T FUCKING HEAR YOU. LOUDER.’ “

Joseph said that the MPs had basically gone straight from McDonald’s to Abu Ghraib. They knew nothing. And now they were getting scapegoated because they happened to be identifiable in the photographs. They just did what the Military Intelligence people, Joseph’s people, told them to do. PsyOps were just a phone call away, Joseph said. And the Military Intelligence people all had PsyOps training anyway. The thing I had to remember about Military Intelligence was that they were the “nerdy-type guys at school. You know. The outcasts. Couple all that with ego, and a poster on the wall saying ‘By CG Approval’ – Commanding General Approval – and suddenly you have guys who think they govern the world. That’s what one of them said to me. ‘We govern the world.’ ”

An aide to Condoleezza Rice, the White House national security adviser, visited the prison, to inform the interrogators sternly that they weren’t getting useful enough information from the detainees. “Then,” Joseph said, “a whole platoon of Guantánamo people arrived. The word got around. ‘Oh God, the Gitmo guys are here.’ Bam! There they were. They took the place over.” Perhaps Guantánamo Bay was Experimental Lab Mark 1, and whatever esoteric techniques worked there were exported to Abu Ghraib.



## **THE ROAD TO ABU GHRAIB**

Perhaps this is the way it happened: in the late 1970s Jim Channon, traumatised from Vietnam, sought solace in the emerging human potential movement of California. He took his ideas back into the army and they struck a chord with the top brass who had never before seen themselves as New Age, but in their post-Vietnam funk it all made sense to them. Then, over the decades that followed, the army, being what it is, recovered its strength and saw that some of the ideas contained within Jim's manual could be used to shatter people rather than heal them. Those are the ideas that live on in the war on terror.

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PLACED WITHIN THE UNITED STATES MILITARY, THE GOVERNMENT, AND  
THE INTELLIGENCE SERVICES—BEGAN BELIEVING IN VERY STRANGE THINGS

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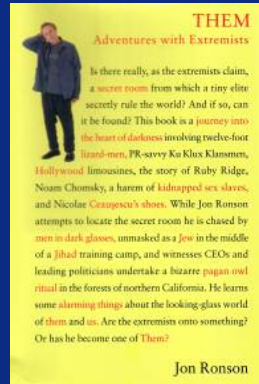
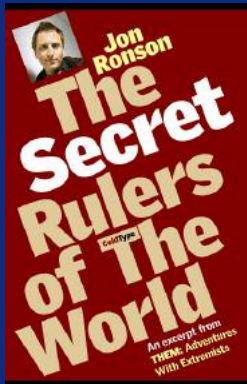
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