

Director Grant Heslov (2009)

Review by Jane Barnwell

What sounds like an obscure documentary about farming practices turns out to be an entertaining and thought provoking dig at the United States home and foreign policies.

Throughout the film the heavy-handed voiceover tells us what to think mirroring the delivery of the mainstream media. Comedic performances which pivot around the central theme of redemption are life affirming.

Based on Jon Ronson's non-fiction bestseller about a secret unit in the US military, the comedy follows reporter Bob Wilton (Ewan McGregor) who meets Lyn Cassady (George Clooney), a special forces agent on a mission in Iraq.

Cassady reveals the existence of a secret squad of psychic soldiers (trained to mind read, walk through walls and kill goats telepathically) whose goal is to end war. The founder Bill Django (Jeff Bridges) has gone missing and the search for him reveals another of the squad Larry Hooper (Kevin Spacey) is distorting the mission to suit his own agenda. Wilton - compelled by Cassady's crazy stories, goes along for the ride - their journey into the desert is intercut with the

psychic squad back story.

Cue - Montage of Django on sabbatical searching for a way to end war. Naked hot tub parties, yoga, dancing, hanging out and 7 years of hair growth later, he returns to the military with a lengthy grey plait and a necklace collection that would make Mr T proud. Transformed he sets about creating the environment for his troops to follow suit. The next makeover is the young Cassady – who is instructed to dance to Billy Idol and gets into his groove, flourishing in a place where difference is celebrated. This is fun to watch but Hooper brings the party to an end with his bitterness resulting in Django getting the boot and the whole operation being shut down.

Wilton and Cassady get lost in the desert and we wonder where this is going? When they discover Hooper's base the plot unravels a little. Their mission results in the release of prisoners and a shed full of goats. Cassady and Django take off in a helicopter leaving Wilton to inform the world of the secret base – as a reporter this is his ultimate role. Will this be the making of him? No. He and his story are a joke – the butt of the major news channels.

The ending packs the punch. Wilton's defeat does not result in failure; instead the film ends on a high as he and his voice over come into their own and leap physically through walls and psychologically through the boundaries constructed by the mainstream media. Refusing to be defined by these modes of address, Wilton defies the ideologies that bind him and the laws of physics by moving through matter.

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