

6.2 Text 1: The Men Who Stare at Goats

Written by journalist Jon Ronson and published in 2004, *The Men Who Stare at Goats* is a book about the First Earth Battalion, a secret unit created by the U.S. army in 1979 to explore the powers of the human mind. They believed that, using only their minds, soldiers could make themselves invisible, walk through walls and kill goats just by staring at them.

This is a true story. It 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 United States army's chief of intelligence, with 16,000 soldiers under his command. He controls the army's signals intelligence, their photographic and technical intelligence, their numerous covert¹ counter-intelligence units, and their secret military spying units, which are 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 can go into the next office. That is his choice. And he has made it.

He is going into the next office.

General Stubblebine looks a lot like Lee Marvin². In fact, it is widely rumored throughout Military Intelligence that he is Lee Marvin's identical twin. His face is craggy and unusually still, like an aerial photograph of some mountainous terrain³ taken from one of his spy planes. His eyes, forever darting around and full of kindness, seem to do the work for his whole face.

In fact he is not related to Lee Marvin at all. He likes the rumor because mystique can be beneficial to a career in intelligence. His job is to assess the intelligence gathered by his soldiers and pass his evaluations on to the deputy director of the CIA and the Chief of Staff for the Army, who in turn pass it up to the White House. He commands soldiers in Panama, Japan, Hawaii, and across Europe. His responsibilities being what they are, he knows he ought to have his own man at his side in case anything goes wrong during his journey into the next office.

Even so, he doesn't call for his assistant, Command Sergeant George Howell. This is something he feels he must do alone.

Am I ready? he thinks. *Yes, I am ready.*

He stands up, moves out from behind his desk, and begins to walk.

I mean, he thinks, *what is the atom mostly made up of anyway? Space!*

He quickens his pace.

What am I mostly made up of? he thinks. *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. What is destiny? Am I destined to stay in this room? Ha, no!*

35

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

Damn, he thinks.

Glossary

¹covert: undercover

²Lee Marvin: an American film and television actor

³terrain: ground