

life because I started to believe that if I asked for help I would get it and it wouldn't be from people. I could do it myself (p 25-6).

The book is a very real and important contribution to understanding what it means to survive rape and deserves a wide audience amongst academics, psychologist, counselors, social workers, and partners and family of victim/survivors. It will also be a comfort and possibly even a guide for women who have gone through similar ordeals.

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## IN THE VALLEY OF ELAH

Written and directed by Paul Haggis, starring Tommy Lee Jones, Charlize Theron and Susan Sarandon; Warner Independent, 2007; 121 minutes

A young soldier is killed shortly after returning from active service in Iraq. His charred remains are discovered in the desert near a military base. He has been stabbed, dismembered and almost completely incinerated. Who would do such an act? His army buddies come under suspicion, and the soldier's father, an ex-military investigator, resolves to find the killers.

Ordinarily, finding those responsible for a murder would provide some closure. Here, it only raises more difficult questions. How do young men adjust to ordinary civilian life after the violence and brutality of active service in Iraq? Over there, they are trained to kill, ordered to kill, expected to kill. At home, killing is the highest crime. In places like the United States, the state can take your life for intentional killing. In war, the moral compass is bent out of shape, shattered.

*In the Valley of Elah* opens with fragmented, grainy images of the battle zone in Iraq. A soldier exclaims, and is ordered to 'Keep on driving. Don't stop'. We learn later that the driver is the soldier who was murdered. In accordance with standing orders, he is ordered to drive on when an innocent Iraqi goat-herder accidentally steps on to the road in front of the troop carrier. Disobeying orders, however, he stops the vehicle and photographs the

body on the road. He is young, fresh-faced. This is a key image in the film — a young man's loss of innocence. Soon after, we see him calling his father. Sand is blowing through the open military tent, and he is sobbing, 'Get me out of here'.

Not since Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* has a film so powerfully captured the violent insanity of war. We see broken images of armed soldiers bursting into a bomb-shattered building, and discovering inside the charred remains of an Iraqi family. A soldier defaces one of the corpses, the others laugh — to cope with the utter horror of it.

We discover also that the murdered soldier was given the name 'Doc' by his army buddies because he used to repeatedly prod injured prisoners and ask, 'Does this hurt?'. We learn not to blame the person, but to look at the circumstances in which they are placed.

Like Oliver Stone's *Platoon*, this film explores the ways soldiers deal with the horror of what they see in active service, and what they are ordered to do. Drug use is presented as commonplace but we are told that the army doesn't test soldiers on active service in Iraq. Why not?

The army recruitment process, and the lack of adequate psychological and criminal screening of applicants, is also highlighted in the film. The focus, however, is on what comes out the other end — the frighteningly high incidence of violence, especially suicide and murder, by recently returned soldiers. The story told in the film is based on the murder of Richard T. Davis in 2003, shortly after his return from active service in Iraq. Moreover, the story is based on extensive research into the problems faced by returned soldiers from Iraq.

*In the Valley of Elah* concludes with the father of the murdered soldier hoisting the American flag upside down — the international distress symbol. A former soldier and flag-waving patriot at the beginning of the story, he encouraged his son to go to Iraq. He comes to realise, however, the devastating, brutalising effect of war. In a rare glimpse of cross-cultural awareness, the father tells the story of

David and Goliath to a young boy, before mentioning 'It's in the Koran'. In the midst of death and destruction, the film brings us to realise we share so much — common hopes, common fears, a common humanity.

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## GURRUMUL

Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu; Skinnyfish/MGM, 2008; \$30.

In our technology-driven environment, we're surrounded by music — usually mindless and invasive — and any artistic inspiration is often lost to hard sell. That's what makes Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu such a living musical treasure. This — his solo debut album — is a powerful spiritual and emotional experience that almost defies dispassionate analysis. Gurrumul, originally from the Gumatj clan of north east Arnhem Land, is a multi-instrumentalist; he plays guitar left-handed (but conventionally tuned), drums, keyboards and didgeridoo. In the mid-80s, Gurrumul was part of the highly successful Yothu Yindi ensemble but left to form the Saltwater band on Elcho Island. His high, pure vocals are intense and utterly disarming. Sung in Galpu, Gumatj and Djambarrpuyu languages, and some English, Gurrumul's musical style is spare, acoustic folk. However the songs are all about his people, his land and tradition — from his ancestor mother ('Baywara') and father ('Bapa'), to the wonders of the natural world and coming to terms with blindness. Other instrumentals and voices appear, principally from producer and ex-Killjoys bassist Michael Hohnen, but this is Gurrumul's music and it is magical. The wonder is it took so long to reach us.

**MIKE DALY** is a journalist and music reviewer.