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## Review of Last One In by Nicholas Kulish

Kevin Clouther

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## **Last One In.**

**By Nicholas Kulish.**

July 2007. Ecco, \$23.95 (0-06-118938-3).

It has become a profitable trend to relay true stories with novelistic techniques. Strangely refreshing, then, to find an embedded reporter with the *Wall Street Journal* telling the story of an embedded reporter without relying on what actually happened. In this book, Kulish introduces Jimmy Stephens, a reporter more committed to celebrity indiscretion than military direction. Jimmy goes to Iraq to resuscitate his career, and the novel quickly introduces two tensions. First, will Jimmy be able to fit into a group of hard-talking U.S. Marines while covering them? Second, how will he negotiate his serious mission with his frivolous interests? The novel does a respectable job of answering both questions, though

it's often limited by forced repartee and stock characters. At his best, Kulish brings the authority of truth to the awful banality of war: "It felt good to wake up early, do a few push-ups, and head out to the tennis courts for gas-mask training. The light breeze had tickled the palm trees as they practiced donning the masks in seven seconds." —*Kevin Cloutier*

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