

# Mad 'Men'



'Yes Men' Andy Bichlbaum (top) and Mike Bonanno (crouching) seek out injustice high and low with a comedic bent.

## 'Yes' hoaxsters real 'World' beaters

**MICHAEL STARR**



**"The Yes Men Fix the World"**

Monday at 9 p.m. on HBO

★★★

I guess they don't call 'em *maxims* for nothing.

"Don't judge a book by its cover," for example — a lesson I learned going into this review. From what I'd read about "The Yes Men Fix the World," I figured self-professed "gonzo political activists" Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno, the titular "Yes Men," would be smirking, obnoxious, self-referential jerks in the typically

"look at us!" mold.

They aren't. At least I didn't think so. While you might disagree with their politics, it's hard not to appreciate the intricate lengths to which the Yes Men go to deliver their message. Remember that fake New York Times front page last fall, declaring "Iraq War Ends"? That was their handiwork. It didn't really fool anyone, but it certainly got everyone's attention.

"The Yes Men Fix the World" premiering Monday on HBO, follows Bichlbaum and Bonanno as they traverse the globe to expose what they see as hypocrisy in corporate America — through elaborately planned hoaxes in which they pose as "officials" in cheesy suits and bad haircuts.

This movie wouldn't exist if their targets weren't initially snookered, but part of the fun is watching the

Yes Men (usually Bichlbaum as the faux "official") play their roles.

The first part of "Fix the World" encompasses the pair's outrage that the survivors of the horrific Union Carbide chemical-plant gas leak in Bhopal, India, still hadn't been paid restitution 20 years after the December 1984 disaster killed thousands. They target Dow Chemical (which bought Union Carbide) — setting up a fake Web site ("dowethics.com"), their usual M.O. to elicit a reaction in the form of an invitation to appear on TV or speak at an important conference.

They get both, and hit the mother lode — an invitation to appear on BBC World Television, in which Dow spokesman "Jude Finisterra" (really Bichlbaum) informs 300 million viewers that Dow has established a \$12 billion plan to compensate the Bhopal vic-

tims. The company's stock plummets before the hoax is discovered — and attention is once again focused on Bhopal.

And so it goes, as the Yes Men visit an energy conference in Canada, where Bichlbaum, pretending to be part of the US Petroleum Council, introduces Exxon's new biofuel, "Vivo-leum" — candles made from the flesh of a deceased Exxon janitor (played by comedian Reggie Watts).

The movie's funniest segment, at least in terms of the hoax itself, is HUD official "Rene Oswin" (Bichlbaum again) introducing Halliburton's new "Survival-Ball" suit at a conference to discuss rebuilding the post-Katrina Gulf Coast.

The duo's exploits are interspersed with clever animation and quick-cut editing — adding a sense of the absurd to an already surreal experience.