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Defiance

Thursday January 15, 2009

Categories: [Based on a book](#), [Based on a true story](#), [Epic/Historical](#), [Movies](#), [War](#)

Audience:	Mature High Schooler
MPAA Rating:	Rated R for violence and language
Profanity:	Very strong language including racial epithets
Nudity/Sex:	Sexual references and situations including adultery and sexual pressure
Alcohol/Drugs:	Drinking
Violence/Scariness:	Disturbing war-time and Holocaust-related violence, characters injured and killed
Diversity Issues:	A theme of the movie
Movie Release Date:	January 16, 2009

(B+)

Cowriter-director Edward Zwick, who also made "Glory," the story of an all-black Union regiment in the Civil War, [spoke to me about why it was important to tell the story of the Bielski brothers](#), who kept 1200 Jews hidden from the Russians and the Nazis during WWII.

There is a perverse irony in commemoration of the dead in the Holocaust with little attention to the survivors and the resistance, especially the Jewish resistance. Its immensity can't be underestimated and it is a story that needs to be told. We all know these iconic images of Jews in the Holocaust and those are important but we have come to accept them as the only images and that needs revision.

This is not the story of Jews trying to stay alive in concentration camps. This is the story of Jews who were lucky enough to have the chance to fight back. Tuvia Bielski does not just have a gun -- he is played by James Bond himself, Daniel Craig.

When the Bielski parents are killed by the Nazis, the three brothers hide out in the woods. In addition to Tuvia there is Zus (Liev Schreiber) and the youngest, Asael (Jamie Bell of "Billy Elliot"). Over time, other escapees ask for their protection and they are faced with the wrenching choice between turning away those who are old or ill or putting the entire group at risk by taking on people who were not strong enough to help them or quick enough to keep out of sight. They have to make other choices, too. The Russian army will give them some minimal protection but only if they will join forces and devote their energy to fighting the Nazis, just just hiding from them. Zus joins them but Tuvia stays on to take care of the people who are not capable of fighting.

The natural world of the forest is for the escapees a sort of Arden where many things are turned upside down. Back in the village, social status depended on class, profession, education, devotion to religious study and ritual. The Bielskis had none of these. In the forest, status depends on the ability to survive in the forest, including the ability to find a balance between asking and telling everyone what to do. Tuvia falls somewhere between achieving greatness and having it thrust upon him. He never wanted to be a leader; he certainly never wanted everyone to depend on him. And most of all, he never wanted to make the tragic choices he must make, to have to find out that he is a person capable of killing and of moral compromise.



Parents should know that this film has some strong language including racial epithets, a great deal of wartime and Holocaust-related violence with characters injured and killed, and sexual references and situations including adultery.

Family discussion: What were the biggest differences between Tuvia and Zus and between the Bielskis and the people they helped? Why has it taken so long for this story to be told?

If you like this, try: [Defiance: The Bielski Partisans](#) by Nechama Tec and the documentary [Partisans of Vilna](#). The Holocaust Museum has [information about Jewish partisans](#). And the [Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation](#) has assembled a wide range of resources, data, and teaching materials. They have produced nine short films narrated by Larry King, Ed Asner and Tova Feldshuh; 200 video clips of surviving Jewish partisans, and over 15 pieces of curricula. The website also provides access to [hundreds of photographs](#) and [online Q&A's with former Jewish partisans](#) and they arrange speaking engagements by former partisans.
