

# Defiance (2008)

Rated R. Our ratings: V- 5; L-2 ; S/N-2 . Running time: 2 hours 17 min.

*Have you not rejected us, O God?  
You do not go out, O God, with our armies.  
O grant us help against the foe,  
for human help is worthless.  
With God we shall do valiantly;  
it is he who will tread down our foes.  
Psalm 60:10-12*

Edward Zwick, director of such Tuvia and Zus Bielski Tuvia social justice films as Glory, Bielski, though brothers, The Siege and Blood Diamond, often clash over issues as shows us that not all Jews want they seek to lead a group of meekly to their deaths at the hands of the Nazis. Based on the Belarus.

true story of three brothers (there is a 4th, but he is too young to lead) who led a group of Jews in Belarus, the film seems like a chapter out of the Book of Macabbees, with its stirring battles of a few against many and difficult survival during cruel winters in the forests of Belarus. Two of the brothers clash over moral issues, with the band of partisans finally accepting anyone, old or young, to live under their protection. It seems a miracle that only 50 out of the group of 1200 were lost to the relentless pursuit of the

2008 Paramount Vantage

Nazis and Anti-Semitic peasants  
working with them

Based on the non-fiction book *Defiance: The Bielski Partisans* by Nechama Tec, the film begins with the brothers seeking vengeance for the betrayal and murder of their parents and families by the Nazis. Because the third brother, Assael (Jamie Bell), is not capable, it is up to Tuvia Bielski (Daniel Craig) or Zus (Liev Schreiber) to take out the collaborator pointing out to the Nazi occupiers local Jews. Tuvia, being the elder brother, takes on the assignment, gunning down in his own house the man, and when they try to intervene, his two sons as well. Ironically, it is Tuvia who later has qualms about killing the enemy, whereas Zus argues that their precarious situation in the forest requires that they kill anyone who might give them away.

How they form a village and eke out an existence, while welcoming new groups of refugees is an inspiring story of courage, and at times, desperate and ruthless acts. In the midst of war the brothers quarrel and separate for a while, Zus and some followers joining for a while with a band of Russian partisans, some of whom are almost as anti-Semitic as the Germans. It has been noted that the continued existence of the Jews, despite all the efforts throughout history to exterminate them, proves the existence of God. This could be said of the Jews of both Schindler and the Bielskis.

## **For Reflection/Discussion**

Might contain spoilers.

1. How is this film different from most Holocaust era ones? Are the Bielski brothers different in essence from those Jews who seemed to go without resistance to their deaths? Or are their circumstances—living in a small village near a large forest—different? Also, the element of not being able to

believe Germans capable of such a monstrous crime—note how other Jews in the town who had not had their loved ones murdered reacted to the brothers' invitation to flee with them into the forest.

2. How does Tuvia change during the course of the story? What do you think of his gunning down the man who continually disrupted matters by rebelling against his leadership? Similar to the way that Moses dealt with opposition? What was at stake? What other choice did he have?

3. What do you think of Tuvia's insistence that everyone, warriors and the old and the weak, share equal rations? How does this keep their band from descending into barbarism?

What do the non-warriors contribute to the group, things which the more impulsive Zus cannot see?