



## Defiance 2008/15

Please note that the review may act as a spoiler for the film.

### Synopsis of the film

*Defiance* is based on a true story and follows the fortunes of the four Bielski brothers who lived in Belorussia. It is 1941 and the Germans have begun to round up the Jews. Zus and Asael Bielski return home to their farm to find their father murdered, and their youngest brother hiding. Realising they need to flee, the three hide in the woods near their farm, which they have grown to know well. The eldest brother Tuvia joins them and the four brothers consider their options, with Zus and Tuvia thinking about avenging their father's death. Other refugees begin to shelter in the woods and the elder Bielski brothers assume leadership of the group, setting up hunting parties. Tuvia seeks out the police officer who he thinks killed his father and murders him, and the group begins to steal from villagers. One night they become embroiled in a messy fight with Nazi officers and Asael gets left behind. They vow not to become partisans, and their revenge will be to live. They also pledge to cease the destructive behaviour and not to become thieves or murderers, but to take only from those who can afford it, and irregularly.

The struggle is hard, particularly through the winter months and Zus and Tuvia argue over the causes to be fought – Zus believing they should join the Soviet partisans to fight the Nazis, and Tuvia concentrating on survival. Zus leaves to join the partisans. There is also some dissent from within the group, as those who are fit and strong enough to hunt begin to believe they should receive larger rations, but Tuvia quashes this.

The group's base is attacked by German bomber planes which have a birds-eye view of their camp. The refugees flee and have to cross a marsh which seems impassable, but they make it and are almost immediately attacked by the German army. The group continue to fight and end up being rescued by a section of Zus' partisans, who were trying to make their way back to the wood.

## When it was made and where

The film was made in Lithuania in 2007 and the locations were around 150 and 200 km from the original sites where the partisans actually hid in 1941. Some of the extras are descended from the original refugees.

## Issues to be aware of

The film is mostly in English, but with occasional Russian subtitles. There are scenes of violence throughout.

The film is based on the true story of the Bielski brothers and those who hid in the Bialowieza Forest during World War Two, and is based on the book by Nechama Tec. However, the authenticity of certain scenes such as the battle scene at the end has been questioned and contested. As with all films, this should not be presented as fact, and you should watch the film in its entirety before you use it in a HMD activity.

At the end of the film, the true fate of the Bielski brothers is revealed.

## Key Themes

### **Community**

- the refugees set up an effective community in the woods, and when new arrivals are taken in by the group, they have set up an efficient screening process to find out what people's jobs were and how they can put them to work
- there are some lively debates between a young intellectual and an old teacher who talk about politics and society
- Asael falls in love with a rescued girl named Chaya. They marry in the middle of winter in the forest, but a normal community wedding with dancing and cheering takes place

### **Jews were not just victims**

- the community which develops challenges the misconception that during the Holocaust Jews were weak and helpless
- the community which grows in the woods shows they were normal people with normal desires and hopes
- when Zus leaves the society to join the Soviet partisans, he is faced with anti-semitism within their ranks, but does not accept it and leaves

### **Resistance came in many different forms**

- a farmer who has been friendly and helpful to the brothers is found hanged with a sign around his neck proclaiming him a 'Jew-lover'
- the Soviet partisans are fighting the Nazis from an armed base within the woods
- the Bielski brothers help hundreds to survive the Nazis regime of hatred

You can use HMD resources to find out more about other acts of defiance:

>> [Sophie Scholl](#)

>> [Alone in Berlin](#)

>> [The Righteous Muslims](#)