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### Michael Giltz

Freelance writer and raconteur  
Posted: February 7, 2011 04:56 PM

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# DVDs: *The Tillman Story* Is F-ing Good!

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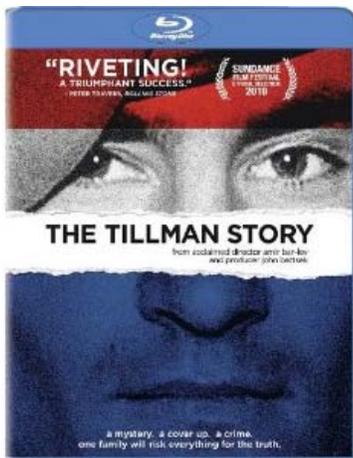
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**THE TILLMAN STORY** (\$30.95 BluRay or \$24.95 regular DVD; Sony) -- What makes a true patriot? Is it blind devotion? My country right or wrong? Or is the true -- or rather, the better patriot, the one that helps their country grow and be true to its principles -- the one who supports but questions, challenges and cherishes? The one who trusts, but verifies? The more valuable patriot of course is the

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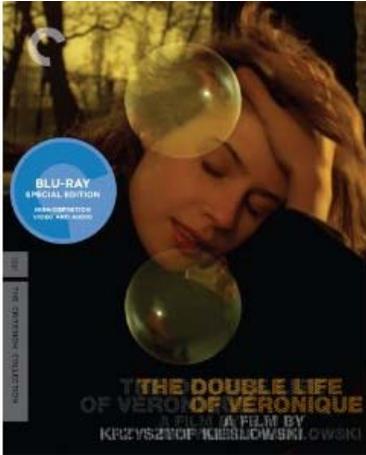
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later and an excellent example of that is the late Pat Tillman, a journeyman player in the NFL who became a national symbol of pride when he left his team to join up after 9-11. Tillman was eagerly seized upon by the Bush Administration as a potent symbol. That was only one of the many mistakes Bush made during the lead-up to the Iraq War. Tillman served bravely but he also kept questioning and eventually this free-thinking atheist decided the continued occupation of Iraq was misguided. Unfortunately, he was killed by friendly fire before he could come home and probably act on those beliefs. Ironically, the Bush Administration covered up Tillman's death, lied repeatedly to his family and rode the wave of sympathy for a fallen hero to re-election. This documentary charts the fascinating life of Tillman and his family's unceasing quest for the truth about how he died. Bush and the Pentagon certainly are shown as cynically and unforgivably in the wrong. But the movie's strength is that it is not a diatribe but a simple search for truth. The family is inspiring. Tillman is fascinating. And as a bonus the movie contains some of the most inventive and memorable use of the F word this side of *The King's Speech*.



**THE DOUBLE LIFE OF VERONIQUE** (\$39.95 BluRay; Criterion) -- Krzysztof Kieslowski is one of my favorite directors and this beguiling movie starring Irene Jacob is the perfect introduction to his talent. *The Colors Trilogy* contains his masterpiece *Red* but is flawed. *The Decalogue* is brilliant but is rather sprawling -- it is, after, a 10 part TV miniseries with each episode centered around one of the Ten Commandments. So Double Life is where you should begin. Its story remains a mystery: two women (both played by Irene Jacob) live somewhat parallel lives, one in France and one in Poland. They are also both haunted by the idea, somewhat wonderful and somewhat unsettling, that they're not alone. That is essentially it. And if you're willing to watch a gorgeously shot, beautifully acted, curious film that never explains itself but creates a mood of wonder and suspense (helped immeasurably by a great score by Zbigniew Preisner) then you're in for a treat. Criterion has duplicated almost all of the extras on the standard DVD (two essays are missing from the slimmed down booklet -- why not scan them and include them on the disc?). The BluRay itself has wonderful extras like a documentary about Kieslowski, short films, video interviews, audio commentary and more. A classic of modern cinema.



**NEVER LET ME GO** (\$39.99 BluRay or \$29.99 regular DVD; FOX) -- My problems with the book by Kazuo Ishiguro and the film *Never Let Me Go* that is based on it are the same. Both contain a very elaborate sci-fi set-up: in the future, cloned people will be raised in isolation so that their organs can be



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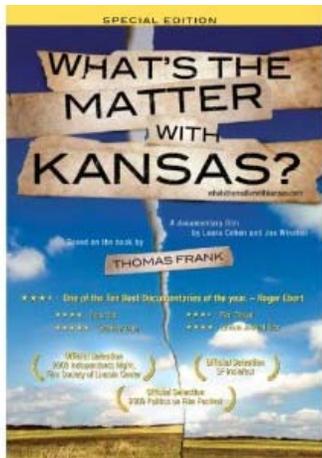
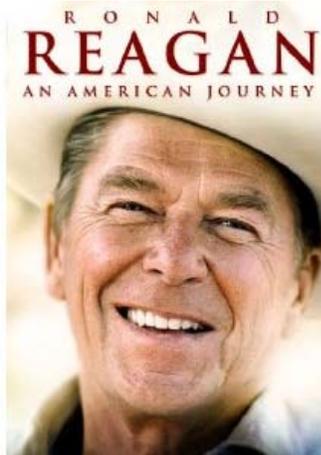
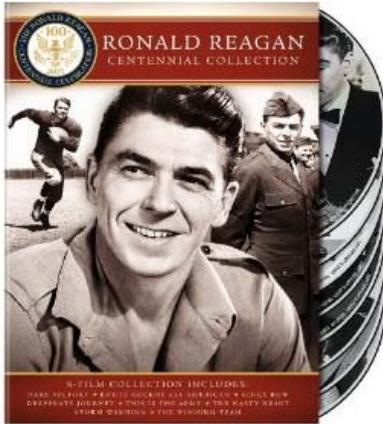
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harvested and let "real" people live much longer lives. The cloned people are ultimately harvested so many times they die. Wow. With a weighty idea like that, you'd expect the movie and book to mine this idea to reveal much about the human condition, about the feeling young people have that their life is mapped out for them, that they're doomed or that they're special, or simply the idea that life is too short. (Most clones die pretty young.) Nope. The movie meanders along with our cloned heroes laboring under the delusion or dream that if they can prove they are "really" in love that they'll gain some respite or release from the death sentence that is their lives. It's beautifully mounted and decently acted with some affecting moments from Carey Mulligan, Keira Knightley and especially Andrew Garfield. (Poor casting for the child actors who play them at younger ages -- the one playing Garfield's character looks absolutely nothing like him.) But those moments are minimal and with such an elaborate set-up, it feels too top-heavy to be successful.



**RONALD REAGAN CENTENNIAL COLLECTION** (\$59.98; Warner Bros.)

**RONALD REAGAN: AN AMERICAN JOURNEY** (\$19.98; Image)

**WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH KANSAS?** (\$24.98; Passion River) -- Even Ronald Reagan had good fun joking about his Hollywood career as a B actor. (Bedtime for Bonzo didn't help.) But the truth is that he appeared in a string of good to great films and while we can all be glad he didn't make Casablanca, he has more good movies to his credit than you'd imagine. The Centennial Collection from his Warner Bros. home proves that. Reagan's masterpiece is the smalltown melodrama Kings Row. His most iconic turn is in Knute Rockne: All American. Dark Victory with Bette Davis is another gem; Reagan's role is small, but hey he was in it. This Is The Army is good musical hokum via the great Michael Curtiz with Lt. Ronald Reagan in a decent turn. The happy surprises are two solid dramas: the action film Desperate Journey with Errol Flynn and the story of wounded soldiers The Hasty Heart. Throw in two programmers -- Storm Warning (down with the KKK) and The Winning Team (up with Doris Day) and you've got a pretty respectable run of films with Reagan proving he really could act. Of course, his greatest role was yet to come. An American Journey chronicles that role -- lovable President -- with a 100 minute film that could have played at a Republican convention. Apparently we're too close still for a balanced but warts and all look at the Gipper. He wasn't much for challenging his own beliefs so even if Reagan tried to watch What's The Matter With Kansas?, he probably would have fallen asleep. He would have missed an interesting film that charts Kansas turning from a progressive state to a center for the Religious Right that Roger Ebert called one of the best documentaries of 2009.

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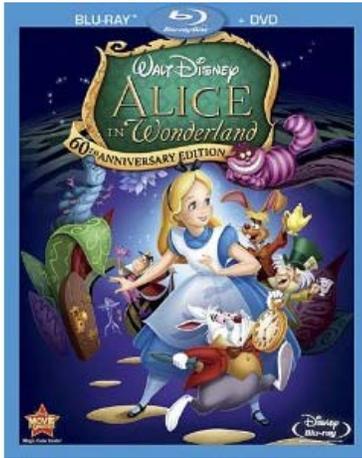
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**ANNIVERSARY BLURAY** (\$39.99; Disney) -- I think the anarchic sensibility and brilliant wordplay of the Lewis Carroll classic is basically not filmable. And yet people keep trying. Patches of this herky-jerky Disney animated version are quite fun. But there's an awful lot of so-so music using Carroll's verse for lyrics and it rarely feels like a proper story and more like a parade of set pieces. That said, the animation at times is stunning and this BuRay is eye-popping. Disney really does take exceptional care of its legacy. Loads of extras, including the first Alice short that Disney made (he was fascinated by the character and books for years). Best for animation buffs and college students, I think.



**CONVICTION** (\$39.99 BluRay or \$29.99 regular DVD; FOX) -- Hilary Swank stars in this true story about a blue collar woman whose ne'er do well brother is wrongfully accused of murder. No one cares, so she decides to take on his case herself. First of course, she needs to get a high school degree, go to college, get a college degree, go to law school and then get a law school degree. I can't possibly spoil this film for you by revealing plot points because the movie moves along on such a tried and true path. Hey, it's not their fault that true life in this case was so predictable. It's wonderful for the real-life people but as a movie, you keep waiting for something, anything to surprise you. The casting is very good -- not just Swank and Sam Rockwell and Minnie Driver as

Swank's pal. All the minor and fill-in characters look like real people, not actors filling up a scene. It also has a nice feel for the world thanks to director Tony Goldwyn. But you won't be shaken up or surprised by a single moment here.



**MONSTERS** (\$29.99 BluRay and \$26.99 regular DVD; Magnolia) -- I was really looking forward to this horror/sci-fi flick about a freelance photographer and the wealthy daughter of his publisher who must trek through the "infected zone" of Mexico -- infected by aliens from outer space, which came to earth via a crashed probe we sent out to collect samples. Now scary gigantic creatures are wrecking havoc and the US has built a really big wall to keep them out. Yes, the parallels are obvious to illegal immigration, but aren't pounded home. The movie is mostly a smart calling card for writer-director Gareth Edwards, who creates tension and believable creatures on a tiny budget. Some eye-rolling moments abound, starting with the idea that the

daughter of a publishing magnate and a savvy photo-journalist would ever CHOOSE to go into a zone infected with gigantic alien creatures in the first place. (Couldn't they have been stranded there or misled into going there? Any sane person would wait the six months they were going to be trapped or, I don't know, hire a plane? If there was a reference to plane travel being unsafe, I missed it.) Even worse is a scene where our heroes are stripping soldiers of gas masks but leave the weapons. I'm pretty sure a Quaker would be packing a gun if they were headed through alien monster territory. Then there's the scene where they're in a boat in the infected zone and some giant thing of some sort is knocking around a crashed jet plane, tentacles pulling it under the swampy water and then tossing it out again. And what do our heroes say? They say, repeatedly, "What IS that?" Uh, I'm gonna go out on a limb and guess it's one of the alien creatures that made this zone infected. What do you think? Generally, the movie is smarter



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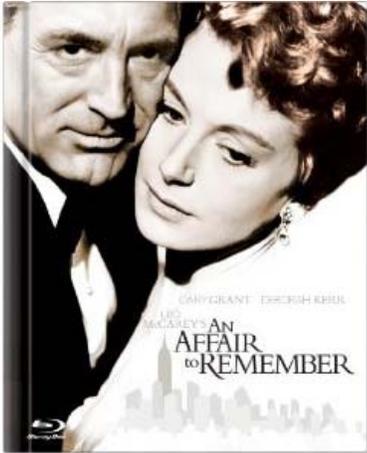
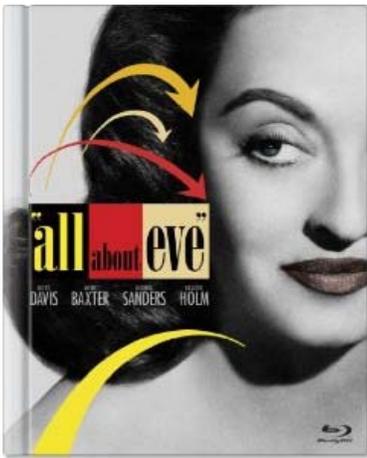
than that by simply avoiding facts and keeping the focus on the budding friendship/romance between the two. Action buffs will be sorely disappointed by a film that has very little action in it. *Cloverfield* isn't such a bad comparison after all, though *Monsters* is smarter. But while the monsters are mostly off camera a genuine if raw talent is visible.



**BLUE MURDER COMPLETE COLLECTION** (\$99.99; Acorn) -- No, she's no Jane Tennison, but the messed-up single mom life of DCI Janine Lewis (Caroline Quentin of UK sitcom *Men Behaving Badly*) is a nice counterpoint to the brutal crimes she investigates in Manchester. Abruptly cancelled after five seasons in the UK when ratings of 4 million+ were almost half of the debut's 8 mil+. Decent enough for hardcore fans of UK crime shows.

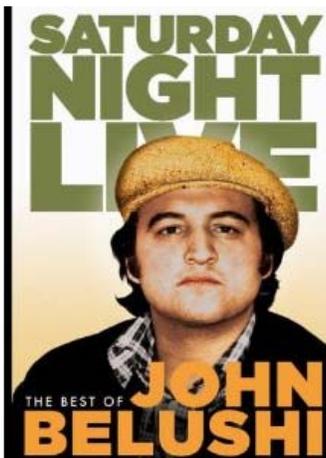


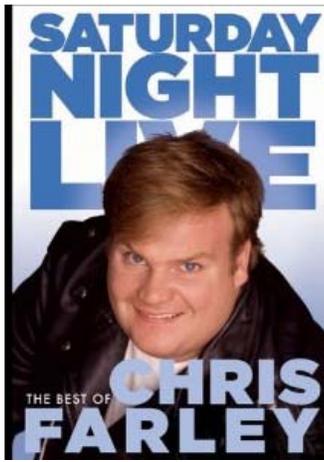
**LET ME IN** (\$39.99 BluRay or \$29.99 regular DVD; Anchor Bay) -- The Swedish film *Let The Right One In* is a modern masterpiece, moving and strange and scary and unshakable. Hollywood's decision to remake it seemed puzzling; it was such a... Swedish film. Or at least European in its sensibility and quietness. Why would Hollywood want to remake it? And how bad would they screw it up? Now that I've seen the remake I'm more puzzled than ever. Don't get me wrong, it's crafted with care and no one could accuse them of Hollywood-izing the movie. It's quite faithful to the original in plot and tone. But the more similar it was, the more I kept wondering, why bother? For the folks who won't read subtitles? It's not exactly a high concept, action-packed movie. Remaking the Korean monster flick *The Host* -- that would make sense. But this is an art film, really. By which I mean it's not a broad entertainment that will appeal to millions. It's quiet and strange and sad and you won't be in the mood to munch down popcorn. The leads are good, both Kodi Smit-McPhee as the boy who is bullied at school and Chloe Moretz as the girl who moves in next door but never gets cold and won't come into your home until you invite her. Maybe Moretz doesn't have exactly the same eeriness and substance of the original's Lina Leandersson. But I wouldn't place my problems with the movie on her or any of the other actors, which also include Richard Jenkins and Elias Koteas. It's been a while since I saw the original, but I think the score here is more prominent and distracting. Maybe it begins with the title: *Let Me In* isn't bad, and it gets across the same idea. But somehow, it's not nearly as subtle or memorable as the title *Let The Right One In*. Exactly.



**ALL ABOUT EVE** (\$34.98; FOX)

**AN AFFAIR TO REMEMBER** (\$34.98; FOX) -- Two beloved classics available on DVD in nice slim hardcover cases with loads of extras. Eve is a towering masterpiece, one of the wittiest and coldest movies about fame and backstabbers ever made. Affair is not really my cup of tea in any version, but if you love it you love it dearly. But a couple problems. One, Blurays should not be higher-priced than regular DVDs even though even to my casual eyes they can offer a significantly sharper, better picture. Two, these particular DVD releases do NOT offer a significantly sharper, better picture. Why put something out on BluRay in nice new packaging if you're not going to take care with the image and make it look better than ever? No reason to upgrade and if you're buying them for the first time, no reason to pay a \$20 premium for the BluRay at all. Not the way to treat such valuable films.





**SNL: THE BEST OF JOHN BELUSHI** (\$14.98; Lionsgate)

**SNL: THE BEST OF CHRIS FARLEY** (\$14.98; Lionsgate) -- He died more than a decade ago but it still feels a little rude to say that Chris Farley is the very poor man's John Belushi. It's not just a superficial comparison -- it's also apt. Farley is similar in style and approach to Belushi but far less interesting. And nothing on these two DVDs changes that opinion. Belushi feels genuinely dangerous and exciting. Farley seems like the frat brother who makes other dudes laugh with his relentless gross-out dumbness. It's the difference (oh, I'm on thin ice, here) between The Three Stooges and the Marx Brothers. Can I save myself if I caveat that statement by saying the Three Stooges are much funnier than Farley ever was? Both discs are reissues that include about 20 minutes of new sketches. It's sort of annoying that they didn't just overstuff these DVDs in the first place. But they're cheap and if you're a fan, well worth it.

**YOU'VE GOT MAIL BLURAY** (\$19.98; Warner Bros.) -- Talk about putting the cart before the horse? I actually don't mind *You've Got Mail*, the Tom Hanks Meg Ryan comedy set in the world of bookstores. (It's even a little sad to see them in the Barnes & Noble store on the Upper West Side that just shut down.) But the "extras" in this set include the standard DVD of *The Shop Around The Corner*, the Jimmy Stewart masterpiece that it's based on and which just happens to be **one of my favorite films of all time**. Watch *You've Got Mail* first because nothing can match the original.

**A WOMAN, A GUN AND A NOODLE SHOP** (\$38.96 BluRay or \$28.96 regular DVD; Sony) -- Great director Zhang Yimou followed his eye-popping Opening Ceremony for the 1998 Chinese Olympics with this curio, a remake of the Coen Brothers film *Blood Simple* set in the past.

**10** (\$19.98 BluRay; Warner Bros.) -- It hasn't aged as well as some other Blake Edwards comedies and certainly doesn't match Dudley Moore's masterpiece *Arthur*. But it's an interesting comedy about middle-age and how that scares the hell out of men and Bo Derek fulfilled her task of looking gorgeous admirably. I'm sure hairdressers and the sellers of those little beads in her hair are forever grateful.

**LUCKY LADY** (\$19.93; Shout) -- I have a soft spot for this would-be screwball comedy which was played at a juvenile level even for a little kid seeing it in 1975. But Liza Minnelli and Gene Hackman and Burt Reynolds have great chemistry in this lark of a tale about bootleggers who have a blast while outsmarting the law during Prohibition. A welcome debut for a movie I haven't seen since it was on HBO back in the 1970s after its misfire at the box office. Silly and it knows it.

**HIGHLANDER 25TH ANNIVERSARY 2 FILM SET BLURAY** (\$29.99; Lionsgate) -- This BluRay of the director's cut of *Highlander* (a personal B movie favorite) and the sequel looks crisp to my eyes. But it comes out a few weeks after *Highlander* alone came out on BluRay and neither one has the extras you'd expect for a franchise that has spawned movies, tv shows, books and more. But if you've never seen the movie, it's good fun.

**HATCHET II** (\$27.98; Dark Sky/MPI) -- The second in a hoped-for franchise starring Victor Crowley (like all horror film monsters, he lives!) who likes to push the boundaries on gore and dismemberment. **Went to theaters unrated in a bid for attention** that did not break the MPAA's stranglehold on exhibition, unfortunately.

**VOYAGE TO THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA SEASON FOUR VOL TWO** (\$39.98; FOX) -- This family friendly series just beat out *Star Trek* to be the first prime-time sci-fi series in the US that wasn't an anthology series but an ongoing show with recurring characters. The final half of the final season, this includes the unaired pilot and the broadcast version complete with vintage commercials, which is great fun.

**PLEASANTVILLE BLURAY** (\$19.98; New Line) -- This clever drama about people living in a black and white world but longing for color is elevated by an excellent cast, including Tobey Maguire, Reese Witherspoon and Joan Allen among others. Good transfer with all the extras of the standard dvd.

**DISCOVERING HAMLET** (\$39.99; Athena) -- Fascinating hour-long documentary about Kenneth Branagh tackling the role of Hamlet in 1988 with Derek Jacobi at his side working with Branagh every step of the way. Yes, it has 3 and a half hours of bonus material, but \$40 still seems steep. Loads of interviews but not the one element you want most of all: a film of the complete production to see how it turned out. Still, for actors and theater buffs this is absorbing stuff.

**BEVERLY HILLS CHIHUAHUA 2** (\$39.99 BluRay or \$29.99 regular DVD; Disney) -- Hey, I'm just as surprised as you that this was made. But the original cost \$20 million to make and grossed \$140 million worldwide, so the only surprise I guess is that this went straight to DVD.

**BAD BOYS BLURAY** (\$19.99; Lionsgate) -- *Bad Boys* should have been a routine B movie about juvenile delinquents behind bars. But Sean Penn is so invested in his role he gives the movie a weight and immediacy it never would have achieved otherwise. Lightning in a bottle.

**SKIN** (\$24.98; E One) -- This true story about a dark-skinned child born to two white parents in racist South Africa is based on a true story. Oscar nominee Sophie Okonedo, Sam Neill and Alice Krige head the talented cast in a film that came and went but which Roger Ebert singled out as one of the best of the year.

**RAY BLURAY** (\$26.98; Universal) -- This biopic already feels a little dated and TV movie-ish but Jamie Foxx's mimicry/inhabitation of Ray Charles is still magnetic, the movie looks terrific and the extras are copious.

**GARROW'S LAW SERIES 1** (\$39.99; Acorn) -- When reading the paperback introduction to the Robert Louis Stevenson book *Kidnapped*, I stumbled across a reference to William Garrow, the star barrister at the Old Bailey whose court transcripts read like terrific mysteries. My God, here's the perfect basis for a crime novel series or even a TV show! I plunged into everything I could find out about him...which unfortunately included the fact that they'd already made a TV series about him in 1996. I'm too bitter to see my meal ticket already on television, but fans of British drama might want to check it out.

**BUTCH & SUNDANCE: THE EARLY DAYS/ DEATH HUNT** (\$14.93; Shout) -- Here's as silly a double feature as you're likely to find. *Death Hunt* is a routine, forgettable Charles Bronson entry. *Butch & Sundance: The Early Days* is the prequel to the classic Western. It's not nearly as bad as it should be, but there's still no good reason it was ever made. At least this odd duck of a DVD is cheap.

**11 HARROWHOUSE** (\$19.98; Shout) -- Here is a much better use of Shout's time. It's an offbeat comedy spoof of a jewel heist scripted by Charles Grodin and co-starring Candice Bergen in her pre-*Murphy Brown* days. Too bad Grodin didn't do a commentary: God knows from his talk show we realize he can hold forth.

**DEAD SPACE AFTERMATH** (\$34.99; Anchor Bay) -- A spin-off from the video game, this animated film is notable for switching directors and even animation styles when telling the story from a different character's point of view. That doesn't make this satisfying for anyone other than hardcore gamers, but it was an interesting experiment.

*Thanks for reading. Michael Giltz is the cohost of Showbiz Sandbox, a weekly pop culture podcast that reveals the industry take on entertainment news of the day and features top journalists and opinion makers as guests. It's available free on iTunes. Visit Michael Giltz at his website and his daily blog. Download his podcast of celebrity interviews and his radio show, also called Popsurfing and also available for free on iTunes. Link to him on Netflix and gain access to thousands of ratings and reviews.*

*NOTE: Michael Giltz is provided with free copies of DVDs to consider for review. He typically does not guarantee coverage and invariably receives far more screeners and DVDs than he can cover each week. Also, Michael Giltz freelances as a writer of DVD copy (the text that appears on the back of DVDs) for some titles released by IFC and other subsidiaries of MPI. It helps pay the rent, but does not obligate him in any way to speak positively or negatively of their titles.*

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**GuyMontag425** 21 hours ago (11:34 PM)

5 Fans

"The Tillman Story" contributes to restoring Pat's legacy by honoring the man, not the myth. As his mother said, "Pat would have wanted to be remembered as an individual, not as a stock figure or political prop. Pat was a real hero, not what they used him as."

However, the film ended too soon, with the 8-01-07 Congressional hearing. Last July, I sent the director a letter arguing the film would have more impact if it also described the "untold story" of how President Obama and the Democratic Congress continued the Bush administration cover-up of Tillman's friendly-fire death.

Instead, the film was ignored since it didn't reveal much "news" about the Tillman story. It wasn't controversial and threatened no politicians. Gen. McChrystal, who personally led the cover-up, was barely a footnote and is making \$50,000 on the lecture circuit ... meanwhile, the film is no longer showing after peaking at only 28 screens.

Just before the 2006 mid-term elections, Kevin Tillman published his eloquent letter, "After Pat's Birthday". Kevin had hoped a Democratic Congress would bring accountability back to our country. But, just as with warrantless wiretapping and torture, those responsible for the cover-up of his brother's friendly-fire death have never been held accountable for their actions.

To learn more, I'd suggest Mary Tillman's "Boots on the Ground by Dusk" (revised paperback at blurb.com), Jon Krakauer's paperback edition of "Where Men Win Glory", and <http://www.feralfirefighter.blogspot.com>

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**Michael Giltz** 5 hours ago (3:49 PM)

60 Fans



Thanks for the info. By the way, any idea why the Tillmans soured so much on Jon Krakauer? I never could discover the deal on that.

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**GuyMontag425** 3 minutes ago (8:31 PM)

5 Fans

In her book, Mary Tillman wrote that in spring 2006, "Over several months Jon has met the whole family, and we have come to consider him a good friend." (p. 280 hardcover).

Obviously something happened over the next couple of years. I don't have a citation but I recall seeing/hearing an interview (CSPAN Fall 2009?) where Krakauer said that the family wasn't happy after seeing a draft of his book. After that, Marie continued to work with Krakauer, at least to some degree, but the rest of the family declined. Krakauer's book has some good detail on the friendly-fire and the Army cover-up (revised paperback) but I don't have confidence in the biographical sections.

Personally, I think JK's got some ego problems. JK used the material my Aunt handed to him at a book signing to revise his book (he wrote in his foreward "he discovered" it) and yet continued to whitewash the Democratic Congress role in continuing the Bush cover-up. If you're interested, I'm in the middle of documentin g this, should have something out within the next week, hopefully.

PS Bad link in my post. Should be <http://www.feralfirefighter.blogspot.com>

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