

Tomorrow Ever After: A Kinder Future

Here on *Wrath-Bearing Tree* we write a lot about ways in which things are imperfect—culturally, politically, institutionally. We often point out examples of things that go wrong. People who lie or use faulty logic to advance unethical or selfish agendas. We focus on negativity in part because we're combat veterans, and have seen bad consequences of lazy thinking and decision-making. The other thing that unites us, if anything, is that we share a basic conviction that things could be better. Especially when it comes to media, and entertainment.

It's not easy to create *ethical* and entertaining drama that uplifts at the same time that it provides laughter. Without resort to conflict—usually in the form of sex or violence—stories fall flat. Why consume an account of someone's perfect day? Few movies manage to leave a majority of their audiences feeling *better* (rather than exhausted), because it's very difficult to accomplish this. Recent examples include [Hot Tub Time Machine](#) and [Safety Not Guaranteed](#), both of which manage to deliver without relying much on violence or sex.

Violence and sex from the male perspective are hallmarks of most mainstream films. In the fourth week of April, I watched or re-watched four movies: *Star Wars: Rogue One*, *LA Confidential*, *American Beauty*, and the upcoming [Tomorrow Ever After](#). The first three movies are violent fantasies that appear to hate women and poor people, and maybe people in general. Characters in the film earn their punishments in a variety of ways, but those ways all come down to the alienation wrought by dissatisfaction with a society built on sexual exploitation and the urge to destroy. They offer dark visions of human nature, and are at heart nihilistic visions of the past, present, and future.

Tomorrow Ever After is different. In it, the principle conflicts that unfold within and between characters are existential, based on questions about their purpose—they are not transactional or punitive. Conflicts unfold within characters as they grapple with the constraints of living within a patriarchal, capitalist system. In this system (that of our present time—the movie is set in 2015) women are systematically oppressed by men, who are systematically oppressed by a system in which housing is not guaranteed, jobs are difficult to come by, and money is the mechanism by which people and items are valued. In *Tomorrow Ever After*, this period of human history is referred to as “The Great Despair.”

One of the film’s most impressive accomplishments is its ability to represent the problems posed by money in a realistic, relatable way, while simultaneously making it clear that this situation is unnecessary—ridiculous, even. The film’s satirical touch is so light that it’s almost unseen, but it guides everything, and fills *Tomorrow Ever After* with humor and optimism. A film about the evils of sexist patriarchy and capitalism sounds like it would be annoying or boring, but this is not the case with *Tomorrow Ever After*. I suspect that this is because it spends so little time moralizing, and because the director and actors are so good. There are no cynical or clichéd moments where a character pauses to deliver some memorable line, no posturing, no *bullshit*. Given the conceit about time travel, this is nothing short of extraordinary.



In *Tomorrow Ever After*, the difficulty of providing empathy or compassion to strangers without resorting to sex or the threat of violence generates much of the positive motion in the

plot and between the characters—successfully so

The pacing is wonderful. There isn't a single moment in the film where someone watching is lost or displaced, save for the very beginning (this is to be expected in a movie about time travel). Contrast this with *Rogue One*, or *LA Confidential*, or even *American Beauty*, all of which make themselves known only through repeated screenings, or by reading secondary material. *Tomorrow Ever After* is not interested in spectacle, nor is it particularly interested in rendering judgment—it is a parable about all of us, and how we live, and so there are no bad characters to murder, no suffering characters that do not themselves possess the means of their own redemption.

The most impressive accomplishment of *Tomorrow Ever After*, however, that its characters are believably written, and the actors capably bring them to life. Because the conflicts encountered by many characters are all basic and comprehensible, one finds oneself empathizing with *everyone* in the film. This accomplishment confirms what appears to be *Tomorrow Ever After's* chief hypothesis: that when we view each other with empathy, and treat each other with kindness, life becomes much more enjoyable and pleasant. In this way, *Tomorrow Ever After* functions not only as a morale parable, but also as evidence that its hypotheses are true. After all, if it's possible to make an film that engages, inspires, and entertains without laser battles, sex, violence used as a vehicle for redemption, or murder—*Tomorrow Ever After* promises none of these elements—maybe, just maybe, it's possible to make a better world, too.

Star Wars: The Force Awakens—It Will Be Watched



By Adrian Bonenberger

I wrote a long essay about Lindsay Graham's candidacy a few months ago, when Craig Whitlock broke the story about Graham's [sleazy and disingenuous military service](#) (I choose my words very carefully—no enlisted man or officer who's had to struggle for promotion can view Graham's career and retirement with anything other than disgust). I revised it about a month ago, updating it to reflect his ongoing unsuccessful candidacy, and his apparent lack of interest in taking responsibility for a matter any honorable man would have sought to resolve before it became an issue. My hope was to bring attention to the fact that Graham himself still draws pay as a retired Air Force Colonel, which is outrageous, and also as further evidence that neither the military nor Congress can be trusted to police themselves when it comes to the obvious conflict of interest inherent to having appointed officers of the executive branch, legally beholden to the office of the President, serving as representatives of the citizen electorate.

Boring, boring shit. So boring I'm annoyed I had to summarize it in a paragraph. And I don't blame *you* for being annoyed with me at having made you read it. Long story short—dictatorship, venality, corruption, blah blah blah. Fuck it.

Instead of slamming you with 2,500 words about how our democracy is basically doomed, let's talk about the new *Star Wars* instead. I recently watched Episode VII—*The Force Awakens* and feel compelled to discuss it in candid terms, for

your edification. There will be no spoilers in this discussion of the movie. I've listened to the experts discuss SWTFA, I've read the positive reviews. It's time to deliver a counterbalance to the predictable parade of pander coming out of the usual corners.

Background on me, and how I interact with this movie franchise: I'm a longtime fan of *Star Wars*, an easy get. I saw *Star Wars* when it first aired on network television, and *Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi* in theaters. I had a few of the toys growing up as a kid. Never read the books, nor did I read many comic books beyond the few that somehow ended up in Branford's public library. I have never worn a character costume for any reason. I'm aware of the role-playing game but never played it. My friends and I played the video games during the high school years, and then later in college.

I didn't hate *Attack of the Clones*. I like movies, and the Star Wars franchise is clearly capable of delivering great movies (*Star Wars*, *Empire Strikes Back*) as well as others that are... less great (*Return of the Jedi*), mediocre, or bad. Albert Burneko wrote about this phenomenon [more gracefully than I could have, as usual](#), for *Deadspin*.

Outside Star Wars, I like satire and noir and comedy. Hitchcock, and Herzog. I loved *The Thin Red Line* and *Dr. Strangelove* and *Paths of Glory*. *Starship Troopers* was a great satire of what it would be like to live in a fascist society. I'm not a goddamned hater! I'm not!

I didn't love *The Force Awakens*.

More context, since no matter what I say now, forever, people will point me out as the white man who stood up and said "it was a good mediocre movie." Not a prudent place, tactically, to be, in other words, in a movie with [a powerful female lead](#) and [strong minority supporting characters](#). On a scale of 1-10,

1 being bad and 10 being great, here's my take on all other Star Wars movies:

I Phantom Menace: 4/10

II Attack of the Clones: 4/10

III Revenge of the Sith: 5/10

IV Star Wars: 10/10

V Empire Strikes Back: 9/10 [many would invert the SW/ESB rating here]

VI Return of the Jedi: 8/10

Overall, I'd give *The Force Awakens* 6/10, putting it a lot closer to *Revenge of the Sith* than *Return of the Jedi*. It was entertaining, it gave me chills and brought tears to my eyes with the music, sound effects, and deft introduction of major plot points I'd seen in my childhood. The story wasn't bad! But it wasn't *great*, which is what I was hoping for. It could have been great, too. You can see it *trying* to be great, almost making it, and being dragged down by—I don't know what. Marketing? Disney? Interference? Politics?

Here are the three major problems I had with *The Force Awakens*. Every intelligent human with whom I've spoken, Democrats and Republicans both (so I feel like I'm on solid footing), old fans and new, all agreed with me on the following basic points:

ONE

The world that was built so deftly, so economically in *Star Wars* and *Empire Strikes Back* (and so clumsily in the prequels) is confusing in *The Force Awakens*. Consider the first five minutes of *Star Wars* for a moment—a movie that is itself a master class in storytelling. The audience learns that (1) there's an Empire and a Rebellion—the political order of the

world is comprehensible [side note—I learned what a “rebellion” was as a child from the movie, when my parents explained the dynamic to me]—and (2) who the good and bad guys are, what they look like, how they behave. When Darth Vader and Storm Troopers capture and storm a tiny ship, killing its soldiers and capturing its cargo, a princess, everything (sounds, visuals, music, action) balances harmoniously for the audience. Whether or not one is interested in the larger story, it is impossible to deny that the essential conflict has been established, definitively and authoritatively. Having established so much, so clearly, the filmmaker is able to efficiently build the world out further in a myriad of ways. Stormtroopers in Mos Eisley represent a threat, which Obi Wan, described as a wizard, neutralizes using some kind of magic called “The Force.” Han Solo, a mercenary, is seen as reliable in part because he doesn’t care for the Empire. This basic world building moment in the beginning of Star Wars is obeyed, reinforced, and becomes a touchstone of sorts, to the point where even in a later movie, understanding where a character stands vis-a-vis the Empire says things about that character—like with Han’s assessment that Lando Calrissian has “no love for the Empire,” which sets, Calrissian up as an essentially good character.

In *The Force Awakens*, there are (ulp) three groups. The Resistance seems like the inheritor (both in terms of weaponry, ideology, and personnel) of The Rebellion, and good characters affiliate themselves with it. The First Order seems like the heir (both in terms of weaponry, ideology, and personnel types) to The Empire’s legacy, and evil characters affiliate themselves with it, including the movie’s primary antagonists. Now—though it’s rarely seen and little explained, apparently the third part of the galactic order at this point is—The Republic! Not “The Old Republic,” which was the government of the prequels, but something that seems to be allied with The Resistance, rather than The First Order—neither powerful enough to keep The First Order in

check, nor so weak that they can be easily defeated at the outset. In any case, The Republic plays a passive role in the film, are described rather than seen, for the most part, and its presence raises more questions than it answers.

So at the end of the first film, here's what I know: Resistance good, like Rebellion. First Order bad, like Empire. Republic—*no idea*. Don't know where they are, what they look like, what they do. And this brings up serious questions that interrupt one's easy enjoyment of the film. We know First Order doesn't like Republic, and Resistance seems to like Republic, but why is the Resistance not part of the Republic? Who are they *resisting*? What are the basic relationships like in the film? In episodes IV-VI, everything was clear: Rebellion versus Empire, Light side of the force versus Dark side, and people torn between those two ideologies. In episode VII, I really could not tell you what motivates people to make choices based on their "side." Which leads up to the second great flaw with this movie:

TWO

Lack of character driven plot. A movie that gets this right succeeds, and those that have trouble establishing or following character motivations fail. The character with the strongest and most clear motivation in *The Force Awakens* is Kylo Ren, one of the primary antagonists. If you don't think this is a problem, you should. Without giving anything away in the movie, I'm going to rate each of the primary characters in terms of character unity and plausibility of action, also on a scale of 1-10, 1 being laughably absurd, 10 being perfectly reasonable:

Han: 9/10. A great performance worthy of the character and its actor.

Leia: 7/10. Not as much for General Leia to do as one might

have hoped. Despite feminism raves about the film, the old and diminished star of the first series proves that especially in Hollywood, nothing is as powerless, ultimately, as a woman ravaged by time.

Kylo Ren: 10/10. Some people disputed this characterization of the first movie's antagonist, but the character was logical and compelling, and acted in ways that one would not expect. Given the weight placed on the actor's role and the character's significance in the movie and series, it is impossible to imagine a better character here.

Captain Phasma: 4/10. An absurd character, totally unnecessary. There were opportunities for Phasma to kick ass in a couple scenes that would have increased the Stormtrooper Captain's menace—instead, Phasma was the punchline of pointless jokes. Wearer of the silver suit, deliverer of vacuous lines. Why?

Chewie: Was never really a fan of Chewie but he does his thing in this movie, only, as with other elements of this movie, in a slightly imperfect fashion

Finn: 5/10. Extremely mediocre, almost perfectly mediocre character. If I had to get rid of one character, it would be Finn. I tried to imagine the movie without Finn, and it immediately improved. A big part of this is the character's inexplicably contradictory compulsions. Just a flat, superficial character whose decisions at every point are surprising, because he's never adequately fleshed out.

Rey: 9/10. Pretty much carries the movie. Only thing that prevents her from rising to full on 10/10 Luke Skywalker status is her lack of *effort*—at no point does one doubt that she will prevail, she cruises through her challenges, which makes for a somewhat boring and anticlimactic finish. Also, her motivations are obscure and aestheticized in a way that Ren's are not. I don't know why a whiney Luke trying to get

off Tatooine in *Star Wars* works where confident, capable Rey does not—but it's just not the same. I suspect that an unwillingness to test the female character, to risk “demeaning” or “diminishing” her and her capabilities were to blame for the difference here.

Poe: 8/10. There was not enough Poe in this movie, and those places where Poe occurred, he wasn't used to full effect. I believe this is because Poe and Finn could or should have been the same character—Poe is just the part of Finn that can fly X-Wings well. Together they'd be a far more interesting character, although their being separate characters raises the possibility of something truly revolutionary: *Star Wars*' first openly gay protagonists.

Side note—the actors all did great work in the movie (or at least I thought so). Finn wasn't poorly acted—on the contrary you can see John Boyega working like crazy to give the character life—nevertheless, one can only do so much with a mediocre draw.

THREE

Rushed plot. There are four or five parts in the movie I remember where one scene jumps to another without any idea of why it's happening or how it's connected to the action—places that, in *Star Wars* and *Empire Strikes Back* are explained by the characters behaving logically given what the audience knows about them, or according to plot points that have been seeded beforehand. A great example of this is how Obi Wan's ghost speaks to Luke throughout the end of *Star Wars*—“use the force, Luke!”—then (the precedent has been established) manifests himself to Luke at the beginning of *Empire Strikes Back* and instructs Luke to seek master Yoda in the Degobah system. Luke then says Degobah and Yoda five or six times before he actually *flies* there. When Luke departs and arrives, the audience isn't thinking “where's Luke headed off to, now?” or “Degobah—where'd *that* star system come from? And who's this

weird alien?" At various points during *The Force Awakens*, I found myself thinking "why are we here now, rather than somewhere else? And what's up with *f***ing* Finn, what he's doing makes no sense, again." Those places where the plot flagged in the original trilogy was often carried by the characters' powerful motivations, or the overall context of the universe (the first two gripes)—in VII, those places the plot drags or becomes confused, there's not much to rescue it from itself. It's nowhere near as bad as in the interminable *Phantom Menace*, but neither is *The Force Awakens* as clean and tight as its predecessors.

A final issue this trilogy will face is less definite, and much harder to describe. Apart from the legacy of the previous films and the weight of expectations from the comic books, television shows, video game, card traders and literary worlds that sprang up to satisfy peoples' curiosity, these films have to contend with the powerfully positive nostalgic legacy of the original trilogy. Things are already shaping up to be interconnected and contextually subtle in ways that are suitable for contemporary society, but fundamentally disappointing as light entertainment. In the original series, a young man confronts his father, and is able to transcend the bad choices his father made, while wrestling to adhere to a strict moral code. Audiences are both more sophisticated and *less rational* today than they were in the 1970s and early 80s (a consequence in part of decreasingly consistent cultural mores, for better and for worse, but in the context of this movie, for worse), and there have been a glut of ambitious movies that foundered on their own desire to create complicated and clever, knowingly self-referential stories that satisfy everyone.

This movie is most laudable in part precisely because it goes so far out of its way to create a new mythology for the current social climate. After all, the original trilogy is

basically a story for white European men. Women have long bemoaned the lack of fully realized female characters who can respond to (rather than mindlessly fulfill) gender expectations, and have found a hero in Rey. Some have claimed that the original trilogy is explicitly racist in its handling of both [Lando Calrissian](#) and [Darth Vader](#), and African Americans will likely be pleased with the inclusion of a heroic black character who owns his black-ness (and, possibly, in future films, his homosexuality) (Finn). Hispanic fans may feel burned by the relative lack of Poe, who is, as mentioned earlier, a character with great potential, sadly underused. Others saw earlier movies' treatment of native societies like the Ewoks and Gungans as exploitative and condescending at best, and racist at worst—there is almost nothing to be seen of earlier episodes' willingness to rely on racist or prejudicial tropes to be seen in *The Force Awakens*. The only overt examples of discrimination in *The Force Awakens* were (1) the aforementioned reluctance to give old women consequential roles outside ceremonial leadership functions and (2) the usual terrified insistence on binary cisgender roles in sex—homosexuality is unseen (unless Finn and Poe end up shacking up in later movies, which would be a good step in the right direction—clearly the two have a powerful and inexplicable immediate intimacy, seen in their few scenes together, and Finn's character is such a cipher in terms of motivations that it's not at all implausible to imagine him developing in that direction).

Overall, the movie did a much better job at living up to the promise of the original trilogy than the prequels. The prequels were so bad without [serious rationalization](#) or [bizarre if entertaining conspiracy theories](#) that it's a minor miracle the franchise survived, and that Hollywood was willing to gamble on further movies. I am hopeful about *Star Wars*' long term prospects, based on this first, long-awaited sequel to the original trilogy. I'm also hopeful that Disney is confident enough in both its brand and the power of the

original trilogy to allow real challenge to the characters, and enable them to grow. The series is overdue for a big winner, and Rey certainly seems strong enough to carry a powerful storyline.

American Sniper and the Hero Myth

American Sniper, a new film based on the book of the same name, is being released on Christmas Day. Directed by Clint Eastwood and starring and produced by Bradley Cooper, it tells the story of Navy SEAL super-sniper Chris Kyle, widely-praised as the most lethal sniper in American history with at least 160 “official” kills, and apparently many more “unofficial” ones. The film’s catch phrase is “the most lethal sniper in history”, and the trailer shows Bradley Cooper undergoing a moment of moral doubt before (presumably) shooting a child carrying a bomb. The Hollywood studio is banking not only on the film’s popularity, but that Americans will want to spend their Christmas Day watching such morally questionable lethality. The trailer immediately reminds me of another Bradley Cooper role in *The Place Beyond the Pines* (a much better movie than *American Sniper*, by the way), where Cooper’s entire character is built around the fact that he killed a man with a young son the same age as his own and felt guilt and regret for the rest of his life.

Digression about the title *American Sniper*: why are there so many films beginning with “American” something or other? Cooper has already starred in one such movie only a year earlier than this one (*American Hustle*), and then we have *American Psycho*, *American Beauty*, *American Pie*, *American Gangster*, *American History X*, *American Outlaws*, and many,

many more. I understand that the double iambic rhythm of America's adjectival form lends an especially strong sound that leads to strong titles, and it is hard to find any other nationality adjectives which convey such emphasis (the few scattered examples are exotic rather than emphatic: *The French Connection*, *The Italian Job*, *The English Patient*, *The African Queen*, *The Manchurian Candidate*, *The Good German*. Even here we see the definite article almost without exception, which is never necessary with "American"). Rather than exotic, titles beginning with "American" are meant to be paradigmatic of something true and universal and worthy of such a phonologically forceful appellation. We can speculate that Kyle, in choosing the title for his war memoirs, intended to tap into this paradigm with himself representing the ideal Platonic form of "sniper" or "killer" by means of his qualitative Americanness. It is beyond doubt that director Clint Eastwood and the Hollywood producers agreed.

Moving back to the original story, after 10 years in the military and four tours in Iraq, the real-life Chris Kyle left the Navy in 2009 and started a private security consulting firm in his home state of Texas. One of his priorities was supporting wounded and troubled veterans. When his book was published, he donated the entire \$1.5 million check to charities supporting such veterans. He was a devoted family man as well as a noted gun-lover and hunter (it remains unclear whether he killed more human or non-human animals).

Kyle, along with a friend, was killed in 2013 by a troubled ex-Marine who shot him in the back when Kyle took him for his own brand of "therapy" at a shooting range. The funeral was held at the Cowboys Stadium in Dallas to accommodate the huge number of mourners. This man was a hero to millions of people in America. My purpose is not to disrespect Kyle in any way, but to point out some of my thoughts and observations about the circumstances which lead him to become such a hero to so many.

It is obvious that Kyle was a conflicted individual, which is perfectly understandable if we consider the inhuman amount of death and bloodshed he was involved in. Many veterans return from war with PTSD, often despite never even firing a shot or being shot at. War is traumatic, and the training and mindset that prepares an individual for war can sometimes be even more dehumanizing. I recognize the goodwill Kyle felt towards other veterans, but should it be considered the wisest decision to bring a suicidal, mentally-unstable veteran whom you had never met to a shooting range? Kyle's death, while tragic, is not surprising. Jesus Christ reportedly said "live by the sword, die by the sword". Kyle, a lover of guns, personally killed hundreds of humans with guns. Is it shocking that such a story should end in his own death by gun? Kyle was also a proud Christian man who must have fallen into confusion about the meaning of his Lord's words extolling pacifism. He had more of a mentally of Crusader-against-the-infidel Christian than a turn-the-other-cheek one. Yet this is beside the point as he was not the first man to justify his violence through his religious beliefs, and he won't be the last.

Another relevant thing I found out is that Kyle never expressed any regret or doubt over killing people on such a Herculean scale (here is a quote from his book: "It was my duty to shoot, and I don't regret it. The woman was already dead. I was just making sure she didn't take any Marines with her."). One must imagine that it would become quite routine after a while to aim, shoot, and repeat. This is no video game, however, nor is it aerial bombing, artillery, or even run-of-the-mill machine-gun fire. Every one of those kills Kyle would have previously and skillfully planned, calculated, and then witnessed in gory detail by means of a powerful telescope sight. That such a thing would be desensitizing is understandable. I would not take such a job, but if it were me I would also by necessity strengthen my personal convictions about my own righteousness if only as a way to avoid insanity (another quote from the book: "My shots saved several

Americans, whose lives were clearly worth more than that woman's twisted soul. I can stand before God with a clear conscience about doing my job.").

There appear to be some unsavory parts of Kyle's story. First of all, I must ask myself why Navy SEALs and other special operations guys call themselves "silent professionals" when there is nothing silent about the stream of lucrative book deals and Hollywood productions involving former Navy SEALs and their ilk telling all the dirty secrets about their work (which is to say, how efficient they are at killing other humans). Kyle's book and movie are just one of an entire sub-genre which the French philosopher Jean Beaudrillard would label "war porn", and its popularity in the military and American society as a whole is revealing. Just as in similarly violent video games, the wide-eyed reader/viewer can excitedly imagine himself killing everybody in sight and single-handedly saving the day/winning the war. Such a mindset, while quite common, is psychologically unhealthy for individuals, and politically unhealthy for a democracy.

Kyle also had problems telling the truth. Though apparently no stranger to garden-variety barroom brawls, he invented a story about a bar fight in which he punched out former wrestler, actor, and Minnesota governor (and fellow Navy commando) Jesse Ventura. Ventura sued and was eventually awarded over a million dollars in damages. Kyle also apparently made up a story about killing two guys who tried to rob him somewhere in Texas, which never happened in real life. I wonder why he would feel the need to make up superfluous falsehoods when he was already well-supplied with enough martial anecdotes to win admiration from his armed acolytes. It reeks of the braggadocio and machismo that is all-too-common in the special operations communities. He was also a heavy drinker, like many fellow veterans. Alcohol is one of the most common and most readily available means for veterans to cope with the trauma of war and homecoming. Sadly, we should not be surprised by

such a man leading a violent life, even if he is by no means alone.

The idea of the Hero is one that is as old as humanity, and well-documented in the ancient stories of Heracles and Achilles on down the line. Thomas Carlyle famously popularized a theory of hero worship whose exemplars were nevertheless praised as much for their cultural and literary feats as for their martial and political prowess. Likewise, we will not find today's ersatz heroes in the pages of Nietzsche, whose morally-transcendent, classically-trained heroes would come to rule over the common rabble. The current American myth of the hero is not so sophisticated as its predecessors, whatever their flaws. If we think about Joseph Campbell's famous theory of the monomyth, Chris Kyle could, through the narrative of his book and the film, be seen to follow the universal mythical paradigm of departure, initiation, and return. The thing about Campbell's theory, though, is that it applies to the myths that human societies create, but not to human societies and individuals themselves. In other words, we create the myths that we want to believe. The myth of Chris Kyle and the hero protecting their freedom from evil-doers is one which many Americans would like to believe.

Like I said, Kyle, for all his personal problems, is not himself the problem, but a symptom of a larger problem. He was just doing his job, as horrible as that job was. The real problem is with the segment of society that glorifies this behavior as heroic, holding up Kyle in particular as a superhero. I think it is twisted logic that holds up people like Kyle, and soldiers in general, as heroes while failing to question the cause or need for war and violence in the first place. In fact, if it has not been clearly enunciated up to this point, I do not care much at all for the term "hero". Heroes are for people who see the world as black and white, good guys and bad guys, us versus them, without much thought for nuance or second-order effects (another telling quote from

the book: "Savage, despicable evil. That's what we were fighting in Iraq. That's why a lot of people, myself included, called the enemy "savages." There really was no other way to describe what we encountered there."). I think it is no coincidence that super-hero movies are especially popular at the moment—the desire for super-heroes in adults comes from the same line of thinking, and the same weakness of critical thinking, that produces hero worship. This same line of thinking also enables the propaganda and social and political environment which facilitates war and stifles dissent against it.

Chris Kyle was no super-hero, let alone hero, though many people (and maybe he himself) saw him as one. The world needs neither fake heroes nor mythical super-heroes with super-human powers or super-human killing ability to be able to solve the world's problems or kill all of the bad guys. The society that produced Chris Kyle and his unquestioning world view will sustain itself with tales of heroes like Chris Kyle who defend our "freedom" from the bad guys. The thing about bad guys is that, to them, the other guys are bad guys, and they are fighting for their own version of "freedom". Killing over 200 "bad guys" is just as ineffective a way to peace or freedom as killing two million "bad guys" if there is no reason why and no plan to stop killing them. This false heroism creates more problems than it solves and multiplies the violence in the world. Chris Kyle did not protect or make anyone safer; his story is one small part of immoral (and probably illegal) war that has only increased the vicious cycle of violent retribution that exists in the world. Such a cycle will continue until someone, dare I say one akin to a real "hero", tries to stop the cycle with understanding, dialogue, and diplomacy. The world does not need heroes; it needs human solidarity.