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## Beautiful boys and fantastical toys

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NCR Today

### Reviews of 'Restrepo' and 'Toy Story 3'

I didn't intend to see National Geographic Entertainment's new film "Restrepo" today but circumstances got me to the theater just as it was about to start. I knew it was a documentary about the war in Afghanistan but I never expected it to be so real, so personal, so heartbreaking.



In May 2007, Battle Company of the 173rd Airborne Brigade was assigned to the Korengal Valley in eastern Afghanistan. The mission of the Second Platoon was to clear out Taliban insurgents so that a paved road could be built to bring in supplies and facilitate transportation and trade. Their other task was to create paying jobs so local leaders would not take money from the Taliban to kill American soldiers who would in turn kill them.

The men built a rustic yet practical outpost on a hill that gave them a tactical advantage over the valley. When the fighting started, one of the first casualties was PFC Juan Restrepo, the platoon's medic. The platoon named the outpost for their brother and comrade. It is still called Restrepo today.

The film's directors are Tim Hetherington ("The Devil Came on Horseback") and Sebastian Junger who wrote the best-selling book and screenplay, *The Perfect Storm*. They were embedded with the unit on assignment for *Vanity Fair* and ABC News. They and their team risked almost as much as the soldiers did

in this yearlong test of endurance. The filming is visceral, the editing sharp, the story both human and inhumane.

What is clear throughout the film is the honorable and courageous brotherhood of men on a distant mountaintop who could be killed at any moment, and the search for meaning in what they are doing. The commanding officer, Capt. Dan Kearney, 29, meets weekly with the local leaders, but he never quite bridges the culture gap, to make them understand his intentions, his actions. He expresses regret in almost edited form for the killing of innocents along side the Taliban. The solution for resolving collateral damage is beyond him.

When his men are killed, Kearney reminds the men that they are there to serve their country. He gives them a moment to pray and then to buck up and move on.

These are brave men, and the interviews carried out a few months after the platoon returned to its home base in Italy, show the young, beautiful faces of men who are hardly more than boys, and will never be the same again. The themes of community, family, character, honor, and trust, fear, and sorrow emerge without any effort on the part of the filmmakers. It's who the men are.

What did the platoon accomplish at the end of a year, in the whole scheme of things? In any lasting way that would give reason and meaning for the death of their friends? Not much. I recommend visiting the Web site for the film, [restreptomovie.com](http://restreptomovie.com), so you can see the faces of these valiant men. John Lennon's song, "Beautiful Boy," played in my heart as the credits rolled.

You don't clap at the end of a film like this; you weep.



"Toy Story 3" covers much of the same territory as "Restrepo" in terms

of themes. To be honest, the film I really wanted to see today was "Knight and Day" with Tom Cruise and Cameron Diaz. As I was buying my ticket to see this after Restrepo, one of the theater staff (they know me quite well) asked me if I was seeing Toy Story 3. She said she had seen it right away because she had grown up with the films and just loves them all. So I exchanged my ticket.

In the original Disney/Pixar "Toy Story," Woody and the toys are afraid they will be replaced, in "Toy Story 2," Woody is afraid he will be sold, and in "Toy Story 3," Woody and his friends are afraid they will be thrown away when Andy goes away to college.

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Woody and the toys are problem solvers and go into one mess after another only to find a way out by working together. They find themselves in a preschool toy prison, watched over by a sock monkey and a baby doll creepy enough to be one of Stephen King's creations. The leader of the toys is a purple stuffed bear that smells like strawberries. He has a hard heart, and in the end, gets his comeuppance. There are consequences to the abuse of power.

There is so much to talk about in "Toy Story 3," such as the meaning of family and community, and

choosing others before self. Team work, however, is at the top of the list of themes. Unlike "Restrepo," however, there are viable solutions to the social conflict in "Toy Story 3," and lessons that can be applied to real life. I hope our political and military leaders will watch both of these films.

The Toy Story universe is not about any "me" generation, but a celebration of "us," a kaleidoscope of communities, in all our diversity, talents, quirks, flaws, and all. If we can walk in the shoes of others, we can find a way to get along.

I had to laugh at the irony of the conclusion of "Toy Story 3," however, when the toys are saved from oblivion, that plastic will outlast all of us -- and this is enough to make us weep as we applaud another artistic tour de force by the ubiquitous Pixar/Disney.

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