

# Warm Bodies (2013)

Rated PG-13. Our ratings: V 5-; L -1; S/N 31. Running time: 1 hour 38 min.

*I will give them a new heart and a new mind. I will take away their stubborn heart of stone and will give them an obedient heart.*

*Ezekiel 11:19 (TEV)*

At last a zombie film I can R and Julie discover a love enjoy and urge others to see. that transcends the hostile This is an inventive take off on division between humans and Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet zombies.

tale. Based on Isaac Marion's novel, director/writer Jonathan Levine's novel could be regarded as a bargain basement Westside Story without the latter's glorious music. Our lovers are named R (Nicholas Hoult) and Julie (Teresa Palmer), and yes, there is a balcony scene, though because R in his zombie form can do little more than grunt, the dialogue is a lot briefer than in the original version.

2013 Summit Entertainment

Instead of warring families we have the war between the remnant of uninfected humanity and the zombies who regard humans only as a source for food. The film, set in the near future, is narrated by R, who cannot remember his name, how he became a zombie, nor what was the nature of the disaster that infected the majority of the population, transforming its victims into the walking dead. Even the zombies are divided into two groups, the zombies and the bonies, the latter having so deteriorated that all is left of them is sinew and bones.

Zombies, as we can see by R's narrative, can still think, but their speech has deteriorated into gestures and grunts and an occasional identifiable word.

Julie is the daughter of Grigio (John Malkovich), leader of the human band who lives in a city around which they have erected a high wall. Her best friend is Nora (Analeigh Tipton,) and her boyfriend is Perry (Dave Franco). When the three of them join with some other youth to go beyond the walls in search of badly needed medicines, they are attacked by zombies in the drugstore. R and his best friend M (Rob Corddry) are among the attackers. In the darkened store R is attracted to Julie, and so spares her, but when Perry tries to shoot him, he kills the boy (out of Julie's sight). He could satisfy his hunger by eating some of Perry's flesh (which would turn the victim into a zombie), but if he eats the brain, he will gain the memories of the dead person. He chooses the latter, and sees Perry's world, including his first meeting Julie and some of their times together. He even stuffs pieces of the brain into his pocket for future consumption, and additional memories. R rescues Julie from the other zombies and takes her to the old hull of a jet liner that he has taken over for his home, filling it with items he has savaged, including a record player and a collection of vinyl.

How Julie tries to escape at various times, even as her revulsion at R slowly dissolves due to his kindness, makes for exciting viewing. In this version of the genre it seems that zombiehood is reversible. Holding hands becomes more than a symbol of love and acceptance: it starts with R and Julie affectionately holding hands and spreads to M and their zombie friends. It might be hard to believe that a zombie film can become a soaring tale of romance and reconciliation, but thanks to a good script, direction, and performances by an earnest young cast, the film does soar at times. (And thankfully we're spared the male bare-chested scenes of the

Twig light series, to which some have compared this film.)

People of faith will appreciate the affirmation that no one, or nothing, is beyond redemption. The power of love can reach across barriers, as both Romeo and Juliet and Westside Story affirm, thus aligning them with the biblical prophets and Christ. God's promise through Ezekiel was to a people who had become religious zombies, dead to God's ways, and yet still not beyond the reach of his love. How good it is to see a horror film that focuses upon something more than blood and gore, one that actually deals with ideas and ideals. The film's rating stops just short of being R, so a youth leaders could take their group to it—I have been informed by a reader that the English teacher of her 9th grade daughter is taking his class to see the film. Now we can't let the schools get ahead of the church, can we? Plenty in the film to inspire a good discussion when led by insightful leaders.

## **For Reflection/Discussion**

Spoilers in the last questions.

1. What do you think of the zombie genre? Are you a fan of TV's 'The Walking Dead? What is it that attracts you, and so many others, to this genre?
2. What do most zombie films focus on? There is blood and gore in this film, but what is it really about? How is our being let in on the thoughts of a zombie a fresh approach? In fact, do most other zombie pictures even assume that zombies have "thoughts" ?
3. Besides names of the principals, how well does the film match Shakespeare's story of the power of love?
4. In what way are the zombies similar to the Jews that were condemned by Ezekiel and the other prophets? And yet what hope

did Ezekiel hold out for his people after Jerusalem was destroyed and they were carried into exile?

5. In addition to Ch. 11 you might check Ch. 37:1-14 wherein resurrection is a theme.

6. How is what happens to R and M similar to resurrection?

What does the film show about the importance of friendship, that companionship means shared goals and dangers?

7. How do both Julie and R demonstrate sacrificial love?

8. What symbolism do you see at the end when something happens to the walls of the city?