

Over the Hedge A film review by Rev Dr Steve Taylor (Originally written for New Zealand, Methodist Touchstone. Reprinted with permission.)

Over the Hedge continues the trend of outstanding animation movies (think *Shrek* or *Madagascar*) that can be enjoyed by all ages. Adults enjoy the witty dialogue and pop-cultural references, children enjoy the animated action. Another crowd teaser is the use of movie star voices (including Bruce Willis and Avril Lavigne in *Over the Hedge*).

Over the Hedge dawns among a group of animals, waking from hibernation, to find their forest divided by a new hedge. Over that hedge is El Rancho Camelot Estates, a brand new suburban housing development.

Enter RJ the racoon. He is on a mission. Can RJ beat his deadline and return the snack food he has stolen from a hibernating bear? Could RJ persuade the freshly wakened animals to go over the hedge and scavenge for snack food among the manicured lawns of suburbia? Will they dodge the local Householders Association and out run the domestic dogs? Can they outwit Dwayne the Verminator, complete with animal catching technologies so violent they are banned by the Geneva Convention?

Before a feel good family ending, the movie tackles some weighty issues. These include US foreign policy, the impact of housing developments on the environment, the authenticity of leadership and the inclusivity of family. Perhaps the most poignant scenes involve human consumption. The scene in which RJ describes the human lust for food – humans exercising solely in order to eat more food, human refrigerators as gleaming altars for worshipping food - is simultaneously superb comedy and a biting critique of Western consumption.

This is the power of film. In the middle of laughing at a superbly animated racoon, you are suddenly forced to reflect on the absurdity of a wealthy Westerners muttering, “I’m starving” or mouthing, “Give us this day our daily bread.”

I saw the movie as part of the 13th Cans Film Festival (Monday November 6th 2006). It is a clever title and a terrific fundraising idea. Donate a can of food and you get free entry to a range of family movies at participating (big hat tip to Hoyts, Readings, Sky) cinemas. The donated cans of food go to The Salvation Army Christmas Appeal. It is a wonderful example of the Christian church creatively engaging with film.

Watching *Over the Hedge* at the 13th Cans Film Festival raised all manner of irony. Give food to watch a film about the human over-consumption of food. Give food to humans who do indeed need their daily bread.

In the month you read this review you will be penning your Christmas shopping lists. If you watch *Over the Hedge*, you could well pen those lists more thoughtfully. You could well enter the frenzy that is a suburban consumer Christmas more carefully and eat your Christmas dinner more slowly.

And when all is said and done, when you find yourself bored and bloated on Boxing Day, you could always check out the *Over the Hedge* website (www.overthehedgemovie.com), complete with clever animation, catchy soundtrack, games and activities.

Steve Taylor
507 words

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