Review: Zombieland: Double Tap delivers wise-cracking, brain-splattering fun

Enlarge / Columbus, Tallahassee, Wichita, and Little Rock face a new kind of zombie in *Zombieland 2: Double Tap*.
YouTube/Sony Pictures

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The makeshift family unit that slays together stays together in *Zombieland: Double Tap*, Director Ruben Fleischer's follow-up to his 2009 hit film *Zombieland*. This hotly anticipated sequel succeeds in recapturing much of the original's magic, with plenty of wit, gore, and playful callbacks to delight diehard fans. And let's just say you'll definitely want to hang around through the closing credits.

(Some spoilers below.)

In the first *Zombieland,* a virulent form of human-adapted mad cow disease sweeps across the United States, transforming most of the nation's populace into ravenous zombies. The film follows a ragtag group of unlikely survivors—Columbus (Jesse Eisenberg), Tallahassee (Woody Harrelson), and orphaned sisters Wichita (Emma Stone) and Little Rock (Abigail Breslin)—on a road trip in hopes of finding some place yet untouched by the disease, ending with a pitched battle against zombie hordes in an abandoned amusement park. Audiences (myself included) loved the mix of horror and dark screwball

comedy, especially the “Zombie Kills of the Week” and Columbus’s hilarious survival rules—cardio, limber up, beware of bathrooms, and buckle up, for instance—often illustrated by various doomed souls who failed to heed those rules. It was a fresh, fun take on the “zom-com” format.

While the original cast expressed enthusiasm for a sequel in the wake of *Zombieland*‘s success, the project languished for several years. All four main cast members have been nominated for Academy Awards, and Emma Stone actually won the Best Actress Oscar for her role in *La La Land* (2016). Fortunately, each of them retained sufficient fondness for their *Zombieland* experience to return for the sequel. They’re clearly still having a blast with these characters, aided this time around by cast newcomers Zoey Deutch, Rosario Dawson, Avan Jogia, Luke Wilson, and Thomas Middleditch as additional survivors of the zombie apocalypse.

Ten years have passed for our protagonists in *Zombieland: Double Tap*—a reference to Columbus’s Rule #2: don’t get stingy with your bullets with zombies, shoot them twice to make sure they’re dead. They’ve become a makeshift—rather dysfunctional—family unit, and they’re a tightly disciplined zombie-killing team, eventually settling into the abandoned White House in what’s left of Washington, DC, to satisfy Columbus’ strong desire for a permanent home. Zombies have evolved, too, splintering into different subspecies. There are the “Homers” (as in Homer Simpson), the slow-moving, dim-witted classic Romero zombies; the “hawkings,” which are faster and smarter; and the “ninjas,” who sneak up on their victims and attack suddenly. There are also rumors of a newer breed of “super zombie,” much more agile and significantly harder to kill.

- Tallahassee’s Twinkie totem decorates the grille of the Beast.
  YouTube/Sony Pictures

- Battling zombies in what’s left of DC.
  YouTube/Sony Pictures
- Wichita and Little Rock, armed and ready.
  YouTube/Sony Pictures
- The gang finds a once-prestigious new home.
  YouTube/Sony Pictures
- Tallahassee thinks he’d make a terrific president.
  YouTube/Sony Pictures
- Tallahassee tries to get his makeshift family into the holiday spirit.
  YouTube/Sony Pictures
- Little Rock meets the man of her teenaged dreams.
  YouTube/Sony Pictures
- Does Berkeley (Avan Jogia) look like the kind of guy who’d be carrying around a bunch of weed?
  YouTube/Sony Pictures
- Columbus picks up stray survivor Madison (Zoey Deutch).
  YouTube/Sony Pictures
- A “hawking” zombie.
  YouTube/Sony Pictures
- Columbus ducks at just the right moment.
  YouTube/Sony Pictures
- Nevada (Rosario Dawson) shows she’s just as tough as the rest of the gang.
  YouTube/Sony Pictures
- Tallahassee channels his inner Elvis.
  YouTube/Sony Pictures
- R.I.P. the Beast. Death by Monster Truck.
  YouTube/Sony Pictures
- Doppelgängers! Albuquerque (Luke Wilson) meets Tallahassee in full-on Elvis mode.
  YouTube/Sony Pictures
- Flagstaff (Thomas Middleditch) is a doppelgänger for Columbus.
  YouTube/Sony Pictures
- When will they learn that zombies are drawn to noise and lights?

YouTube/Sony Pictures

- Kill them with fire!
  YouTube/Sony Pictures
- A monster truck rides to the rescue.
  YouTube/Sony Pictures
- Who is this celebrity cameo in a post-credits sequence?
  YouTube/Sony Pictures

There are other human survivors of the zombie apocalypse, but our ragtag band prefers to keep to themselves. That isolationist strategy is starting to falter, however, as a now-teenaged Little Rock is craving outside companionship with people her own age (namely boys) and pushing back against Tallahassee's over-protective father-figure instincts. Things have also gotten stale in the romance department between Columbus and Wichita, whose commitment and intimacy issues start to resurface. So one day the sisters abandon the men to strike out again on their own. Old habits die hard.

When Little Rock falls for a hippie survivor named Berkeley (Avan Jogia) and runs off with him, Wichita goes back to the White House—only to find Columbus has hooked up on the rebound with a ditzy survivor named Madison (Zoey Deutch). But Little Rock is in danger—a horde of super-zombies is in hot pursuit of the couple—so the group sets off to find her.

One of the original film's greatest strengths was that Harrelson, Eisenberg, Stone, and Breslin all had such great on-screen chemistry, and the past decade hasn't diminished that one whit. They settle back into their respective roles with ease, and they always bring some sense of warmth beneath the constant bickering and occasional eruptions of temper. Among the supporting cast, Deutch practically steals the entire movie as the perpetually pink-clad Madison, who somehow managed to survive on her own hiding out in a mall freezer for years, armed only with a can of mace. Wilson and Middleditch are delightful as bizarro doppelgängers to Tallahassee and Columbus, even if they don't hang around for long. And yes,

Bill Murray—whose accidental death at the hands of Columbus was a comedic highlight of the first *Zombieland*—makes a brief cameo.

Granted, the plot is a bit thin, the humor is a bit broad, the lesser characters are stereotypes, and things get wrapped up a bit too neatly in the end as our intrepid zombie slayers pair off. But that's the "rom-zom-com" genre for you, and honestly, somebody has to start repopulating the human race. Above all, the film resists the temptation to take itself too seriously. The jokes and sight gags come hard and fast, and if a few fail to land, no matter—there are plenty of other laughs to be had. All I really wanted from a *Zombieland* sequel was to reconnect with my favorite characters and relish some wise-cracking, brain-splattering, zombie smackdowns. On that score, *Double Tap* delivers.

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