TWILIGHT

Let's just get it out of the way: No, I haven't read Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight*, and no, I didn't really care for the film version. But I won't begrudge the movie its popular appeal, because while watching director Catherine Hardwicke's and screenwriter Melissa Rosenberg's take on Meyer's teen-vampire tale, it was pretty easy to see what would make the material absolutely irresistible to its target audience. For those of us who *aren't* its target audience, maybe not so much.

It's not like there isn't fun to be had for *Twilight* newbies, even if you, too, are old enough to be chagrined by the movie's rather depressing view of the middle-aged. (Our heroine's mom proves her worthiness in *Twilight* when she finally learns how to text.) Though a little one-dimensional, Kristen Stewart lends a lovely gravity to her role as Bella, the high-school junior who develops a serious - and seriously unwise - crush on her undead classmate, Edward (the actually-not-that-bad brooder Robert Pattinson). With the mountains of Washington State at her disposal, Hardwicke provides some gorgeous vistas, and offers a nice rush through the treetops. For a movie that takes itself just a *li-i-ittle* too seriously, unexpectedly amusing grace notes keep popping up; prior to their introduction, Edward first catches a whiff of Bella via an oscillating fan, and we eventually discover that the music collection of this nearly-100-year-old vampire boasts a few dozen more LPs than any "teen" should rightfully own. And if, like me, you didn't have even a rudimentary knowledge of the *Twilight* mythology beforehand, this introductory film is certainly easy to follow.

A little *too* easy, even given the movie's unsurprising, uninteresting, will-he-love-me-or-*kill*-me? plot. Aside from those outdoor visuals, Hardwicke's filmmaking here is conventional and obvious, with every character given a perfunctory close-up during which their names are stated for quick and easy identification, and she makes predictable use of low angles, smoke-filled rooms, and a sad-bastard score that's employed to goose the leads' romantic misery. She's also anything but subtle in establishing that Edward and his vampire family are hottie "others";

they're meant to be captivating, but with the over-bright lighting accentuating the bloodsuckers' pancake make-up, this *way* -beyond-the-pale ensemble just winds up looking incredibly silly. (In his early scenes, Peter Facinelli, who plays Edward's dad, looks disturbingly like one of the Wayans brothers in *White Chicks* .)

The movie's also awfully repetitive, and the effects are kinda weak, and the stars' high-school pals have little to do but smile (and wait for more engaging storylines in the sequels). But will most of *Twilight*'s audiences care about any of this? Probably not, because Hardwicke and her performers are at least treating the material with a dedicated earnestness, and because Rosenberg's clunkily sincere, frequently expository dialogue is obviously giving audiences the literal-minded adaptation they want. (The film feels just like the first Harry Potter movie, which treated spontaneity and imagination as elements to be steadfastly avoided.) The movie hasn't been made for The Rest of Us; it's been made for the fans, and between its leads' chaste smoldering and the entertaining subtext (always a vampire-flick perk), it'll likely satisfy on a purely fan-boy or -girl level. And yeah, so the film version won't win any Oscars, but I doubt its participants - and the millions for whom *Twilight* will be cinematic heaven - will mind. My guess is that it's already got the MTV Movie Award for Best Kiss all sewn up.

BOLT

During the first half of Disney's animated canine caper *Bolt*, I was having such a good time that it was almost embarrassing. Voiced (and voiced beautifully) by John Travolta, Bolt is a spunky little puppy who is also the unknowing star of a popular action/adventure TV franchise, one that finds the loyal dog, week after week, saving the life of his young owner. Events conspire to have Bolt - who believes himself the possessor of super powers - accidentally shipped from Los Angeles to New York, and by the time the pooch had embarked (sorry) on an ill-thought-out plan to return home, I'd already been laughing so hard that I was wiping away tears from beneath my 3D glasses. The *faux* ac

tion scenes, the happily mean-spirited Hollywood jabs, and the witty supporting animals (especially Mark Walton's excitable hamster-in-a-ball) delivered almost nonstop amusement, and the adorably clueless and determined Bolt himself was a priceless original - Lassie by way of
The Truman Show
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Unfortunately, at about the 45-minute mark, the movie turns into a more run-of-the-mill affair, albeit a spectacularly well-animated one; pitfalls are experienced, Life Lessons are learned, and its title character, inevitably, becomes a less engaging creation. (He's so much fun in his obliviousness that you don't *want* to see him wizened up.) Yet even at its least inspired, *Bolt* is never less than entertaining, and earns major kudos for its hysterical trio of fidgety Noo Yawk birds that unwittingly instigate the whole adventure.
Twilight
fans may already be panting for
Full Moon
, but I'm thinking I'd have a much better time at
Bolt II: Attack of the Pigeons
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