

Written by Mike Schulz
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THE TWILIGHT SAGA: BREAKING DAWN – PART 1

We're now four films into the five-part series of Stephenie Meyer adaptations, and *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 1*

is the first one that I wouldn't hesitate to call unpredictable. As someone who couldn't care less about the tortured love triangle involving the human Bella (Kristen Stewart), the vampire Edward (Robert Pattinson), and the lycanthrope Jacob (Taylor Lautner), I was confident that this moody romance would perk up with an added dash of

Rosemary's Baby

, once the now-married Bella found herself pregnant with Edward's child. (So the undead have living sperm, then?) But how could I have guessed this would be the exact moment that, at least for me, the movie

stopped

being interesting?

Prior to that miracle conception, which occurs (off-screen) at roughly the film's midway point, director Bill Condon pulls off something of his own miracle, because the first half of *Twilight's* latest

is actually – and I swallow hard in saying this – quite impressive, and even a lot of fun. With the movie opening during the final nuptial preparations, Condon, right off the bat, does a rather exemplary job of signaling Bella's fear and intense devotion: the former in a creepily suggestive fantasy that finds the new marrieds standing atop the piled corpses of their wedding guests, the latter in the swoony recitation of vows, with the minister's recitations silent and only Bella's and Edward's voices heard. Yet in an even more welcome surprise, Condon and screenwriter Melissa Rosenberg manage to make much of the film – in its early scenes, at any rate –

legitimately, laugh-out-loud

funny

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At the series screenings I've attended, the *Twilight* fanatics in the crowds happily gobble up whatever borderline-amusing lines or reaction shots they're given; with Billy Burke, who plays Bella's agitated and overprotective pop, a heavy exhalation of breath is generally all it takes to get the devoted giggling. But in *Breaking Dawn – Part 1*,

I was routinely one of the gigglers, and not a derisive one. (Well, I was

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later

, but we'll get to that.) Absolutely everything uttered by that sublime comedienne Anna Kendrick is priceless – assuming that Bella is expecting, Kendrick's Jessica cuts through the romantic hooey by asking, "Who

else

gets married at 18?" – and the wedding toasts are so sharply edited that one guest after another earns chuckles. Yet thankfully, the tonal lightness doesn't abate once Bella and Edward get to their Brazilian honeymoon retreat. Condon stages a terrifically amusing montage demonstrating Bella's pre-coital jitters (she panics over her outfit and brushes her teeth with obsessive purpose), and an even better one after the couple's first night together leaves Bella bruised and Edward gun-shy; Bella's attempts at seducing her new hubby are riotously awkward. (It's a pleasure, and a huge relief, watching Stewart and Pattinson do more than smolder and pine.)

Yet all honeymoons must come to an end. And when Bella's and Edward's does, so, too, does the movie's; Bella discovers she's with child, and all of the traditional *Twilight* failings that had been successfully skirted – the mopey stares, the endless debates, the climax's tiresome vampire-versus-werewolf scuffle, the maudlin ballads on the soundtrack, the distractingly weak CGI, Taylor Lautner – come immediately flooding back. Oh, and don't expect anything in the way of a joke in the film's second half ... unless, like me, you find yourself practically doubled over during the powerfully awful scene in which the werewolves growl at each other while conversing telepathically, a sequence that might stand as the most unintentionally hysterical one this series has yet offered. There's still time, of course, for this concluding chapter to rally. (Michael Sheen and Dakota Fanning are returning for

Part 2

, yes?) But for now,

The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn

is just more of the same, and especially disappointing for initially delivering so much more than that.



HAPPY FEET TWO

As follow-ups go, director George Miller's *Happy Feet Two* is much like the polar opposite – and I use that term deliberately – of the latest

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Twilight

release: mostly underwhelming in its first half, and mostly sensational, even

brilliant

, in its second. I found 2006's original, Oscar-winning

Happy Feet

all but unbearable, given its time-wasting musical numbers, lazy pop-culture riffs, strident ecological moralizing, and Robin Williams perversely allowed to voice not one but

two

irritating flightless waterfowl. And that's all accounted for in Miller's sequel, too. But in this visually stunning outing, we also get scenes of outrageous slapstick, a deeply moving partnership-among-the-species finale, Hank Azaria as a heavily-accented Swedish puffin, a baby penguin offering a burst of grand opera, and, best of all, Brad Pitt and Matt Damon as a pair of sweetly squabbling krill. The former aches to move up the food chain ("I wanna chew on something with a

face

!"), the latter just yearns for peace and babies with the former ("We'll adopt!"), and together, they add laugh-'til-you-cry hilarity to Miller's less ambitious yet ultimately more satisfying animated adventure. Near the film's end, Pitt's Will describes dancing as "a momentary relief from the existential terrors of existence," simplifying the sentiment for Damon's Bill as "it brings out my happy." Ditto

Happy Feet Two

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