Written by Mike Schulz Sunday, 14 July 2013 11:59



I'm presuming that you're reading this while seated. But just in case you aren't, you might want to grab the nearest chair, because in *Grown Ups 2*, the strongest, funniest, and damn near *only* perf ormance in the movie is given by Taylor Lautner.

Yes. Taylor Lautner.

And the apocalypse just got a little bit closer.

It's not that the shirtless stud from the *Twilight* franchise is all that remarkable in director Dennis Dugan's sequel to 2010's *Grown Ups*, that man-child slapstick hit that found Adam Sandler, Kevin James, Chris Rock, David Spade, and Rob Schneider (blessedly absent here) enjoying a country vacation while legions of Happy Madison devotees willingly paid off Columbia Pictures' bill. But Lautner is at least *trying* 

. Playing the thuggish leader to a dimwitted cabal of frat-house guys, the actor — and it took all my strength not to put quote marks around "actor" — doesn't show up terribly often this follow-up, but whenever he does, the movie is briefly roused from its going-through-the-motions stupor. In the midst of terrorizing Sandler and company, Lautner's wannabe tough guy spits out grade-school-level insults, performs back flips and front tucks, engages in ridiculously complex best-bro handshakes, and everything he does feels fresh, and even close to spontaneous; I can't believe I'm writing this, but in

## Grown Ups 2

, Taylor Lautner suggests that he actually has it in him to become a really inspired comedian one day.

Barring, however, a few brief bits involving Cheri Oteri, Alexander Ludwig, and the eternally dotty, eternally delightful Georgia Engel, Lauter is about the only close-to-inspired thing you'll find in *Grown Ups 2*, a cinematic block party in Mr. Sandler's neighborhood so relentlessly lazy

## Unhappy Madison: "Grown Ups 2" and "Pacific Rim"

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that it doesn't even bother with anything resembling a plot. Transplanting the star, screen wife Salma Hayek, and their kids from their original L.A. digs to Sandler's boyhood home in a sleepy New England burg – where, against all logic, James, Rock, Spade, and their families appear to have moved as well – the film doesn't really boast a narrative. It doesn't even boast narrative threads. Things just happen in Grown Ups 2 (the guys go a charity car wash, the guys go to a ballet recital, the guys go to an '80s theme party), but they don't happen with any noticeable thought or comedic flair or common sense; if you were feeling generous, you could describe Dugan's rambling, structure-less movie as "Altman-esque," but only if Robert Altman were a complete imbecile.

Did my fellow audience members, at least, laugh at this desperate, howlingly unfunny travesty? Hell *yeah* they did. They laughed when Sandler, in the very first scene, got sprayed in the face with deer urine. They laughed when a generously endowed dance instructor bent forward and Sandler and his cronies stared open-mouthed at her boobies. They laughed when a half-naked Nick Swardson stood up and revealed a splotchy pee stain on his tighty-whities. They laughed when Kevin James said or did damned near anything. (Personally, whenever I saw the comedian here, I was less amused than deeply concerned, because James' frame now appears so unhealthily huge that his head looks completely disproportionate to his body; it's as if someone placed a grape on top of a fire hydrant.) I should mention, though, that a majority of the cackles sounded like they were coming from very small children, and indeed, my auditorium did seem to be strangely overloaded with viewers under the age of 10. Is *Grown Ups*, just by

being infantile, actually being considered a family

movie? If so, that's horrifying. Not quite as horrifying as Nick Swardson in pee-stained underwear, but horrifying nonetheless.



**PACIFIC RIM** 

Big robots lay waste to big undersea dwellers in director Guillermo del Toro's big-budget *Pacific Rim* 

and I would dearly love to say that what results in this futuristic monster mash-up is a whole bunch of great big fun. Would you settle for a fair amount of so-so fun?

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After a rather spectacular 10-minute prelude that's practically a movie in its own right – and a smarter, tighter, more suggestive movie than the one we end up getting – del Toro and co-screenwriter Travis Beacham settle for a sadly formulaic storyline in which Charlie Hunnam's and Rinko Kikuchi's traumatized creature-killers have to mind-meld, or something, to combat skyscraper-sized alien lizards called Kaiju. Their weapons of choice are Jaegers, which are equally gargantuan, human-controlled robotic apparatuses (and not, as you may have hoped, frat-party Jell-O shots). And amidst the seemingly incessant bashing and clanking of reptilian skin against steel, we're given a whole rash of clichéd, combat-flick characters to contend with: a contentious father and son (Max Martini and Rob Kazinsky) who reconcile right before one of the military men perishes; a gruff sergeant (Idris Elba) who makes the *de rigueur* inspirational speech

This is our Independence Day!

" and "

Freedo-o-o-om!

"; a pair of yammering, nerdy scientists (Charlie Day and Burn Gorman) who inevitably know more than their über-macho employers. Oh yeah, and Ron "Hellboy" Perlman shows up. I did mention Guillermo del Toro's involvement, yes?

It bears repeating, because despite the narrative blandness and presentational sameness of many of its blockbuster set pieces – with nearly every *battle royale* appearing to take place during monsoon season, making it impossible to ever get a good look at the theoretically astonishing aliens – it's also pretty freaking funny. The movie's scale, to be sure, is enjoyably epic-sized; the early destruction of the Golden Gate bridge is a queasy kick, and in one especially excellent moment, a Jaeger attacks a Kaiju by mercilessly beating it with a steamer ship. But it's actually the gags that I'll most recall from the experience of del Toro's latest

(Not that the steamer-ship beating isn't

a gag.) He throws at us sensational visual jokes involving a strategically placed toilet and one of those office toys in which metal balls knock against each other, and while Charlie Day is always best enjoyed in limited doses, limited doses are exactly what we're given here; nearly every word he utters in his strangled shriek of a voice proves priceless. I yawned a few too many times for comfort during its warfare sequences, but happily,

Pacific Rim

also manages to emerge as one of the summer's more inventive comedies, and one in which Idris Elba – in one of the few times since his days on

The Office -

emerges as a topnotch comedian. "Two things," Elba's bad-ass commander says after Hunnam has the nerve to grab his arm. "One: Don't ever touch me. Two:

Don't ever touch me

."

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