

“THE TWILIGHT SAGA: BREAKING DAWN, PART 1” (Film Review)

Written by Samuel Zimmerman
Thursday, 17 November 2011 18:15



It's early in *BREAKING DAWN, PART 1* when it clicks: Director Bill Condon (*DREAMGIRLS*, *CANDYMAN: FAREWELL TO THE FLESH*) gets it. As Bella's pre-wedding jitters coalesce into a nightmare, the picture zooms out quickly to reveal that she and her groom have splattered their guests to bits. Then, right in the thick of its woodland, desperate-to-be-enchanted dream wedding, the film cuts between Bella and Edward (now icons of shallow, heartstopping romance) exchanging their vows, the camera quite literally swoons...and you know that the fourth entry in this most ridiculous of phenomena will finally throw out any (false) sense of earnestness and reach the dopey, melodramatic and over-the-top heights it always should've been aspired to.

BREAKING DAWN, PART 1 is easily the most serviceable of the *TWILIGHT* films, and that's simply because its source material is so full of bizarre and unintentionally laugh-out-loud moments and interactions that Condon has chosen to find the hilarity in. We're four films into a franchise chock full of lame conflict and empty characters, and it seems we've reached a point where everyone involved finally knows what the game is. Even seeing the film with a mob of Twihards, you'll notice embarrassed laughter and self-loathing at the obvious awfulness of it. And since the filmmakers have (seemingly) chosen at last to recognize this lack of quality and play it up, it's resulted in the first purely entertaining of the series.



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It also doesn't hurt that Condon is a real talent. He has chosen to call on the big, broad and unsubtle gestures of cinema past, harking back to Universal monsters (BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN is seen in one of the film's all-too-brief but most memorable passages) and romances of yesteryear. There's a moment in Bella's room where Condon frames Robert Pattinson in a charming, soft glow that we haven't seen the likes of since the days of Rock Hudson and Cary Grant. It's intentional, smart and playful in a story that deserves to be played with and played up (i.e. beds break from vampire sex; C-section via vampire teeth).

Condon also revels (as much as he can) in the sex and violence of it all. The aforementioned nightmare, Edward's own flashback of his stalking days (which, unsurprisingly, is lamely tamed by the fact he only killed murderers) and, of course, the birth are bloody and pulpy. And there's truly great, disgusting work done to make Bella look quite sickly. Stewart already seems to be a solid 90 pounds, and the camera unabashedly focuses on her decomposing features as the baby inside sucks the life out of her. She often looks like a BREAKING BAD-esque meth addict, jaundiced and disconcertingly angular and bony. It's appropriate if you choose to look at her first brushes with sex as an addiction and her pregnancy completely ruining her now-rabid sexual appetite (and it *is* rabid; there's a whole montage revolving around the fact that Edward doesn't want to get down, and Bella does).

Alas, Condon can play all he wants, but he can't outrun the sheer shittiness of the TWILIGHT series itself. The characters are still nonentities who refuse to provoke any sort of emotion. It isn't a problem that Bella loves Edward unconditionally and wants to marry him at 18; it *is* a problem that that's the

only

thing that defines her. Our leads are an endless loop of “I love you”s with no clear signs as to why or how, just bland notions of being romantic. Then there's the wolf problem.

After a dumb, light first half, the film begins to seriously slog due to empty threats and non-conflict from Jacob and his wolf pack. Aside from a hilariously heinous scene in which the pack have an aggressive meeting in furry form that descends into crudely formed CG beasts literally yelling at each other, there is absolutely no reason or point for them to factor in here (well, aside from Jacob falling in love with a baby—the other and equally hilariously heinous scene). In fact, Jacob may be contemporary cinema's most stunningly useless character, especially as enacted by the non-presence that is Taylor Lautner. The “actor” stands on the sidelines for much of the film, attempting to yell with a weightless voice and feign anger with squinting eyes. In one scene he threatens, “I will kill you,” only minutes later to utter, “I'm going to let you live.” He and his “pack” seem to consistently change their own rules and guidelines in attempts to insert themselves in a story that isn't, and will never be, theirs.

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Like the rest of its series, *BREAKING DAWN, PART 1* is a farce. This fourth entry is undoubtedly elevated by its own inept, utterly ridiculous and absurd nature (does Stephenie Meyer even know what she's created or unleashed, or even written?), and it is quite interesting to watch some of its fan base fold in on itself and even accept these aspects. *BREAKING DAWN*, and *TWILIGHT* as a whole, is even fascinating, both in its widespread popularity, conflicting ideologies, idiocy and just emptiness. But no, it's still not good.

