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By now it’s probably way too late to suggest that serious horror fans venture out to see a TWILIGHT movie, but it must be said that the latest and last installment, BREAKING DAWN, PART TWO, offers a climactic smorgasbord of vampire/werewolf violence that makes the preceding 80 minutes almost—but not quite—worth sitting through.

The series closer is certainly livelier in toto than BREAKING DAWN, PART ONE, though it suffers from the opposite problem. Where the previous movie felt like about 20 minutes’ worth of material stretched painfully out to two hours, PART TWO gives the impression of a severe condensation, sacrificing any sense of continuity as a result. In an early moment, new parents Edward Cullen (Robert Pattinson) and freshly minted vampire Bella Swan (Kristen Stewart) are presented by his family with a fully furnished house in the woods to call home; a couple of scenes later, everyone’s discussing how the whole clan will soon have to move. Some time after, bad vamp Irina (Maggie Grace) spies the couple’s young daughter Renesmee (Mackenzie Foy) behaving suspiciously on a snow-drenched plain; cut to characters discussing the ramifications against a lush green backdrop, and it’s mentioned that the situation will come to a head “when the snow sticks to the ground.” Er, wasn’t it sticking pretty well a couple of scenes ago?

What gets Irina so out of sorts is her perception that Renesmee is an immortal child, which is a big no-no with the Volturi, the ruling bloodsucker clan residing in Italy. The little girl is, in fact, only half-immortal, as Bella was human when she was born and was only “turned” to save her life during the bloody delivery at the end of PART ONE. None of this is recapped at the beginning of PART TWO, the filmmakers assuming—no doubt rightly—that anyone seeing this movie will be familiar with previous events from having viewed the last one or reading the Stephenie Meyer source novel. And they waste little time giving the target audience what they want, i.e. Taylor Lautner stripping down to his skivvies as his character Jacob prepares to reveal his lycanthropic identity to Bella’s father (Billy Burke).

Jacob, you may or may not recall, “imprinted” on Renesmee at the moment of her birth, a potentially unseemly development that naturally doesn’t sit well with Bella. Their confrontation on the issue finally allows Stewart to play something other than lovelorn or morose in this series, while Edward and his family’s reactions from the sidelines provide welcome bits of humor. There are other moments where director Bill Condon and screenwriter Melissa Rosenberg add respites from the self-seriousness of the whole thing; certainly the *blah-blah-Dr acula*
accents sported by Canadian actor Noel Fisher and Israeli Guri Weinberg, as visiting Romanian vampires Vladimir and Stefan, had to have been intentionally over-the-top.

Vlad and Stef are part of an extensive multiculti assortment of vamps who turn up at the Cullens’ place, intending to serve as “witnesses” that Renesmee poses no threat and convince the Volturi to back off. Given the assorted psychic gifts everyone sports in this movie, you’d think at least one of the Volturi would be able to sense this for themselves, but then there wouldn’t be a story—such as it is. Even as it races pell-mell through the scenes building up to the big confrontation, a good deal of the movie consists simply of large groups of characters standing around the Cullens’ home, strategizing and delivering exposition. The vast ensemble, both good and evil, comes to feel unmanageable (once again, Dakota Fanning as the wicked Jane is given too little to do), especially when you add in Jacob’s wolf pack, seen sometimes as CG canines that are technically proficient but still don’t completely convince as the real thing, and sometimes as humans, one played by Boo Boo Stewart (whom I single out only because I love that there’s actually an actor named Boo Boo Stewart).

It all comes to a head as the Cullen crew and the Volturi, led by Aro (amusingly hammed up by Michael Sheen), face off in a mini-apocalyptic clash. Fangs are bared, werewolves lunge, heads are removed and some of the participants are literally sent to hell in a lengthy melee that’s easily the most fun setpiece ever to appear in a TWILIGHT film. Though it says something that this sequence doesn’t appear in Meyer’s book; in fact, one of the most fun parts for this reviewer was hearing the cries of disbelief from the girls sitting in front of me as certain characters met unexpected demises. At the conclusion, Condon and Rosenberg attempt to have their cake and eat it too, in a manner that they get away with and that seemed to please the die-hards in the audience as well. The fans who enjoyed the previous TWILIGHTs will no doubt enjoy this “Final Chapter”; would that the storytelling was coherent or compelling enough to keep non-converts engrossed until the fur starts flying in the last act.