

FILM REVIEW



Sucking blood is so yesterday

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Robert Pattinson keeps his fangs in his mouth in the second installment of Stephenie Meyer's 'Twilight' series

OMG, can you believe that Edward, like, unfriends Bella in the new *Twilight* movie?

Not on Facebook, though, so you know he isn't serious. Teenagers in dreary Forks, Washington, apparently didn't get the memo about the Internet, iPhones and Xboxes. They're too busy wallowing in their own mope about who's kissing or biting whom.

Just another day that feels like a year in *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*.

That's cat (or "cool" for anyone over the age of tween). Edward says this is the last time Bella will ever see him but he's just fronting. He keeps popping up in wispy apparitions — which is no different from Robert Pattinson in the flesh — to warn Bella not to do anything reckless. But she's an "adrenaline junkie" now, which is whack because every time she runs it's in slo-mo.

I'll bet Bella's gonna marry someone. I hope it's Jacob, whose performance-enhancing workout regimen buffed up everything except Taylor Lautner's acting skills. At least he doesn't look like he'd snap in two while carrying Bella over the threshold.

Something is inherently wrong with a movie featuring vampires and



He just wants to snuggle. PHOTOS: REUTERS

werewolves when the only screams from the audience occur when some dude takes off his shirt.

But you have to admit that *New Moon* is an improvement over the first *Twilight* flick, which is kind of like saying you prefer e. coli to swine flu.

Now that most of the introductions to personality-challenged characters are out of the way, and special effects aren't just the first flick's lame-o treetop scampers and Cirque du Soleil leaps, there's actually a story shaping up.

It probably has something to do with Big Willie Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, judging from heavy-handed hints dropped along the way. Bella (Kristen Stewart) falls asleep with a copy of the book — no Kindles in Forks, either — by her pillow, and Edward throws a few lines back at an English lit teacher who thinks he isn't paying attention in class. I'd just bite him.

Edward's too sweet for that. He even tries the Romeo bit while self-exiled in Italy after someone drops the bomb on him that Bella offed herself. She didn't, of course. Bella's too busy swooning over Jacob's sudden hunkiness and the way he protects her from his werewolfy crew, the same way Edward saved her from his family's bloodlust.

Oh, yeah, there's gonna be a smackdown, looking something like what Michael Vick dreams.

Meanwhile, abstinence makes Bella's heart grow fonder. Not the "hit it" kind of desire because that's, you know, foul. But that doesn't prevent a few laughable double entendres when Edward announces he's leaving and Bella says she wants to come with him. You can cut the sexual tension with a spark.

Since this is a *Twilight* movie, there must be a few new characters introduced to keep fans guessing as if they hadn't read Stephenie Meyer's books. The fine British actor Michael Sheen (*Frost/Nixon*, *The Queen*) does the Dumbledore thing as leader of the vampire union, latching onto a franchise like Michael Gambon and Richard Harris with the *Harry Potter* flicks. Dakota Fanning shows up for one scene as his ruby-eyed minion, apparently because she's a closet Twi-hard.

You almost feel sorry for those

Film Notes

THE TWILIGHT SAGA: NEW MOON

DIRECTED BY: CHRIS WEITZ

STARRING: KRISTIN STEWART (BELLA SWAN), ROBERT PATTINSON (EDWARD CULLEN), TAYLOR LAUTNER (JACOB BLACK), BILLY BURKE (CHARLIE SWAN), ANNA KENDRICK (JESSICA), JACKSON RATHBONE (JASPER HALE), MICHAEL SHEEN (ARO), CAM GIGANDET (JAMES)

RUNNING TIME: 130 MIN

TAIWAN RELEASE: TODAY

actors playing various off-the-hook monsters who, for the second movie in a row, have little to do except stand aside waiting for their few lines of dialogue. Then you remember they're getting the red carpet treatment and doing star interviews for their troubles. Easy work, if you can get it.

OTHER RELEASES

COMPILED BY MARTIN WILLIAMS

The Wingless Swallow () / Fururi ()

A package of two films set in Taiwan and Japan with the same crew and actors, this is an unusual exercise in mood and emotion suitable for older teenage girls in particular. Set in Taipei, *The Wingless Swallow* sees a young author of picture books struggle with family memories, but she finds a voice for her past after coming across children's tales in an old library. *Fururi* looks at the frustrated dream of a young Japanese woman to become a flight attendant, and what happens when she meets a mysterious youth. From director Masayuki Koide.



Poker King ()

Just how many more crappy gambling films can Hong Kong come up with? Louis Koo (古天樂) has a special gift that allows him to calculate poker odds, and this comes useful in squaring off with Sean Lau (劉青雲), who has his beady eyes on Koo's deceased father's casino empire. Time Out Hong Kong pointed out in its dispirited review that the film was produced by the firm that owns the casino in the film. Even the film's poster and title font seem tired. Next!



Troubled Water

Praise aplenty for this Norwegian film whose structure resembles a pared-down take on *Rashomon*. A young man released from prison after serving time over the death of a young child reinvents himself as a church organist, but fate cruelly brings the boy's mother to his church. From there the fireworks proper are unleashed, but not before the mother's alternative take on the story is delivered. Humane and rich, this is bound to be one of the highlights of the year.



Transsiberian

As the title almost suggests, this is a train mystery, with missing passengers, relentless police, drug dealers and murder most foul. Married couple Emily Mortimer (*Match Point*, *The Pink Panther*) and Woody Harrelson run into all sorts of intrigue and danger on the famed remote train route after encountering a couple of fellow passengers into drugs. Ben Kingsley is a Russian narc on the trail. Great locations and lots of surprises add up to a movie that Roger Ebert called "one hell of a thriller."



I Come With the Rain

The weirdest release of the week takes no prisoners, on screen or off. Josh Hartnett is a traumatized ex-cop on an Asian hunt for the son of a pharmaceutical mogul. His enquiries, with the help of a Hong Kong policeman friend (Shawn Yue, 余文樂, *Infernal Affairs*), lead to a young man (Takuya Kimura) living in a hut who performs bizarre healing ceremonies. Also hunting this prey is a marauding gangster (Lee Byung-hun) with a romantic score to settle. Extensively violent, gruesome and framed by religious motifs and serial killing flashbacks, this international production prefers style and symbols over story and was dismissed by *Variety* as "frequently incoherent," though it has its defenders. From eclectic director Tran Anh Hung (*Cyclo*, *The Scent of Green Papaya*), who probably doesn't care what *Variety* thinks.



Rahtree Revenge

More grisly stuff, but this time in a more conventional and comic format as Thailand's *Buppha Rahtree* series clocks up its fourth entry. The female ghost Buppha and her would-be acolyte, a student/cartoonist, are still angst-ridden and morose in the Oscar Apartments building, but that razor-packing little girl with a serious jaw injury is still hanging around. Added to the mix are bumbling cops, a Cambodian shaman and an illegal gambling den. There's even a cameo by a small Chinese-style hopping vampire. Fun for all who like Thai horror with plenty of sauce.



Pride

Two ambitious would-be opera singers duke it out amid wildly fluctuating fortunes (figuratively and literally) in *Pride*, a Japanese drama from director Shusuke Kaneko. Working class struggler Hikari Mitsushima (*Death Note*, *Exte: Hair Extensions*) and rich kid Stephanie (a singer in real life) star as the initially friendly, later combative, twosome who end up vying for the same romantic and musical opportunities. The *Japan Times* liked this one, calling it a "deliciously bumpy ride."



Ander

Very little advance press for this Spanish film, but what exists is very positive. *Ander* is a farmer approaching middle age in the Basque country whose life is quiet and routine. An accident leaves him unable to work, so his family reluctantly hires a migrant laborer from Peru, leading to interpersonal revelations. Like *My Beautiful Laundrette*, this film crosses ethnic and class boundaries to unite ordinary people in life-changing relationships.



Villa Amalia

A composer and pianist (Isabelle Huppert) goes almost completely off the grid — existentially, not mentally — after discovering her husband's infidelity and running into a childhood friend. Abandoning her career, Huppert takes a trek through Europe in search of inner peace, a journey that finishes at the title location, which brings its own complications. The implications of the story and the anomalous elements of the main character are sure to provoke debate among the few who see it.



5th Taiwan European Film Festival

This festival, a joint effort of the European Economic and Trade Office and the INFINE Art and Culture Exchange, is back. Feature films from all over Europe are on the menu, and it's on a tour of university campuses and select other locations until Jan. 15. Screenings are in DVD format, but entry is free. Titles, times and locations are at www.infine-art.com/eufestival, though the English-language page is yet to be updated.



SEAL Team VI

A US counter-terrorist unit in Iraq just before Operation Desert Storm runs into grave danger ("Is there any other kind?"). Purportedly based on actual events. According to IMDb, debuting director Mark C. Andrews was also the film's writer, producer, Foley artist, underwater cameraman and assistant editor — who said auteurs died out? This DVD promotional release is at the Baixue theater in Ximending from tomorrow.

