



Kristen Stewart returns
as Bella Swan."

ECLIPSE

Overshadows First Two TWILIGHT SAGA Films

A Review by Rachel Weinberg

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THE TWILIGHT SAGA: ECLIPSE opens in the midst of a raging thunderstorm. As sheets of rain pour from the lugubrious sky over Seattle, Washington, a young man (we learn later his name is "Riley") sprints across the movie screen, trying to escape from an unseen predator. A few seconds later, Riley (Xavier Samuel) falls to his knees on a pier, howling in pain as the camera zooms in on a familiar red mark on his hand—the sign of a vampire bite. As Riley's excruciating yowls echo through the theater, the image changes to the ECLIPSE logo.

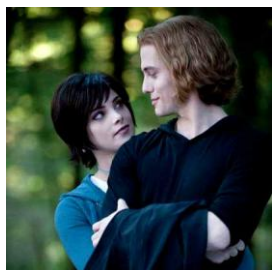
From the beginning, director David Spade makes clear that ECLIPSE, the newest installment in the TWILIGHT SAGA films based upon Stephenie Meyer's popular novels, will be darker and edgier than its predecessors. The movie's second scene indicates further that the TWILIGHT SAGA, and its cast of characters, has grown up since NEW MOON. Human teenager "Bella" (Kristen Stewart) and her protective vampire boyfriend "Edward" (Robert Pattinson) lounge in a sunshine-filled meadow. As Edward literally sparkles in the sun, Bella rests her head in his lap. Before five minutes have passed, however, the pair is standing up and engaging in an intense onscreen make out session. Unlike most Disney films, ECLIPSE does not keep viewers waiting for that magical moment when the lovers' lips meet. Instead, Stewart and Pattinson kiss like they'll never have the opportunity to ever do so again. The sight of the two of them makes me feel slightly sick, like I'm watching a high school couple displaying too much PDA in the hallway. Edgy, yes, but also uncomfortable.

Unfortunately, audience members will have to endure many more make out scenes during ECLIPSE—and not all of them will be between Edward and Bella either. With Edward's return to Forks, the love triangle between Edward, Bella, and werewolf "Jacob Black" (Taylor

Lautner) surges with intensity. Jacob is not the only threat to the safety of Edward and Bella; the Cullens and the La Push werewolf clan soon discover that an army of newborn vampires, led by Riley, has taken over the nearby city of Seattle. In ECLIPSE, Edward must fight not only to save his relationship with Bella, but also to save her life.

As the ECLIPSE characters prepare for battle on multiple fronts, the newfound maturity of the film becomes clear. All of the actors seem to have grown into their roles a little bit more with this film. Even the normally wooden Lautner (as Jacob) seems to have relaxed into his part, and screenwriter Melissa Rosenberg bestows some little gems on him in her refreshingly self-aware script. When the romantic tension heats up between Bella and Jacob about a third of the way through the film, Jacob decides to kiss Bella, and Bella slaps him across the face in retaliation. When he returns Bella home to Edward and her father "Charlie" (Billy Burke), Jacob explains the situation like this: "I kissed Bella, and then she broke her hand trying to punch me in the face." While the writing is far from literary, the snappy line fits perfectly with both Jacob's character and Lautner's awkward onscreen persona.

Although Stewart, Pattinson, and Lautner certainly improve their performances in this film, the supporting actors remain the shining stars of ECLIPSE. The adorable Ashley Greene continues to bestow the role of Edward's sister "Alice" with poise and nuance. Her male counterpart "Jasper" (Jackson Rathbone) is equally enjoyable to watch and his elevated role in ECLIPSE is a pleasant addition. Greene and Rathbone have cultivated a believable and joyful onscreen relationship. The pair's subtle interactions, such as gentle caresses and quick pecks on the cheek, feel like a cool respite from Stewart and Pattinson's longing stares and fiery kisses. "Rosalie" (the petulant Nikki Reed) and "Emmett" (the playful Kellan Lutz) round out the Cullen teenagers, and bring additional spark to ECLIPSE. These four young actors add cheer to a film that is oftentimes dark.



Alice & Jasper



Rosalie & Emmet

The supporting actors' energy seems to have rubbed off a bit on the major players as well. Edward and Jacob's numerous face-offs are filled with genuine concern for Bella, not strained, stiff interactions. During the climactic battle, the two camp out with Bella in a tent in order to protect her. While Bella sleeps, they share one of the most touching moments in the film as they discuss the girl they both love. The conversation is sweet, subtle, and nicely delivered—a scene of the likes of which we never saw in the overwrought NEW MOON. As actors, this is Pattinson's and Lautner's strongest scene by far, and Stewart adds nicely to the mix by portraying Bella as truly conflicted. Although their performances are hardly Oscar-worthy, these three have all markedly improved since the last film.

Although ECLIPSE is far darker and more violent than either TWILIGHT or NEW MOON, the change is entirely welcome. Unlike the first two films, ECLIPSE forgoes melodrama for true intensity. With this third film, the TWILIGHT SAGA is finally hitting its stride.

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Rachel Weinberg is a recent graduate of the Francis W. Parker School in Chicago. She will join the University of Pennsylvania's Class of 2014 in the Fall, where she plans to major in Communications.

In 08/09, Rachel was a member of the Cindy Bandle Young Critics Circle (cosponsored by Goodman Theatre and the Association for Women Journalists—Chicago). Rachel did her first review for FF2 on 27 DRESSES in 2009.