

**The Twilight Lexicon's interview with Melissa Rosenberg, screenwriter for the film adaptation of Twilight by Stephenie Meyer. Interview was conducted by Cocoa.**

**We would like to thank Ms. Rosenberg for her time. We are honored that she has used her tremendous talent to bring our favorite novel to life.**

**Lexicon** - When did you decide you wanted to become a screenwriter? What drew you to this profession?

**Melissa** - Originally, my goal was to become a dancer/choreographer. It's what I studied in college and was my first love. Unfortunately, I started too late and grew too tall and, honestly, didn't really have enough talent to make a career of it. So I came out here to L.A. This being a company town, I found myself working in the industry. And I immediately gravitated toward the creative side. Writing had always come easier for me than other endeavors, so it never occurred to me to make a career of it – go figure. I found with writing I could choreograph on the page -- scenes, dances, fights, relationships... it was the same creative outlet I pursued in dance. Plus I could be more articulate than I ever was in daily life and bolder and say all the things I never think to say in actual conversation. I began taking classes, figuring out the craft of it all. And my first writing job, the one that got me into the Writer's Guild of America, was an assignment from Paramount to write a dance movie. Poetic, eh? Of course, that movie never got made, but it got me working. I then shifted over to T.V. because I love T.V. I'm a huge fan of hour-long drama. And I haven't stopped working since (knock on wood).

**Lexicon** - You have written for both film and television, which do you prefer? Why?

**Melissa** - I'm really enjoying being able to go from one to the other. I've never had the opportunity before while I was working in network T.V. When you're writing and producing 22 episodes a year there's not a lot of time to spend on a feature. I've had a couple windows and tried to get something going, but T.V. always swept back in and, blessedly, kept me employed. Fortunately, right after "The O.C.," I had the perfect window and wrote "Step Up." Then I went on to the Showtime series "Dexter," which only produces 12 episodes a year. Love cable. That gives me the second half of the year to write features. I'm hoping I can keep this schedule up indefinitely. Wouldn't that be nice?

Television is an extremely collaborative process. You have a writing room, with 6 to 8 writers in it, and you all break story together, give each other notes, bounce stuff off one another – I love it. There's nowhere I'd rather be than in a room full of talented writers, breaking story. But it can also be a little like being crammed onto a submarine during wartime. Inevitably, personal politics arise, which is why I also love the respite of feature writing. I can just retreat to my little office at home, see no one, hear only my own voice. It's a very meditative thing. The

isolation would drive me batty if I had to do it year in and year out, but it's a wonderful counter-balance to television.

**Lexicon** - Do you ever suffer writer's block? What do you do to get the creative juices flowing again?

**Melissa** - I live in terror of writer's block. I had it once, early on. It's the complete loss of confidence. Horrible. The only way through it is to simply write. To be willing to throw absolute crap onto the page, and keep throwing it until you find one tiny thing that's not crap... and you go "Wait. That line was actually pretty good." Your confidence ticks up a notch. You keep throwing out crap, until the next good line comes. Your confidence ticks up another notch, and so on.

**Lexicon** - How does writing an adaptation differ from an original script?

**Melissa** - I've always said writing an original script is much harder than writing an adaptation. And now that I've done it, I'm absolutely sure of it. Facing the blank page - that's the hardest thing anyone has to do in this business. Coming up with the idea, shaping it into an actual story, with characters that arc, etc. Nearly impossible. An adaptation will at the very least give you a title, or a character name, or a general milieu in which to set the story. Even those little things are more than you have with an original. Of course, Stephenie Meyer gave me a great deal more than that. I feel extremely fortunate to have had the honor of adapting so rich a story. She made my job easy, or easier, comparatively.

**Lexicon** - Now that you have written two adaptations, would this be something you would like to do again? What other books would you be interested in?

**Melissa** - I'd love to always adapt books. I love the challenge of it. It's like collaborating in T.V. You take an author's words, ideas, whatever they give you, and you build on it - this is what you do in a writing room; someone throws out an idea, you toss it back and forth until it takes shape. Adapting someone else's vision is not dissimilar. You're collaborating with the author, in a sense.

**Lexicon** - What about Twilight made you want to be apart of the project, you mentioned "teens and vampires," is this a genre that has always interested you?

**Melissa** - Always, always. I was a HUGE fan of Buffy the Vampire Slayer. I still think it was one of the all time greatest series ever on T.V. I remember reading the first several Anne Rice books and loving them. I've probably seen every movie featuring a vampire in it (don't hold me to that). And then Stephenie comes along and takes on this overused genre and completely reinvents it with a wonderful fresh new mythology. How lucky am I that I got to play in her world?

**Lexicon** - Can you tell us about that initial meeting with Catherine and the producers of the film?

**Melissa** - I already knew Eric Feig of Summit Ent. really well. But two new Summit folks were in the meeting, Geoff Schaevitz, and the very smart Gillian Boher. There were the other producers: Mark Morgan from Maverick, whom I'd worked with years before on a T.V. pilot called "Alyx", plus the talented Karen Rosenfelt – we'd tried to work with one another before on a different movie project, and the lovely Greg Mooridian, whom I was meeting for the first time. And of course, Catherine, whose work I absolutely loved, so I was a little intimidated meeting her. I went in and talked about how I thought the book could be structured. We discussed many different options, but the one thing we all completely agreed on was that the book was our bible. We would not veer off it. Aside from the fact that we all wanted to honor Stephenie and the fans, we just loved the book and that's what we wanted to make. We were simpatico.

**Lexicon** - Music played a large part in Stephenie's writing process. What part, if any, did music play in yours? What music did you hear/listen to when you were writing the screenplay?

**Melissa** - Honestly? I didn't really listen to music. I'm too easily affected by it. The musicians' moods seep into my mood and start shaping things... I wanted to be the one shaping things. Well, me and Stephenie. There is, however, a scene in Edward's bedroom where Edward tries to dance with Bella, who refuses. I initially wrote in the Staple Singers' song, "I'll Take You There" for that scene, because there's no way you can *not* dance to that song. Using that song would reveal just how anti-dance Bella was that she couldn't dance to it. But the scene changed, and we wanted to fold in the Debussy piece that Stephenie wrote into the book, "Claire De Lune." So the Staple Singers were out. I still can't not dance to that song. Try it. Just try not dancing to that song. Impossible.

**Lexicon** - How much collaboration did you do with Stephenie in the writing process?

**Melissa** - None at all and absolutely every word. What I mean to say is... as the screenwriter, I had to bring my own vision to it. I had to see it clearly as a movie, separate from the book. I needed some distance to do that. So I actually had very little contact with Stephenie initially. But as I mentioned before, every word I wrote was born out of her imagination. So, though we had very little contact, we danced together on the page. I did have one important meeting with her during the writing process. Catherine and I, and Stephenie talked about why she set Bella's home in Scottsdale, what it was like to live there – which completely shaped the opening of the movie. She also explained Bella's relationship with Renee which helped me better understand why the climatic ending was built around Renee's endangerment. There were many more things discussed, all deepening my understanding about the character's motivations and backstories. And she sent me some pages that took me further into the characters' minds and backstories. Invaluable. Since then, we've had a lot more contact and will

continue to. She's an amazing lady, very funny and smart, I really enjoy her company... though I spend most of our time together picking her brain.

**Lexicon** - What are the challenges that go into adapting a first person narrative to the big screen?

**Melissa** - One of the biggest challenges of the book was figuring out how to see and hear Bella's inner thoughts. First of all, I followed the book's lead by having everything be from Bella's point of view. There are very few scenes that take place without her in it. Secondly, I had to invent scenarios in which she could express her thoughts aloud to someone else. Thirdly, I tried to set up situations in which the actors themselves could convey their inner emotions sans dialogue. With a terrific actor, you can get a page of dialogue from just one look. Fortunately, we cast extraordinarily talented actors who brought even more to it, to the point where even more lines were cut from the script in favor of letting the actors silently convey things.

**Lexicon** - In what ways does the casting change an initial script? Do you have any examples from Twilight you can share?

**Melissa** - I tend to write a lot of humor into scenes. But when those two actors got in a room together, there was an intensity between them that rendered some of the script's humor inappropriate. They brought their own brand of humor to it, which is as it should be. When you're writing alone in your room, not knowing who will be saying your words, you can only imagine how they'll play. Television is easier that way; you know exactly who you're writing for. You've heard your lines spoken by the actors, day in and day out. You're able to tailor it to them. I didn't have as much of an opportunity to tailor the lines to these actors. But they did some tailoring themselves, Catherine did some tailoring, I managed to re-tool a little. It all worked out in the end.

**Lexicon** - What scene did you find most difficult to adapt? What made it difficult?

**Melissa** - The question and answer part of the story. It's very important stuff, I wanted to include absolutely everything, but I had to pare it down to its essence. And it was difficult because there's not a lot of visual activity going on during it in the book; it's a very intimate, stationary exchange. So I tried to give them activities that were equally telling. Catherine was essential in helping me come up with much of it. A lot of it changed once it reached the set; the realities and limitations of production and all. I haven't seen it put together, but I'm sure that the essence of it all is still very much intact.

**Lexicon** - There are a few book characters that have merged parts. Can you tell our readers about the reason behind this? (For example Eric/Ben, Jessica/Lauren)

**Melissa** - I loved all the characters, but if you have limited time in a movie and if you populate it with too many characters, all of them get short shrift. The Cullens couldn't be merged, each was too important. So I chose some of the humans to fall under the knife.

**Lexicon** - How would you describe Edward and Bella's fundamental relationship?

**Melissa** - It's all about longing; overwhelming, consuming longing. And chemistry that can't be denied.

**Lexicon** - What is your favorite scene in the movie? Why?

**Melissa** - I haven't seen the movie yet, so at this point, I can only talk about the scenes in the script that I loved writing. I really enjoyed the Charlie / Bella scenes. I love the subtlety of that relationship, and how it grows and expands. I loved in particular their hospital scene, after the van nearly hits her. I also liked writing the early scenes between Bella and Edward, the tension between them: the biology scene, their hospital scene, and particularly the scene where she confronts him about being a vampire. All juicy stuff.

**Lexicon** - Whose character did you have the most fun writing? Why?

**Melissa** - Eric was fun. And Rosalie. Him for humor, her for snarkiness. Emmett for just guy "let's go kill something" stuff. Oh! And James, most fun of all. He's so deliciously evil.

**Lexicon** - If you had to choose one casting choice that perfectly matched the character you envisioned, who would it be? Why?

**Melissa** - Well, honestly all the Cullens and Bella. She's a very difficult role to cast - has to be very real, flawed, beautiful in an unusual way. Only Kirsten could have played it. How lucky did we get? I'm also particularly fond of Jackson, who's playing Jasper. I see big things for him.

**Lexicon** - Who is your favorite character in the books? Why?

**Melissa** - I'd have to say Bella. Because she's every girl who ever felt awkward, uncomfortable, mortified, clumsy, and completely, hopelessly in love with the utterly unattainable. We've all been that girl.

**Lexicon** - Are you a Werewolf girl or a Vampire girl?

**Melissa** - Hard to say. One is sexy because he's so perfect, the other because he's so wild and reckless. In my real life, I've always gone for the werewolf...

and gotten bit more often than not. Actually, I've gone for the unattainable Vampire too, hoping against hope he'd choose me... yikes, it's all coming back.

**Lexicon** - Out of the three currently published novels in the series, which is your favorite? Why?

**Melissa** - I actually didn't read all three initially because I knew that Twilight had to stand on its own feet, and I didn't want to be influenced by where it was going (the producers and Catherine had read them and made sure I stayed on track). Since then, I've read New Moon. Wow. A very different story. Love the world and mythology of the werewolves. And now I'm deep into Eclipse, which might be my favorite of all three. I'm not sure. They're all so different. I hear chapter 22 of Eclipse is the best chapter in the whole series. I'm looking forward to it.

**Lexicon** - What about this story, do you feel, makes it so endearing to readers?

**Melissa** - It's so universal. The longing. The desire. We've all felt it.

**Lexicon** - Have you been surprised by the hype surrounding the film?

**Melissa** - It always surprises me. I toil away alone in my little office... then I see some awesome trailer and hear everyone going crazy over it. You begin to feel a little... exposed. But then you get swept up in it.

**Lexicon** - What other projects are you currently working on?

**Melissa** - I'm writing and co-executive producing "Dexter" for Showtime. We're writing our third season right now, to air, I think, Oct. 1<sup>st</sup>. There are also some movie projects in the works... the deals aren't done yet... check in with me in a week or two, I may have news.

**Lexicon** - A Personal Message to the Fans:

**Melissa** - I'm a huge fan of these books, as well. I, and all of us who worked on this film, have done our best to stay true to Stephenie's vision. When one reads a book, the world takes shape in our minds. We see it very clearly - but each person's perspective is unique. Hopefully, what we see on screen will fulfill everyone's expectations or expand upon them. But every member of the cast and crew brings something of themselves to the film; the trick is to stay open to their creative contributions. It may be different from what we had imagined... so I recommend surrender.

**Once again we wish to thank Ms. Rosenberg for this interview. As you all can see she has taken great care to ensure Twilight the movie, is every bit as magical as the novel.**

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