

The Twilight Lexicon Interview with Billy Burke cast as Chief Charlie Swan in the film adaption of Twilight by Stephenie Meyer. Interview conducted by Cocoa.

We would like to thank Billy for his willingness to share a few details of his life with us, and for his candor and humor throughout the interview.

Lexicon - Why did you decide to become an actor?

Billy - It wasn't so much a "decision". It's a life that largely chooses you. As soon as I was old enough to comprehend that there was an actual job where you get paid to goof off most the time, I began to gear everything toward having that job. After that, you either get work or you don't. (By the way, my first choice would've been rock star, then actor)

Lexicon - Do you prefer stage, television, or film? Why?

Billy - I've only done two plays in my entire life and one of those was in high school so I don't have much to base an opinion on there. Television is very restricting unless it's cable and frankly, either way most of it ends up being crap. I hate pretty much everything I've ever done on TV. Independent film is still where it's at if you want the freedom to do anything that doesn't make you feel like a liar.

Lexicon - You have been in several film adaptations of books, is there something that draws you to these types of movies?

Billy - I would say that good books make good scripts but I'd be talking out of my ass because I've never read any of the books that my films were based on. I just try to find stuff that I feel like I can bring something of value to with some modicum of honesty.

Lexicon - What would you consider to be your dream role?

Billy - Dream roles are for ***-holes who are so into themselves they think that they are actually destined to play a particular part. I don't look at acting that way. I see each role as an opportunity to do something I would've never imagined I'd get to do. In other words, I kinda doubt that Marlon Brando ever "dreamed" of playing a guy named Don Corleone in a movie called The Godfather, but I bet as he was doing it he thought "hey, this is a pretty ****ing great role".

Lexicon - What is the funniest thing to ever happen to you on set?

Billy - People seem to have this notion that a movie set is a kind of netherworld where crazy and amazing **it happens all the time. Believe me, I wish that were true. The reality is that if something truly "funny" occurs, it's usually because

something has gone terribly wrong, and THAT happens so often it's impossible for me to recount any one incident. What's funny is... **it going wrong is often the best part.

Lexicon - The Twilight fandom loves music, you are a singer, is there a recording of you we can hear?

Billy - There are loads of recordings, yes. Someday I'll get around to cleaning them up into versions that I'd actually be ok with people hearing. I like the songs that I've written but right now the recordings are kinda hacky.

Lexicon - Do you have any favorite songs or bands?

Billy - Way too many, but my favorite artists are mostly singer/songwriters -- Tom Waits, Jackson Browne, Kate Rusby, Ben Folds, Ray LaMontagne, Patty Griffin, and recently Brandi Carlile and Amos Lee. My favorite bands at the moment are Spoon, Band Of Horses, Kings Of Leon and Placebo.

Lexicon - Have you read the Twilight series? If so, who is your favorite character, and why? And if not, do you plan on reading it in the future?

Billy - I'm about half way thru Twilight right now. If I actually finish it, it'll be a miracle. I'm sure this will piss off all the fans but I gotta be honest people, I'm not big on reading. Sad as it may sound, I grew up on TV and movies and I never seemed to get the joy out of books that other people did. I welcome any arguments regarding my being fully educated about the character in its original form versus who he is in the movie we're making. If you hate my portrayal I suppose you can go ahead and blame me for not doing my "homework" but I think I've got a pretty grip on who Charlie is.

Lexicon - What made you want to audition for the role of Chief Swan?

Billy - I tend to gravitate towards characters that carry their damage in their hip pocket. When I read the script, even though I've never been married and don't have kids yet, I felt pretty sure I could invoke the regrets and failures Charlie must feel. I know a little about not being there when I was needed most. The idea that this guy is probably consumed with emptiness but can't show it attracted me, I guess. Beyond that, I consider the story classic poetry.

Lexicon - Can you tell us a little about your audition process?

Billy - I came in. I read a scene. Catherine smiled. I smiled. (I don't smile very often)

Lexicon - Who are you most looking forward to working with on the film?

Billy - Most of us have met already. It's an unbelievably gifted group of people who all really seem to have the desire to make a good picture. I just hope no one's NOT looking forward to working with ME.

Lexicon - **This isn't your first time playing a police officer, why do you like these types of roles?**

Billy - That's really just coincidence. In this business you read a lot of scripts. (Which sucks for me 'cause like I said, I don't like to read) A good number of stories happen to involve people in law enforcement. (You know--- cops, doctors, lawyers. It's tough to avoid them.) A few of the characters I've taken a shine to in recent years have just happened to be cops. I don't have any special affinity for wearing a badge. As a matter of fact, most the time, I feel like a hypocrite. I'm pretty sure I break the law quite often.

Lexicon - **How would you describe Charlie's character?**

Billy - He's a dad that misses his daughter and probably beats himself up constantly wishing he'd have done more to keep her and her mother around. I don't think there's anything he wouldn't do to make Bella happy and to have her back in his life. However, as with many parent/child relationships, sometimes neither parent nor child has the balls to step up and say out loud how much they love and appreciate the other despite their harsh pasts and stupid differences. I applaud all of us who make it past the age of 17 and maintain any sort of meaningful relationship with our parents.

Lexicon - **Have you met with Kristen Stewart? How does that father/daughter relationship on screen influence your relationship off screen?**

Billy - Well here's a "funny" story. I met her for the first time on the plane up to Portland. I tapped her on the shoulder and said "Hi. I'm your dad". She thought I was a stalker. Despite that, since then I think we've gotten along pretty well. I think she's an extremely rare talent.

Lexicon - **You obviously know more about Bella's life, then Charlie does, do you feel as though Bella should tell Charlie about the Vampires? Why?**

Billy - From the moment I finished the script I have felt that Charlie already knows. How could he not?? Oh well... I'm not the writer.

Lexicon - **What elements of your own life do you draw upon to play Charlie?**

Billy - As far as elements of my life that I recognize in Charlie's – well, don't we all feel like there's something going on in our world that is being kept a secret

from us?

Lexicon - Have you met Sarah Clarke (cast as Renee, your estranged ex-wife)?

Billy - Yes. We've actually met before. She and I and her husband Xander Berkley were all on the TV show "24". She's a lovely person and a kick ass actor. Unfortunately, we don't actually get to work together on this film. Charlie and Renee as you know, haven't been together for a long time.

Lexicon - How do you feel that past relationship with Renee affects Charlie on a personal level?

Billy - I like to think that they were each other's first loves. There's no question that he would have her back in a heartbeat if he could. It's pretty clear that no one he's met since her has ever come close. Otherwise, why would he choose to be alone all these years? It's a pretty admirable quality in most men. We don't like to settle for second best.

Lexicon - You were born in Washington, have you ever been to Forks? Do you enjoy filming in the Northwest?

Billy - Never been to Forks. This is my 3rd movie in a row shot in Portland. Feast Of Love, Untraceable and now Twilight. I do feel comfortable here and I'm used to the climate and culture, but again, it's just coincidental. Portland's becoming a very popular shooting location. It's a pretty groovy little city.

Lexicon - What type of research did you do to prepare for this role?

Billy - Again, I don't mean to sound crass but unless you're playing a boxer, a transvestite, or an astronaut, I find extensive research to be hugely overrated. For actors with limited life experience it's probably invaluable but most the time, unattainable. If I were going to play a giant, would I be expected to go hang out with a bunch of dwarves for a month to know what it feels like to be really tall? Anyway, for those of us who usually don't have the luxury of knowing what role we're stepping into more than two weeks in advance, it's a virtual impossibility. What you end up doing is infusing your imagination with what's there on the pages of the script. You bring what you know and make the rest up as you go.

Lexicon - Are you surprised by the hype surrounding this film? Have you had any Twilight Fan encounters yet?

Billy - It's unreal. It's nice to see some passion about something other than what Oprah's reading. No encounters yet, but I won't be surprised if people have some reactions to what I've said here.

Lexicon - The overwhelming response to the announcement of your being cast in the movie has been, “He’s the perfect dad!” and “That’s exactly how I pictured Charlie!” does it add to the pressure of performing, playing such a beloved character, even though you have already been accepted by the fans?

Billy - Well, that’s certainly nice to hear seeing as from what I had heard, everybody wanted Dennis Quaid, but hey, I’ll take all the approval I can get. Thanks. Listen, all I can do is bring my interpretation and try not to suck. If I were motivated only by a desire to please everyone, I’m sure the result would be pathetic and I’d probably end up guzzling bleach in my trailer.

Lexicon - Have you visited any online fan sites?

Billy - If I’m online, I’m either buying music or playing poker... but yeah, sure I’ve taken a peek.

Lexicon - Have you met Stephenie Meyer or plan on meeting her in the future?

Billy - Not yet but I think soon. Looking forward to it.

Lexicon - Do you have anything on the horizon we can look forward to seeing you in?

Billy - I shot my 10th (yes I’ve done 10 of them) TV pilot a few months ago. If it goes to series it will be on in the fall. If not, I’ll be very close to George Clooney’s record of failed pilots.

Lexicon - I ask this of all the cast members, because the Twilight fans always want to know...Are you single?

Billy - If by that you mean not married, the answer is yes but my official status would be “taken”. Come on though, do you really think any of your readers would care?

Lexicon - A personal message to the fans:

Billy - I know that there are a lot of people who hold extremely high hopes for this movie to be as precise a depiction of the book as possible. I assure them all, everyone here shares in that spirit. I would only suggest to the fans that they open their imaginations to the film as freely as they did when they opened the book. If some things are there that weren’t in the book or perhaps “missing”, just embrace it and go for the ride, man. Understand that as hard as it may try, a motion picture can only be an adaptation. It can never be the book. Enjoy.

Thank you again to Billy Burke and his Management for arranging this time with us. We are thrilled to have Billy as a part of this project, and look forward to seeing his portrayal of Charlie on screen this winter.

This interview is property of the Twilight Lexicon and may only be copied with the express permission of its owners.