

Mark Cotta Vaz
Twilight Lexicon Interview Questions

Were you familiar with *Twilight* before you started to work on the movie companion?

I was only vaguely aware of *Twilight* and the other books in author Stephenie Meyer's series. That all changed when I was asked to write a book on the making of the *Twilight* movie. I quickly learned about the popularity of the series (fans include a niece of mine). Before writing the movie companion, I read *Twilight*. It was wonderful and romantic, and captures the dramatic emotions of First Love.

Clearly you have a passion for entertainment companion publications. What is the TV or movie series that has captured you personally as a fan that you would like to do a guide for?

I've always been fascinated with Batman. I wrote the authorized fiftieth anniversary history of the character, an "art of" book on *Batman Begins*, and I provided comments for the features section of a recent *Batman* TV movie DVD. It would be interesting to write a global history of the Batman mythology, from the comic books and newspaper strips to the 1960s TV show and the entire motion picture history, which ranges from old movie serials to the 2008 blockbuster, *The Dark Knight*.

What part of the *Twilight* movie companion did you enjoy working on the most and why?

It was fascinating to learn how the filmmakers brought the book to life. The key to writing about the making of a movie is to find the essential story and narrative threads. In this case, the main story was director Catherine Hardwicke's determination to film on real locations, which proved a challenge, given the rainy and

cold weather the production had to battle throughout principal photography.

What type of research do you typically do before starting on a movie companion?

It's important to read the script, learn about the filmmakers and their past work, become familiar with any particular technology that might have been used in a production, be conversant with any source material (such as the *Twilight* novel that inspired the film), and do corollary research. For example, on the latter, Meyer and her work got me thinking about such classic horror writers as Mary Shelley and the origins of *Frankenstein*, as well as Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and vampire myths in general.

The photography in the companion is fantastic. Do you have any input as to which pictures are selected?

I have done a number of books where I've selected all the artwork, including my aforementioned Batman book (*Tales of the Dark Knight*), a history of Industrial Light + Magic, and a companion book for *Lost*. For the *Twilight* movie companion, editor Joseph Monti handled the selection of visual images.

You have done a lot of movie and TV based companion guides to series such as Lost, Star Wars, and Spiderman that have met with acclaim from notoriously picky fans. That's a pretty impressive track record since many companion books don't resonate with fans. What do you think are the most important three things to have a movie guide be successful with fans?

First, a little empathy goes a long way, and anyone writing about a beloved television or film series has to emotionally and spiritually connect with the subject. If you hate blockbuster movies, if you dislike the *Star Wars* or James Bond movies or whatever, you're not going to be true to the fans of those films. Second, it's a sin to be boring. Behind-the-scenes books involve

a lot of exposition, but the key is producing a lively narrative that is not only informative, but captures the inherent excitement of the material. Third, it's fun to use the main material as a springboard to bring in corollary subjects that expand upon and enrich the reading experience. Ultimately, the end result will take readers on a journey to the heart of what makes the particular subject popular and powerful, providing a fresh perspective and appreciation of the material.

Did you get to see a rough cut of the movie? If so, what did you think?

I did not get to see a rough cut of this movie. I've done "art of" books on Pixar films and saw the early story reels for *Finding Nemo* and *The Incredibles*, which helped me understand and anticipate the look and feel of the final animated films. But it's not vital to see a rough cut in terms of what's needed for a "making of" chronicle. Along the way, a writer will usually see production design art, on-set photographs, trailers, visual effects shots, cuts of specific scenes, and other visual elements that allows one to understand the visual approach and feel of a film.

You've obviously dealt with a lot of fan circles. How would you rate the Twilight fans on a scale of 1-10 based on how passionately they feel about the Twilight Saga vs. other fan bases you've dealt with?

I have to give *Twilight* fans a huge 10. Unlike a particular movie or TV series, *Twilight* is a book! The written word is magical to me, so fandom based on a literary work gets high marks from me. A writer creates an interior space that becomes unique to each reader, but the reader has to participate by bringing their imagination to the reading experience. Reading requires complete engagement, it is not a passive activity. What's great about *Twilight* is Stephenie Meyer created a fully-developed world in which fans could invest their imaginations. The readers

have a partnership in building this imaginary world, each in their own minds.

If there is a New Moon movie made, would you be interested in making a New Moon companion book?

Sure!

Is there anything else that you would like to add?

I would add that writing about movies, or the entertainment field in general, is no different than writing about history, politics, science, or any other field. The skills of a good reporter and historian are vital to the task.

The tendency for a large segment of the entertainment media is to dumb things down and sensationalize. Certainly, the entertainment business itself trades in mystique, image, and illusion, all things that feed our culture's fascination with celebrity. But the "What's Hot/What's Not" items, tawdry sex scandals (the kinds you find in supermarket tabloids), and reports on the bank accounts of certain stars, are pretty boring to me.

Taking just the field of motion pictures, that subject includes the history, politics, and economics of an industry, technological advances, the iconography of stars and their stories, the power of dreams, and a time traveling dynamic that allows us to visit past times and places. For me, it's fascinating.

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