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opening extract from

Bedazzled: Stephanie Meyer and the Twilight Phenomenon

written by

George Beahm

published by

JR Books Ltd

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First published in Great Britain in 2009 by
JR Books, 10 Greenland Street, London NW1 0ND
www.jrbooks.com.

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

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"An Interview With Stephanie Meyer in her Home Town" was originally published under the title "Charmed". Written by Megain Irwin and © 2007 Phoenix New Times/Village Voice Media, it is reprinted with their kind permission.

ISBN 978-1-906779-96-2

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed and bound in the UK by Thomson Litho Ltd.

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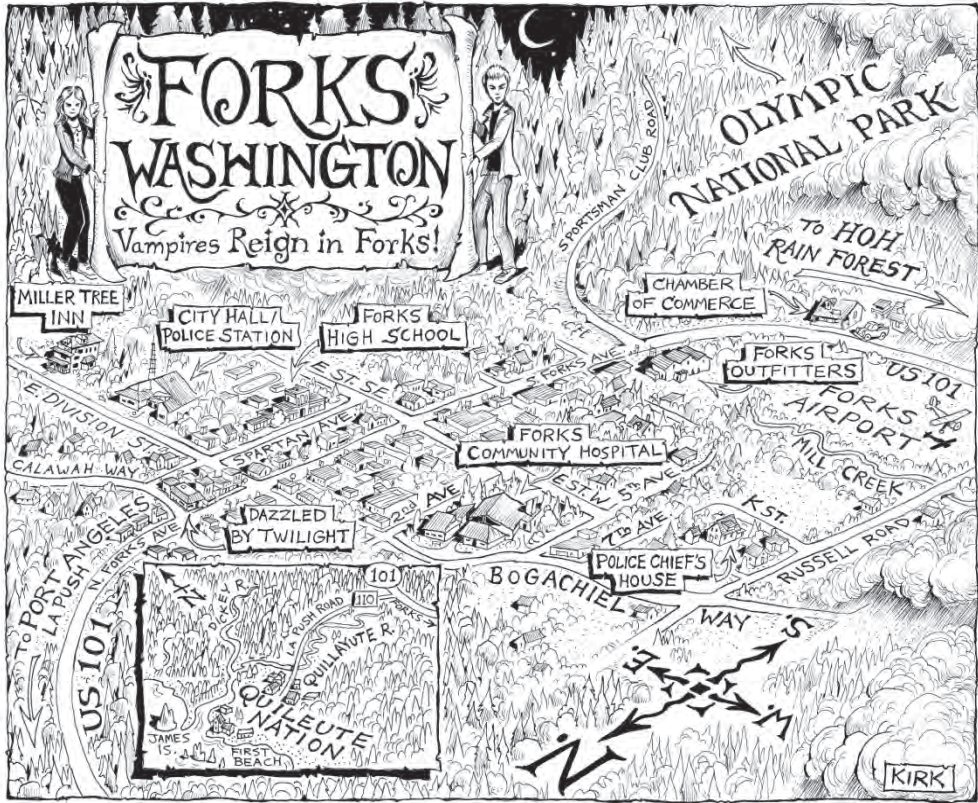
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The small town of Forks, Washington (art by Tim Kirk).

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Flanking the road on part of the drive on U.S. 101 from Port Angeles to Forks, Lake Crescent offers numerous scenic views.

PART 1:
THE REAL WORLD
OF
STEPHENIE MEYER

A Note to the Reader

The Twilight franchise belongs to Stephenie Meyer, but the Twilight phenomenon belongs to the fans who started it by word of mouth recommendations, blogs, fan postings on message boards, fan fiction, Web sites, and conventions.

This book is a celebration of the Twilight phenomenon and Stephenie Meyer.

Specifically written for a general audience, for tweens to grandmothers, this book explores every aspect of the Twilight universe and presents a wealth of information for every fan.

A love story for women of all ages, the Twilight Saga has struck a responsive, universal chord among its readers who have eagerly devoured millions of copies worldwide of the four books in the series.

For those who want to know more about Twilight creator Stephenie Meyer, the books, and their film adaptations, this book provides information that the reader can sink her teeth into: take small bites, though, as this book was intended to be read at a leisurely pace, preferably by the dying light of the setting sun, the onset of twilight, the coming of a new moon, or the breaking dawn.

**Stephenie
Meyer:
By the Numbers**

Four books:
Twilight,
New Moon,
Eclipse, and *Breaking Dawn*.
\$383 million (£230 million)
worldwide gross for the
Twilight film.
16 *Twilight* conventions
by Creation in 2010.
8,996,200 DVDs
of *Twilight*.
39 foreign languages.
70 million books.
All from
one writer.

Chronology

1973

December 24: Stephenie Morgan born (Hartford, Connecticut), the second of six children, to Stephen and Candy.

1978

Morgan family moves to Arizona.

1992

Stephenie Morgan awarded a National Merit Scholarship. Graduates from high school (Chaparral High School, Scottsdale, Arizona).

1993

Began dating Christiaan “Pancho” Meyer, who, on their second date, proposed. Stephenie recalls that he proposed over 40 times before she finally accepted.

1994

Stephenie Morgan marries Christiaan Meyer.

1997

Stephenie Meyer graduates from BYU (Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah) with a B.A. degree in English Literature.

2003

June 2: Inspired by a dream about a mortal girl and an immortal vampire in a meadow, she begins writing *Forks*. **September:** Submits *Forks* (working title) to literary agents and signs on with Writers House. Sells *Forks* and two sequels for six figures. The book is retitled *Twilight*.

2004

Twilight optioned as a movie for MTV and Maverick Films.

2005

October 5: *Twilight* is published in trade hardback by Little, Brown and Company in a print run of 75,000 copies. Meyer designated as one of the “most promising new authors” of the year by *Publishers Weekly*.

2006

May 31: *New Moon* is published in trade hardback in a first print run of 100,000 copies. **September 30:** Meyer is a guest at the biggest literary book festival in America.

2007

April: Film option with MTV lapses. Summit picks up the option. Publishes short story, "Hell on Earth," in *Prom Nights from Hell*. **May 5:** Meyer hosts prom at Arizona State University. **August:** *Eclipse* is published in trade hardback with a first print run of one million copies.

2008

May: *The Host*, bought for six figures, is published in trade hardback in a first printing of 500,000 copies. **August:** *Breaking Dawn* is published in trade hardback in a print run of 3.2 million copies. First midnight book party held for *Breaking Dawn*. Goes on Concert Series Tour with Justin Furstenfeld (of Blue October band). Posts notice on her Web site about the unauthorized release of *Midnight Sun* on the Internet. **November 21:** *Twilight* released as a major motion picture, directed by Catherine Hardwicke, from Summit Entertainment. **August:** *Midnight Sun*, a retelling of *Twilight* from Edward Cullen's perspective, is posted on the Internet and goes viral; Meyer self-publishes the work-in-progress as an e-book on her Web site.

2009

September 22: *The Host* is optioned by producers Nick Wechsler, and Steve and Paula Mae Schwartz, with Andrew Niccol to write the screenplay and direct. (No release date has been announced.) **November 20:** *New Moon* released as a major motion picture, directed by Chris Weitz.

2010

June 30: *Eclipse* to be released as a major motion picture, directed by David Slade.

2011

Breaking Dawn presumably to be released as a major motion picture.

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art by Tim Kirk

Edward Cullen and Stephanie Meyer.

An Interview with Stephenie Meyer in her Hometown

by Megan Irwin

Written by an Arizona newspaper reporter, this profile/interview with Stephenie Meyer was conducted in May 2007, three months before Eclipse went to press with a print run of one million copies. Meyer's previous book, New Moon, had a first print run of 100,000 copies. (This profile was originally published under the title "Charmed".)

*

Outside the entrance of Arizona State University's old gym on a warm Saturday in May, hundreds of teenage girls stand in full prom get-ups, chattering, shrieking, and hugging in the way only adolescent girls should. It's a windy day and the girls fidget with their hair and poofy dresses while they wait for the doors to open. They are nervous and excited. Inside the gym, black and red crepe paper streamers and homemade centrepieces try to hide the fact that this is a room made for sports, not fancy dresses.

When the doors finally open, the girls stream in quickly, stampeding for the food and a place to stand near a stage set up on the far side of the gym. Their nervous energy finally has a place to go.

The scene is like every awkward school dance you ever went to, except for a few key things: it's the middle of the day. At this prom, the bored wallflowers are parents. There are almost no boys here. And it's not boys (not real ones, anyway) or first kisses or even dancing that have brought hundreds of girls to this prom.

It's a book. Or rather, an author: Stephenie Meyer, who, in the past two years, has caused an international sensation with her young adult vampire series *Twilight*.

The prom is actually a publicity event to celebrate a special edition of her second release, *New Moon*, and get readers hyped for *Eclipse*, the third book in her series.

The event, put on personally by Meyer with help from Tempe's Changing Hands Bookstore and Arizona State University's English department, sold out in seven hours. It sold out so fast that Meyer decided to do two proms in one day. Tickets for the second one were gone in four hours.

Meyer sold out the Arizona State University gym faster than presidential candidate Barack Obama filled the Orpheum Theatre last fall. And though tickets for Meyer's event were only \$8 (£4) (compared with \$30 [£18] for Obama), all the girls here have purchased her books, which retail for \$18 (£11).

The buzz today is that she's going to read the first chapter of *Eclipse*, which won't be released until late summer.

The Arcade Fire pumps through the loudspeakers in the gym as the girls shove around the stage. After what seems like forever to the fans, Meyer emerges in an enormous red dress and glides toward the podium.

With her dark hair and pale skin, she could almost fit in with the fictional bloodsuckers she's invented.

The crowd goes wild with an adolescent roar as soon as they see her. She looks out at her fans. She looks down at her paper.

"I'm a little nervous," she tells the prom. The resulting screams almost drown her out.

She shouldn't be worried.

Meyer's books have sold a combined million copies and both have topped the *New York Times* bestseller list for young adult fiction. *Publishers Weekly* named *Twilight* one of the best books of the year.

Amazon.com called it one of the best books of the decade. It's been translated into 20 languages, and there's talk of turning it into a movie.

It's not just the publishing industry that loves her. Her fans are rabidly loyal. Harry Potter loyal.

In fact, when the Harry Potter series wraps up this summer, industry insiders think Meyer and her vampires might just be poised as the Next Big Thing. Meyer's characters Edward Cullen and Bella Swan are positioned to become household names—teenagers across the globe already know them on a first name basis, the same way they know Harry, Hermione and Ron.

Though J.K. Rowling is still the best-known young adult writer in the world, Meyer is closing in on the title.

Not bad considering that four summers ago, she was a stay-at-home Mormon mom with three young sons and no connection to hordes of teenage girls. Four summers ago, she'd never written anything more than what she calls "really bad" poetry, and that was in college.

Yet at the prom, she will sign more than 1,000 books. And a few weeks later, she will tour Europe, visiting Spain and Italy, where hundreds of fans will travel hundreds of miles just to see her.

Meyer can't quite make sense of the past few years of her life.

"It's surreal," she says. "It's hard to think about."

June 2, 2003, should have been a normal day for Meyer. It was the first day of swim lessons for her kids. It was the first day of her new diet, a time to lose

the weight that comes with having two babies nearly back-to-back. When she climbed into bed the night before, she certainly didn't have any reason to think her life was going to change overnight.

But it did. Around four in the morning, she woke up from an extremely vivid dream.

"It was very clear. I was an observer. When I woke up, I sat there with my eyes closed, thinking about it," she says. "It was like reading a great book when you don't want to put it down; you want to know what happens next. So, I just laid there imagining."

With three kids, she couldn't lie in bed imagining all day so she decided to write her dream down.

By breakfast, she was at the computer, where she typed the first line: "In the sunlight, he was shocking." It's now the first sentence of Chapter 13 in *Twilight*. Reluctantly, she got up to take her kids to the pool.

"The whole time, my mind was just churning," she says. "It was a really sleep-deprived summer, but one of the best of my life."

When she came home from swimming, she made lunch and kept writing. By the end of the day, she'd completed 10 pages. From that day forward, she wasn't able to stop.

The Meyers were coming off a depressing year. While she was pregnant with her youngest son, Eli, she'd fallen over—"I was *really* pregnant," she says—and broken her arm badly. Five weeks later, her husband, Pancho, was diagnosed with Crohn's disease.

"It wasn't a great time in my life. I'd put on so much weight with the two babies. My 30th birthday was coming up and I was so not ready to face being 30," she says. "I didn't feel I had much going for me. I had my kids, but there wasn't much I was doing."

Meyer needed a creative outlet. She'd painted in college, but with the kids, it was too hard, and the scrapbooking parties she went to with friends from church were fun but not exactly fulfilling.

"When I switched to writing, it was a much fuller outlet for me," she says. "There was a whole lot of pleasure in that first writing experience. It felt like a dam bursting, there was so much that I couldn't get out, and then I could."

She's not the first writer to turn a dream into a novel and find success on her first try. Mary Shelley is rumored to have dreamed about *Frankenstein* before she wrote it. But the pace of Meyer's writing that summer and the wild success that followed are rare.

She didn't tell anyone what she was doing. She dropped out of her scrapbook club and didn't even go to the movies because the thought of three hours away from the computer was unbearable.

"I lost a lot of friends that summer," she says, laughing.

She didn't even tell her husband, though he'd started to wonder what she was up to.

"I was really protective and shy about it because it's a vampire romance. It's still embarrassing to say those words—it sounds so cheesy," she says. "It's not like I was going to tell him that I was writing this story about vampires, because he was just going to be even more perturbed."

Their marriage didn't exactly suffer, but they did get in little arguments.

"We're not either of us very docile people," she says. "We argue all the time because that's our personalities. We didn't get in mean arguments, but I'm sure we argued over it because we argue about everything—we argue about milk."

These days, Pancho is happy to play the proud husband. Because of his wife's success, he was able to go back to school to become an accountant, and while he was a little frustrated in the beginning, he beams when he talks about her.

"It's fun to watch," he says. "Before she wrote an international bestseller, she was just a creative and intelligent woman. She's extremely blessed."

The person who finally got the secret out of her was her big sister, Emily Rasmussen. The two have been extremely close since childhood, so when Meyer dropped off the face of the Earth, forgetting to make or return phone calls and ignoring e-mails, Rasmussen got worried.

"It was abnormal that she wasn't talking to me," says Rasmussen, who lives in Utah with her husband and daughter. "I called her and said, 'What's going on? Why aren't you calling me anymore?'"

Meyer took a deep breath and blurted it out.

"I don't keep secrets from Emily," she says. "I thought she'd laugh, but it turns out she's a big Buffy fan, which I didn't know. She wanted to see it, and, on the one hand, I was very shy about it, but on the other hand, I was in love with it, so I wanted her to see it."

Meyer e-mailed Rasmussen a couple of chapters. As the story took shape, Meyer's sister read, and loved, every word.

"I would call and hound her, and I was always there bugging her," she says. "I've read *Twilight* I don't know how many times."

Within three months, the book was done. That's a quick turnaround for a book almost 500 pages long, but Meyer couldn't stop herself.

"Obsession covers it pretty well," she says, describing her writing methodology.

By the time Meyer finished the first book, her sister persuaded her to try to publish it.

She sent out queries to agents, not expecting much.

A month later, she got a call from New York agent Jodi Reamer, who had fallen in love with the story and wanted to represent Meyer. Reamer sent the book to nine editors, expecting a long wait.

But one week later, Meyer got another call. Megan Tingley, a top editor at Little, Brown and Company, read the book on an airplane and wanted to sign Meyer in a preemptive \$300,000 (£183,000) three-book deal. Reamer turned it down and asked for a million.

"I almost threw up," says Meyer.

The publisher's counteroffer was \$750,000 (£460,000), the largest amount of money it had ever offered a first-time author.

"That was the most surreal day. Eli was with me, so he was thinking Mommy lost her mind for a little while," she says of her youngest child, then 1. "I was on the phone with Jodi trying to be all professional, 'Yes, I'd love that. That's great,' and then I called my sister and I could hardly talk. Eli was following me around on his play phone going, 'Hahahahaha,' imitating me."

Tingley was behind Meyer 100 percent from the start.

"It was the combination of desire and danger that drew me in. I could not put it down and I could not wait for the plane to land, so I could sign up the book," she says. "On a gut level, I knew I had a bestseller on my hands when I was halfway through the manuscript."

While Meyer worked on the sequel, Little, Brown was gearing up for a publicity blitz. The unusual circumstances surrounding her deal—unknown writer gets three quarters of a million dollars—were enough to generate a significant buzz among publishing insiders, and Little, Brown was anticipating a huge reader response as well.

"Stephenie's fans are rabid," says Tingley. "Stephenie has tapped into something very deep in her readers, and they respond on an emotional level. She really understands the hopes and fears of teenage girls."

Tingley was on to something, and today, a million teenagers around the world have devoured Meyer's story.

On the surface, the books may sound cheesy—her word—and as she says, vampire romance is a bit overdone. But the characters she's created resonate, especially with teenagers. The story centres on a 17-year-old girl, Bella Swan, who is uprooted from her home in Phoenix to live with her dad in the small town of Forks, Washington.

Though Bella is clumsy and shy, she quickly grabs the attention of Edward Cullen, a mysterious boy at her high school. The two fall for each other in that head-over-heels way that's believable only when you're a teenager.

Of course, the fact that Edward has a strong urge to kill his girlfriend and suck her blood complicates things. His conflicted nature and constant struggle are part of what pushes the series forward.

"There's something about overcoming the natural man," Meyer says. "Having free agency to decide what you're going to do with yourself is a gift.

I think kids pick up on that—it doesn't matter if you're a vampire. You can choose what to do with your life. Conflicted heroes are the best kind. Edward really has to fight."

It's Meyer's characters, and their struggles, that fans have gone crazy over. Collette Morgan, owner of Wild Rumpus, a children's bookstore in Minneapolis that's hosted Meyer on previous tours, says teenagers related instantly to the characters in the story.

When *Twilight* came out, Morgan's book club, "We Know What You're Publishing and Here's What We Think of It," (they read only advance copies of books) was one of the first groups of teenagers to read the book.

"I was blown away by the reaction of these kids," she says. "They were so taken with that story. She makes the characters so believable you want to meet them. You want Edward to be at your school."

The characters become more developed, more real, in the second book as the story gets more complicated. Edward and Bella face a series of problems, including one in which Bella's best friend, Jacob Black, a Quileute Indian living on the La Push reservation, turns out to be a werewolf, part of a pack that is supposed to protect the area from vampires.

Part of what makes the story so compelling is that Meyer's vampires and other monsters play by their own rules.

The central vampire characters, the Cullen family (they run around as a clan—three other couples plus Edward), are "vegetarians," meaning they feed on large animals instead of humans. Other vampires in the story feed on humans—there's one particularly gruesome scene in the second novel—but Edward and his family have taken an oath not to.

Meyer's vampires don't turn into bats or sleep in coffins. They don't have fangs, and they can even go out during the day, though they prefer darkness because they are simply too beautiful in the sunlight.

Essentially, she has created an entirely new vampire myth.

"I haven't even seen *Interview With the Vampire*. I change the channel really fast when horror movies come on," she says. "I know the [traditional vampire] stories because everyone does, so I knew I was breaking the rules, but I didn't really think about it much until I started worrying. But vampire fans have been very open-minded."

Jana Reiss, religion editor at *Publishers Weekly* and author of *What Would Buffy Do? The Slayer as a Spiritual Guide*, says Meyer's vamps are a welcome change.

"I have yet to talk to anyone who is upset by it," she says. "I think most people are looking for innovative takes. Meyer really taps into that."

Though adults do relate to Meyer's books, once they give them a chance, it's teen girls who really go crazy for them. Kaitlan Harris runs a *Twilight* fan page

on MySpace. The 18-year-old from Georgia started the page in 2006, two days after she finished the book.

"I loved the way I couldn't stop thinking about what was going to happen to Bella. I never read anything before that has left me wanting more. I always just put it on the shelf and that's it," she says. "But I can't help but look at the book and remember all the emotions I felt [reading]. I felt like I was living the story, and that has never happened to me."

Bree Painter, a teenager from San Diego, agrees that the books and the characters feel real.

"It's the way the story is written," she says. "Stephenie writes in a way that makes the entire thing completely believable, like I could have an Edward Cullen living right next door."

Faith Hochhalter, buyer of young-adult books for Changing Hands, an independent bookstore in Tempe, Arizona agrees that Meyer's fans have a dedication rarely seen among young adult readers, and it has as much to do with Meyer's personality as it does the story.

Changing Hands is the official outlet for signed copies of Meyer's books, and Hochhalter says that even three years after the original release, orders are still pouring in at the rate of 12 a day, from places as far away as Croatia.

"Her fans are so loyal. I feel at this point, Stephenie could rewrite the phone book and her fans would still buy it," she says. "She's so giving and warm and her fans see that and relate to it, even if they don't know that's what they're relating to. Aside from J.K. Rowling, I've never seen anything on this scale."

Meyer's fandom is reminiscent of Harry Potter mania, crazy fan sites and all. The biggest fan site, *Twilight Lexicon*, is run by fans who seem to do little else but talk about Meyer and her books.

The Web site's features range from detailed timelines to character outlines to fan fiction to a question-and-answer section where readers ask things like "Can vampires have sex?" (they can, but Meyer won't give specifics) to details about the Cullens' personal history.

The Lexicon group seems to know Meyer's books almost better than she does.

"The Lexicon scares me sometimes," she says. She worries that once things are explained on the Lexicon, they become fact in the *Twilight* universe. For example, she's explained the backstory for each of the vampire characters on the Lexicon, so now she can't change it in her books without dealing with thousands of disgruntled fans.

But she still answers their questions.

The fact that she'll go on a fan site at all speaks volumes about Meyer and is, perhaps, why her fans get so hysterical when they see her. Meyer says it's not unusual for little girls to shake and stutter when they meet her.

"It's almost rock-star status," says Hochhalter. "I want to start calling her fans Steph-Heads. She has people who go to every book signing."

Libby Scott, a teenager from New Brunswick, Canada, has followed Meyer all over North America. Scott has been to Utah, Washington, Tennessee, and Arizona to meet up with her favourite author. She remembers shaking and stuttering the first time she met Meyer.

"I couldn't even get coherent words out," she says. "She hugged me, and I was, like, 'Oh, my gosh! Stephenie Meyer is hugging me,'" she says.

Scott got *Twilight* as a gift from her mother in 2005 and has been hooked since she read the first page.

"I just obsessed. For a couple of months, that was all I wanted to read," she says. "I liked it because it wasn't stereotypical. The relationship wasn't what you normally get in a teenage romance novel. The boy isn't perfect, and it brought you into this world where you think that this could really happen. I like that she wrote fantasy in such a real setting."

Her mom, Barbara, says the family has traveled more than 22,000 miles and spent more than \$10,000 (£6,000) so that Scott can travel to signings. Meyer even came to Scott's birthday dinner in Nashville, bearing *Twilight*-themed gifts.

"Because of Stephenie, we've seen parts of the continent we wouldn't have thought to go to. I mean, I'd never seen the desert," Barbara says. "It's been quite an investment, but a good investment. We told Stephenie we'll follow her until the last book."

The Scotts aren't the only family who's gone crazy over Meyer's books. Her following is international.

Meyer's had to learn some hard lessons as a result of her massive popularity, and she's become a lot more guarded as her fame has increased.

Before the release of *New Moon*, a librarian leaked spoilers from her advance copy onto the Internet.

"It was two days of straight crying [after the spoilers were posted]. I wouldn't have minded if she went online and said she hated the book without posting the spoilers. That wouldn't have bothered me," she says. "But somebody linked to it, everyone read it, and then started e-mailing me. I couldn't defend myself, so I had six months of e-mails in all caps saying 'WHY WOULD YOU DO THIS TO ME?' It was like being attacked."

In addition to the spoilers, some people who had access to the galley started selling it on eBay. One copy sold for over \$350 (£210). It's not the fact that her book is being sold illegally that upsets Meyer (though it certainly angered the publisher)—she's just worried that whoever bought it was getting ripped off.

"There's no way they're going to be happy with that purchase," she says.

With *Eclipse* coming out this summer, the publisher decided to be much

more careful. Absolutely no advance copies were distributed. Still, Meyer ran into a problem.

She lent a copy to her sister-in-law, who then asked if her other sister could read it. Meyer said okay, but it soon was passed on to another sister who passed it on to a 14-year-old friend, who made a copy for her friends. And so on.

"My fans are extremely loyal, and one girl e-mailed me. I flipped out. I was horrified," she says. "I found out it was through my sister-in-law's copy, and I met with the girls. I told them I can't write with this kind of nightmare. I can't deal with the stress, so if you guys can't keep your mouths shut, I'll have to stop writing."

No one wants to be the girl who killed *Twilight*, so they've kept Meyer's secrets under wraps. Still, she didn't get as angry as other writers might. Showing a dazzling understanding of the teenage female psyche, she didn't just threaten them, she also made them a promise.

"I told them, if they don't talk, when *Eclipse* comes out, we'll have a party and I'll make them shirts that say 'I kept the Eclipse secret,'" she says.

Still, because of the leaks, she won't even let her kids read book four. She used to read them her books as bedtime stories, but she now worries they may start talking.

"I never thought about it before, because who listens to them? But Gabe knows them really well," she says. "And the last thing I need is him trying to impress some girl . . ." she trails off in horror.

Her youngest son, Eli, 5, chimes in.

"*Eclipse* is coming out!! But I don't know, I don't know what . . ." he says before his mom cuts him off.

"You can't talk about it, Eli," she reminds him.

"Um, I don't know what comes after *Breaking Dawn*," he finishes meekly.

Meyer pauses for a second, then hugs him and laughs: "I don't know either."

Watching her at home with her kids, it's easy to glimpse what life was like before she became a famous writer. Back when she was just mom to Gabe, Seth, and Eli, now 10, 6 and 5. Back when she was just Sister Meyer to her friends in her ward, the word for congregation in the Mormon Church.

Big families are the norm in the Latter Day Saints faith—Meyer has five brothers and sisters—but she's not planning on having more kids. She said she might adopt a girl in the future. It would be fun for her to have a little girl, but for now, she lets her fans act as surrogate daughters.

"It makes me want to adopt a teenage girl," she says. "It would be so nice to have a girly-girl around. Someone to go see *Waitress* with. It's nice because I get to have a million teenage daughters."

She was born in Connecticut, and her family moved to the Valley when

she was 4. Her dad had a new job as a finance manager. Meyer had what she describes as a typical Mormon upbringing. There are six kids in her family—three girls, three boys—and Meyer is the second-oldest in an incredibly close family. The world has always been a crowded place for her, something that translates into her books. No character, except for Bella, is ever really alone.

“When you grow up in a big family, there’s always someone to hang out with,” she says. “I babysat my brothers and changed diapers. I used to have mom nightmares about my brothers—when you’re a mom you have nightmares about terrible things happening to your kids and you can’t stop them. I had those about my brothers.”

Those maternal tendencies have carried over into her life with her three boys. Eli explains the way his family works:

“Gabe is the boss of us [Eli and Seth] and mom is the boss of us all,” he says.

“Yep, I’m the boss of everything,” she says.

“Uh huh. And of dad,” Eli adds.

Though a lot has changed for her family since her career took off, she still manages to stay home with the kids. During the day, she works on editing her novels—a task she can leave to intervene in a snack-time crisis—and does her fresh writing at night after the kids are in bed.

When she’s on the road, Pancho becomes Mr. Mom, balancing a tight schedule of getting the kids to and from school and getting himself to work. Luckily, Stephenie’s parents are willing to help out, and she’s in the process of hiring a personal assistant to help with the kids and some of the chores that come with fame (updating her MySpace page, for example.)

“The more I travel, the harder it gets,” she says. “My kids are complacent. They make it easy, but I do feel bad. They play a lot of video games.”

At that moment, the boys, tired of hiding in the guest room while a reporter bugs Mommy, come bursting into the room.

Seth is wearing a homemade superhero costume, from back when Meyer still had time to sew. He says he’s “Animal Time,” a hero he invented. As he jumps on the couch, he explains that he has all the powers of every animal in the world and can talk to them, too.

Eli brings out a book about cars and starts explaining that he likes Porsche the best. “I know every car in the whole world,” he brags.

They don’t seem very impressed that their mom is going to be in the newspaper.

“Gabe is old enough to remember before and after, and his teachers get excited and send books home to get signed, but he’s very blasé about it at home,” she says. “The two little ones don’t know anything else, so they think everyone’s mom is the same.”

One thing that hasn't changed is Meyer's commitment to her Mormon faith.

"It's not a church that's low on time commitments," she says.

That means three hours of church on Sunday in addition to teaching a class for the 14- to 18-year-old kids in her ward.

On her Amazon.com profile, when asked for a list of influential books, she included the Book of Mormon.

Though she wasn't a writer until *Twilight*, Meyer says she was always a storyteller. The family took a lot of trips to Utah to visit her grandparents, and she used to tell herself stories to stay entertained.

After she graduated from Chaparral High School in Scottsdale, she went to college at Brigham Young University in Utah, majoring in English.

"I don't know if I ever considered anything else. That's what I love. I love reading, and this was a major I could read in," she says. "I figured I'd go on and go to law school, but I wasn't super-concerned with supporting myself because I wasn't thinking beyond being a student."

During the summer break before her senior year, she started dating Pancho. They'd known each other since they were kids at church but were never friends until that summer.

"It's funny, because in 20 years of knowing each other, we never had a conversation. But we got along so well," she says. "On our second official date was when he proposed. He proposed a lot. Over 40 times. He would propose every night and I would tell him no every night. It was kind of our end-of-date thing. Mormons get married a lot faster. The no-sex thing does speed up relationships."

Though she doesn't write overtly Mormon literature, her religious upbringing filters into her stories. She won't, for example, ever write graphic sex. And the theme of free will throughout her books draws from Mormon doctrine.

Still, she thinks people make a bigger deal out of her religion than they should.

"I think it's because Mormons are rarer in other parts of the world," she says. "But I get more of, 'What's a Mormon girl doing writing about vampires?' from the Mormon community than I do the outside. I was more worried about [friends at church] thinking I was doing something cheesy and lame."

Don Evans, spokesman for the Mormon Church in Phoenix, says the church has no position on Meyer's books.

"Her works should not be judged by her religious affiliation. She could be Catholic, Baptist, or atheist," he says. "It shouldn't matter."

He adds that his wife and daughter are both fans.

Meyer isn't the first Mormon writer to go mainstream with "edgy"

material. Science fiction writer Orson Scott Card is another well-known Mormon who's vocal about his religion but has found success in both the secular world and among his faith. He's also one of Meyer's favourite authors.

Jana Reiss from *Publishers Weekly* says it's become a point of interest because Meyer isn't afraid to mention her faith.

"Why does this keep coming up? There are a couple of reasons," she says. "She brings it up. She outs herself as a Mormon writer in a way other writers don't. The other reason is Mormonism is an exoticized religious minority. We see it with Mormon politicians, too."

Meyer got to talk to Card when he called her to try to persuade her to shop a science fiction novel she's working on to his publisher. Card didn't seal the deal, but Meyer got some great advice.

"He said, as a prominent Mormon author, you're never going to please everybody. You're going to get people who will tell you your stories cross the line—how can you be a good Mormon and write this? Then there will be other people who will say that you're limiting your art because you're letting your religion control what you write," she says. "So far, I haven't gotten it bad from either."

She does remember one Mormon woman who reviewed *Twilight* and analyzed how it tied into the Book of Mormon. She was dead wrong on every tie-in, Meyer says, though there was one deliberate Book of Mormon reference, Meyer says, that the reviewer missed.

Growing up, Meyer's favourite Book of Mormon story was the one about the 2,000 stripling warriors, from the book of Alma. In the story, the parents of a small group of boys are under attack but have taken a blood oath never to fight again after their conversion to Christianity. They consider breaking the oath but are persuaded not to by a prophet. Their sons, who never took the oath, go to fight instead, and because of their faith, not a single one is harmed.

Meyer sees her werewolves as her stripling warriors.

"In the history of the Book of Mormon, they [the warriors] would have been dark-skinned, the ancestors of the Native Americans who are here now. So for me, the Quileute [tribesmen, the wolves in her books] are kind of these sons who have taken on the responsibility of taking care of their families."

She may write a Mormon novel someday, but for now, she's happy working with her vampires.

"I have a novel I started that would be a Mormon comedy romance," she says. "I do wonder what it would be like, because I have these girls who will read anything I write, so I know they'll read it, and I can't imagine what their reaction would be. And what parents will think about their kids reading stuff

that has quite a lot of Mormon doctrine in it.”

After *Eclipse* comes out August 7, there will be one book left in the series, then Meyer plans on doing a book [*Midnight Sun*] that retells *Twilight* from Edward’s perspective. She’s also gearing up for a 15-city tour behind *Eclipse*. In between, she’s focusing on finishing her mainstream science fiction book, *The Host*, and has about 20 other story ideas in various stages of development, including one about cannibal mermaids.

Still, she’s not the type to plan too far into the future.

“When the prom hadn’t happened yet, I couldn’t even think about (the trip to) Italy because there was nothing until [the] prom was done. Now there’s no life until I finish editing *The Host*,” she says. “I just live from crisis to crisis.”

Her current worry is that *Eclipse* comes out so close to the release of the final Harry Potter book. But if her previous success is any indication, she’ll be fine. In June, she enjoyed a special honor: *Twilight* and *New Moon* both topped the *New York Times* bestseller list, one as a hardcover and one as a paperback, even after being on the market for so long.

That mark of success has a lot to do with how involved she stays with her readers. The *Eclipse* prom she hosted in May is a good example.

The idea actually sprang from fans in Pasadena, California, who came to a signing and told her that the next time Meyer came to town, they were going to wear prom dresses and have a party for one of the characters, just like the prom Edward and Bella go to at the end of Book One. Meyer and her publicist jumped on the idea.

The publisher turned the prom into a PR event for the release of the *New Moon* special edition and to promote the release of Book Three. But, in the end, it really was all about the fans. Fans formed the “prom committee,” a group of girls (and grown women) from around the country who helped Meyer with decorations and logistics.

At the prom in May, Meyer signed more than 1,000 books and, by nighttime, had a blister on her finger. The naturally shy woman still has a hard time believing that it is all for her. She still doesn’t believe she’s as famous as she is and scoffs at the idea that she’s approaching J.K. Rowling status. She says she’s been recognized only twice, once by another author and once by two girls at an OK Go concert.

“Writer fame is like 100 percent better than any other kind of fame,” she says. “Unless I’m going to an event, no one will recognize me.”

But in small groups of fans, she lights up, relishing the chance to be one of the girls. At an after-party for the prom, a group of about 30 girls, and a few boys, are gathered in their pajamas, playing Meyer-themed games like *Twilight* Cranium. They’re divided into teams: humans, vampires, and werewolves.

BEDAZZLED

Excitement erupts when Meyer walks into the room in her PJs, her hair still done up for the prom.

Meyer plops down in a chair and is immediately surrounded by girls. She pulls one onto her lap while another plays with her hair.

Through the cheers, one fan whispers to a friend, "See, I *knew* she'd come."