

# Hunted and haunted by the Twi-Hard hordes



**ELAINE LUI**

Elaine Lui runs the website *Laineygossip.com* and is a reporter on CTV's *eTalk*

Instead of spending quality time with my husband at a Vegas blackjack table, there I was in a bathroom at Caesars Palace, whispering with another man over the phone. There was a *Twilight* cast party going on back in Vancouver, and the man – an on-set source of mine – said the paparazzi were on high alert, and the fans were begging to know the location.

This was last May, near the end of the Vancouver shoot of *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*, which had transformed my celebrity gossip site, *laineygossip.com*, into the epicentre of *Twilight* mania. Twi-Hards (the term for the franchise's obsessive fan base) had an insatiable appetite for photos and insider gossip about fey-boy vampire Edward Cullen (Robert Pattinson) and Bella Swan (Kristen Stewart), the ordinary girl who had captured his 100-year-old bloodless heart.

By the time production on *Eclipse*, the next instalment in the series, had begun in August, the fan frenzy was at a fever pitch. Nearly 30 Los Angeles-based paparazzi were camped out in Vancouver. Twi-Hards used Twitter to post location shoot details, which would then get picked up by local radio. Crowds, including parents with children in tow, flocked to the sets, desperate for a glimpse of something – anything. Together, the paparazzi, the production, and I, the celebrity blogger, became part of a complex *Twilight* ecosystem – and horny Twi-Hards the world over were looking to



While Pattinson (left) and Stewart were filming in Vancouver, devotees were desperate to see them as real-life lovers. MICHAELA REHLE/REUTERS

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me to constantly feed their fix.

And I did. Because, like all bloggers, I am a traffic whore. Before *Twilight*, stories such as a Brangelina birth or adoption would send site visits through the roof. But even the rabid fascination around that pair paled in comparison to the *Twilight* phenom, and I quickly discovered that with the Twi-Hard traffic comes the Twi-Hard crazy.

Fans from as far away as Brazil, France and Australia were making pilgrimages to Vancouver, hooking up with photographers and autograph hounds outside of hotels and restaurants. Together, they formed a *Twilight* hunting party, tracking the cast across town. Once I started reporting on cast gatherings and what scenes they were rehearsing, and posting photos of the actors both in costume and around the city, I found myself

trapped, albeit willingly, inside a hormonal hurricane. My inbox was flooded with tips, sightings and messages from fans of all ages, shapes and sizes begging for more.

Some of the things I experienced have had the makings of their own horror film. The Twi-Hards don't just love the story; they are desperate to believe that Pattinson and Stewart, now rechristened Robsten, are a modern-day pop-cult Romeo and Juliet. They hope fervently that Stewart's onscreen swooning for Pattinson's tortured vampire is merely an extension of their real-life love story.

Every photo I posted resulted in what amounted to an online mass orgasm. Every scene detail prompted virtual hugs in chat rooms, as fans expressed their devotion in the form of YouTube tribute videos, even creating Photoshopped images of a euphoric Pattinson kissing

Stewart's pregnant belly.

But when it came to gossip, if my report didn't fit into the fantasy, the enabler became the enemy. Hate mail would pour in. When I mocked the film's cheesy dialogue, Twi-Hards blamed my "meaniness" on my Chinese-ness, and e-mailed to tell me that I had a cultural predisposition to insensitivity. Some suggested I was stuck in a loveless marriage. That, apparently, was the only logical explanation for my failure to be moved by Edward's love for Bella. Then they surmised that my husband was not attracted to me because of my overuse of "the swears" (the liberal cussing that permeates my blog). These messages were usually characterized by the overuse of exclamation marks, and much cussing of their own.

Fans really became unhinged when I reported that Pattinson

and co-star Nikki Reed were becoming close early on in the production. I was accused of conspiring with her to stage photos and to lie about the relationship to further her fame agenda. Likewise, when I posted photographs of Stewart holding hands with her ex-boyfriend, I was portrayed as a puppet master. My motives were analyzed and debated on message boards and *Twilight* blogs. According to some, I was being paid by Summit Entertainment, the studio behind *Twilight*, to cover up the hot Robsten love. Flattering, but false.

Through it all, they kept begging to know where the cast was staying. One intrepid Twi-Hard had bravely followed Pattinson into an elevator and took a photo that I later posted on my blog. Other Twi-Hards studied that photo, and identified the hotel. I subsequently received this promise from a woman in Florida: "Lainey, is Rob at the Sheraton? Please confirm and in return I will name my puppy after you. I am not a stalker so you have nothing to worry about."

I've seen my share of passionate fans and twisted celebrity obsession over the years, but all of this has led me to believe that Twi-Hards belong in a category of crazy all their own.

So where does that leave me? I guess I'm their dealer – so who am I to judge? Besides, I'm not above admitting that I, too, have been waiting for my own fangirl moment. At a Juno Awards party last Spring, Pattinson asked another Canadian blogger if she was "Lainey Gossip."

OMG! HE TOTALLY WANTS TO MEET ME! WE COULD SO TOTALLY BE FRIENDS! There's still a possibility that Summit will come back to Vancouver to shoot the fourth film. Perhaps then, I'll get my chance.

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