

## Rogue Librarians, Bonus Episode

Author Bella Higgin

Welcome to a special episode of Rogue Librarians, a podcast in which three librarians discuss banned books. We are your hosts, Marian, Dorothy, Alanna, and we are the Rogue Librarians. We would love for you to participate in our discussion. Please visit [theroguelibrarians.com](http://theroguelibrarians.com) or follow us on Instagram or Facebook @roguelibrarianspod or on Twitter @RLibrarians.

Our episode this time is a little different than usual. Rather than discussing a book that has been banned, we had the opportunity to interview an author about her new book. Bella Higgin just released *Revelations*, her second book in the *Belle Morte* series. We are so excited to share our interview with Bella Higgin. Bella first fell in love with vampire fiction after reading an illustrated copy of *Dracula* as a kid. So it was inevitable that her dream career would involve writing about vampires. Her works on Wattpad have amassed more than 13 million reads, including her publishing debut, *The Belle Morte* series. A collector of swords, books, and TV memorabilia, she hopes to one day have enough money to build a Tardis in her garden. Bella currently lives and writes full time in a small English town not far from the sea. And we had a wonderful time talking with Bella today. She was just so kind and thoughtful and it was really interesting. What did the two of you think?

I just love talking to authors so much. Um, and about vampire books. I mean, what's not to love? It was fantastic.

It was great for me too because it reminded me how much I do enjoy vampire books. Um because like everyone else, um I got drawn up into the whole, you know, um the whole *Twilight* series and, and, you know, that kind of brought a whole different um feel to vampire books. But, but loving many other vampire books I've read and, and starting now to watch uh *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, I've just, I've been having so much fun and, and I'm, I had the unique opportunity actually many years ago to visit um Bram's Castle in Romania, which um was kind of cool, especially now knowing Bella's perspective on *Dracula*. So, yeah, it, it was really special. Um One thing I, I do want to mention is how interesting it was to talk to Bella about her perspective on book banning in the UK. Um because it's, it's so different. She, she doesn't have to worry about what she writes, she just writes and publishes and not a conversation. It's not a

conversation, which is great. It, it really is great. I mean, just to have that freedom of creativity and knowing your audience and putting out your creative work and not having to, to have any of that. Um, just fear in the back of your head that it's gonna ruin your career. Or peg you as someone that, whose books will not appear in libraries as a result. I, I think that was just a really nice perspective to hear.

Yeah, she talked a little bit, she talked a little bit about uh not letting other people's opinions influence your creative process, which I think is uh wise words.

And I, I loved learning more about her writing process and some of the details in the books too because I'm always curious how an author decides how to do things. And then when you get to know some of the story, it, it just deepens my appreciation for the books. It was, it was really fun to read her books and um and we all especially enjoyed *Revelations*. So it was really fun to talk to her about them.

It really was. And um I, I do hope that some of our listeners will, will pick up her books and explore them themselves. We'd love to get your feedback on them. Definitely.

So without further ado, here's our interview with Bella Higgin. Bella, thank you so much for joining us on Rogue Librarians.

Thank you for having me.

Oh, it's such a pleasure, and congratulations on releasing *Revelations*.

Thank you.

It's very exciting. And we're really looking forward to talking to you about it as well as *Belle Morte*. We wanted to ask you a few questions about your background before we dive into discussing your books, though. So I'm going to turn it over to Marian.

Yes. Hi, Bella. Hi. What, um, would you say was one of the most influential books that you personally read when you were growing up? And why, and why was it influential?

In terms of my writing career, it is definitely *Dracula*. I mean, there are many, many childhood books that, you know, I was kind of addicted to growing up. I had all the Narnia books that I read so many times, they quite literally fell apart. But it was *Dracula* that really, you know, made me think. Wow, vampires. Yes, please. Wonderful. Very formative childhood book.

Yeah. Well, and then, um, so from, was it from your reading experience as a child or, or something else in your life? Um What led you to become a writer?

It was, yeah, reading, I mean, I, I was reading from a really early age and, and I mean, books are just magic, aren't they live in the real world when you can, you know, go away in a book and you know, you people tell me, where are you going on your holidays this year? And I'm like Middle Earth, where are you going? Right. Um What could be better? Honestly, I kind of, you know, that that was the sort of magic that shaped my life and I just thought, well, I want to create magic.

Yeah. Well, definitely. And, I mean, did, did you have a chance to travel much as a child growing up or? Were you more like you kind of stayed in one place and, and books opened up your world or, or was it sort of a combination?

Uh, I know, I definitely didn't have the money to travel. It was a very long time. I don't think I went on an official holiday until I was 22. Oh, wow. So, yeah, definitely relied on books.

Yeah, I mean, I, and that's, that's the story, I think for a lot of people and I think that that's really compelling. So thank you for sharing that. Um So would you mind giving us in your own words um uh give our listeners an introduction to *Belle Morte* and *Revelations*. Yeah. So *Belle Morte* is it imagines a world in which vampires have revealed themselves to the general public. And 10 years later, they've become, you know, the absolute ultimate celebrity and they live in luxurious mansions and donors live with them to provide them blood. And our heroine isn't, she's not really into this whole sort of vampire celeb scene, but her sister is, and her sister becomes a donor for a very famous vampire house and disappears inside that house. So she becomes a donor herself to find out what's happened and along the way finds that, you know, maybe vampires can be quite sexy after all.

That's awesome. And, and what about *Revelations*? So *Revelations* I can't say too much because of how the first book ends. But that is going to deal very much with what she has discovered about the darker side of the vampire celebrity and the power struggles behind the scenes and you sort of a war that may be starting to brew.

Right. Well, that's great. Well, we are so excited to discuss the books in more detail. Uh But before we do, we just kind of wanted to touch on a little bit about banned books because, uh you may know that's what our podcast is about. We read and discuss banned books. Um, in the U.S., we've had, you know, record numbers of book challenges in the past couple of years. Uh And I was curious, is something, is there a similar trend in the UK?

Uh If there is, I'm certainly not aware of it. I, I don't think that's really a thing over here, to be honest.

Oh, that's fantastic. It's quite harrowing on this side. Um We, we've got a lot of uh right-wing people making a whole lot of noise and trying to ban just incredible numbers of books and it's, it's kind of a scary situation, uh which is what kind of, what prompted us to start the podcast in the first place. Yeah, for sure. Um, so I'm guessing then, uh, I mean, my next question was whether book banning attempts came up in your publishing process. Did you think about what, you know, whether readers would be upset about something that you had written, uh, in, in the content or just didn't even cross your mind?

I'll be really honest. It never even crossed my mind the point where, where that would have occurred to me at all.

And that's fantastic. Glad to know that that creative process is not being stifled.

Yes. And in the U.S., we're aware of um *Twilight* having been banned at certain points because of its content. Um I'm not aware of any other vampire books that have been banned. But um that is one, especially after it came out for a few years where there were a bunch of challenges. Yeah. Yeah. But it hasn't, we haven't heard about *Twilight* as much recently. So how did you decide to write about vampires for these books? You mentioned being influenced by *Dracula*? But um why did you decide to write about it this time? And why do you think portrayals of vampires continue to fascinate people?

I decided to write about them because they are for me, you know, sort of the, the fictional monster from my childhood. I love all of the, you know, all of them: ghosts, zombies, fairies, everything. But vampires were like the original for me. So no matter what happens, I always come back to them. Um, and I just, I wanted to write a young adult vampire book that had honestly a bit more biting in it because I'd read a lot. But I was like, this is great. But where are the teeth? So I just, yeah, I really wanted there to be a lot more focus on some things that's really interesting.

Well, I loved *Dracula* too when I read it. Um, but I haven't read as much, uh, recent vampire fiction so it was really great to read your books. Um, in what ways would you say your novels were influenced by *Dracula*? Besides the fact that there's vampires and, um, what were some things that you decided to do differently?

I don't think they sort of directly influence or were influenced by *Dracula* except for, you know, this, the kind of *Dracula* idea of, of elegant, sort of mysterious supernatural creatures who can seduce you but could just as easily kill you. I've, I've always really quite liked that. Yeah. Gonna say they are the sexiest villains. Yeah, they can be pretty funny because originally they, they weren't at all. They, they were not, yeah, they were not, was not sexy.

No, but I would say that the female vampires in those, in that book, um, were sexy but like the ones who tried to, um, get Jonathan when he's in the castle and also, uh, Lucy, once she's a vampire, you know, they, they are definitely, um, voluptuous and, uh, you know, trying to seduce the, the men and children.

But if you go way back, like before, before *Dracula*, the proper, like, myths and legends, they vampires were not, you know, there was nothing sexy about them. *Dracula* certainly moralized. It wasn't, it wasn't actually original. There is an earlier one, um, which never seems to get the credit it deserves, which was about Lord Ruthven, which that was sort of the original, you know, hey, vampires can be sexy and then *Dracula* came along and kind of solidified it.

Interesting. Yeah. Well, speaking of vampires and vampire lore, uh when you write your own vampire book and I definitely have noticed some interesting choices that you've made with the, you know, the traditional vampire lore, you get to choose, you know, what you want to discard

and what you want to keep. So for instance, your vampires can go out in daylight if they're old enough, they've been around a longer time. Uh And you've got healing properties in their saliva. That's another, for instance, um, what lore from your books did you particularly enjoy? Including like, did you come up with something that is entirely yours? Was everything researched?

Yeah. But I think have in the past, not for this book, but for vampire books that I wrote in the past of practice ones, I did absolutely massive amounts of research I really was interested in. I said real Vampire lore. What they used to be before they kind of got the Hollywood treatment. Um, and basically the more you learn about it, the more you kind of think. Ok, I get why I get why we're not making films about these vampires because they're not as interesting. They're not as compelling. Um, I mean, you know, there's one of my favorite ones is you can become a vampire if a cat steps across your corpse. And you're like, well, that's kind of cute. I guess it's kind of, I don't know, it's not very, it's neither sexy nor villainous. So I get like things like that kind of just got swept aside. I mean, everything that I've done probably has been done before, to be honest, everything has been done before. Um, but yeah, I, I just, I wanted to make sure that, you know, these vampires have strengths and weaknesses, particularly younger vampires because, you know, it's no good if they're completely, completely invincible.

Well, what about the versions have, I'm sorry, some versions have young vampires being stronger, I think *Twilight* does that. So I thought that was an interesting choice.

Yeah. And I was curious about the, the silver, the fact that they can't do anything about silver. Um, where did you come up with that?

Silver is again, this is just such an old legend. I mean, obviously it's most famous for [?], but it is just generally known as being, you know, a pure metal that effectively used to repel evil and where vampires used to be seen as evil, it, it all kind of seems to come from that as far as I can and tell it. It's, it's just one that I've always quite liked the idea of, of the fact that, you know, silver isn't that hard to get a hold of, is it, you know, loads of people just have silver jewelry lying around that you think? Hey, this could be a weapon. It just, yeah.

Yeah, that's so interesting.

Well, I know, I think *True Blood* definitely played on that. Yes. See that. I said it's all been done before. I mean, in *Buffy*, um, silver, I think it's more that it's a crucifix, I think because it was a crucifix.

Yeah, but it's a long time since I've seen that episode.

Um, I'm a big *Buffy* fan. So, uh, ok, so I was, I particularly loved this idea of the vampires as living history, uh, you know, resources. Um How great would that be? Right? If we have people who lived through the history to tell us more about what was really like because God knows we do a terrible job of it at least in this country. Um, lately. Uh So if you could talk to a vampire who'd been living for hundreds of years, uh, what period would you be most interested in learning about?

How would you ever choose? I mean, I don't see how you could ever pick one particular period. There's so much that you like that we don't know or that we can know more about.

Well, and for that matter, geography too, like, we, we tend to think of history as it exists in our particular culture. Right? But what, what it was like 300 years ago, you know, with Native Americans versus, you know, eastern Europe versus, uh, oh, you know what I would want, I would want a vampire who had been around with Stonehenge was made so we could learn more about that. Yeah, that would, there were all these [?], you know, I be a vampire would know. Definitely you'd want to speak to, you know, have, you know, a vampire gladiator ever was there? Who, you know, as you said, Stonehenge or even further back, like how, you know, whether or not they'd want to share them. That's a good question too. Well, that makes it interesting writing, right?

I especially liked your details about the French Revolution and uh the Great War. I thought it was really interesting to hear uh Edmond's perspectives on that, that and just to the idea that the vampires had fought alongside, you know, they, they're not so other in that sense because they, they were there fighting along with regular soldiers.

I really like that inclusion as well. I did too and I, I liked the fact that they were affected by it, you know, it wasn't just a thing that they lived through but it affected it and it was a part of a formative part of who they were. Yeah, there's, I think that that was another reason with this

book in particular was something else I've noticed with vampire books is you'll have a vampire who's been around for 2, 3, 4, 5, 600 years. But they never talk about it or you never know anything other than, oh, yeah. You know, I was there for that and you're like, but what happened, what happened to, um, and there always seemed to be a lack of the history. So I thought like that would be one of the first things I would want to know if I've met a vampire was like, tell me everything in a lot of vampire books ever seems to want to know. And I was thinking why, you know, that's, that's really true because, you know, you think back to, um, the *Twilight* books, for example, the, the history was more like about the elegance that, you know, the elegant periods that they lived through and the way they dressed and talked and, but not about how that history formed who they were. So, yeah, that's really fascinating.

What I actually have is, is on what pads where *Belle Morte* was very first written. I actually have an enormous collection of short stories which follows all of the main vampire characters. Some of them from children up to present day. So, it covers all of the, like some of the major historical events, all, all that kind of thing. So, so we can go back and read those. That's cool. And that's all free, that's all free to read. So, there's a lot more about the war. French Revolution, all of that. There's a lot of, yeah. Yeah. And you wrote us first or no, because when sort of on, on what, when the series started gaining popularity, I just kind of thought, well, there's so much I can do with this world and, you know, people seem to want to know, you know, that, as you said, Edmond's experiences in the war, I'm like, well, I could write about that. I can't put as much into the novel itself because of the word count restrictions. But why can't I just write some stories? Yeah.

Well, I, I know, I think Cassandra Clare has a couple of books out on her. Um, what's the name of that series? The, um, or the *Mortal Instruments*? Um, my first intro to that whole thing was, uh, was a book of short stories about one of the characters. So it was a, and it was, I really enjoyed it. I love those little compilations. They're fun. Yeah. You just get to see more of the characters. I really like them. Yeah, definitely. And, um, I think, you know, when you kind of fall in love with a series, you, you do like, you know, you're, you're waiting with bated breath for the next one to be written. But also you just want to know everything about your characters. I mean, that, that's kind of the world we live in where with social media, we, we would just want to know more about the, the people we admire. Yeah. And it gives you a chance to, to sort of explore the events that are mentioned in the book. You kind of think, oh, if you actually want to read that story in full, you now can Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

When you mentioned the um you know, the Great War and the, and the French Revolution, were there books or authors that you had read before or history class, whatever that inspired you to particularly choose those two historical events. I mm interesting question. Do you know, now that you mention it, there actually was a, I don't know if it was a full book or a short story and I no longer have any idea what it was called. It was in a big book of stories I had when I was a kid about a man in disguise who went to rescue people from the guillotine. And I've only just remembered it and I think that possibly subconsciously was something I was very interested in. Um But unfortunately, I have no idea what it was called or who wrote it, which is really sad.

Um And obviously, you know, World Wars were such a dark period in history that you kind of think that would have affected everyone and it's a time period that everyone is familiar with. Yeah. Yeah. And, you know, because, I mean, obviously we're American and America hasn't had these wars fought on, you know, our current land. But if you grow up in Europe, you know, all the great wars, there's, there's history and, and, you know, buildings still left in, in disrepair from many of these great wars. So, yeah, I, I was actually thinking um *A Tale of Two Cities*, you know, because that's always where I go with the French Revolution.

That's like the only book we've ever read here in America about.

I mean, I was a French major so I've read more but immediately, you know, I was introduced to Dickens when I was in um I guess 7th and 8th grade. So um middle school. But um anyway, but that's, that's what I, you know, struck me as I was reading it and of course, being a French major, I was like, you know, I can, I can speak the French. I know what he's saying.

Well, yeah, I need it because I struggled with that bit. My French is not great.

Well, and I, I love the way you made Renie, not know it, you know, so that it was like, what did you say? Um But yeah, um I do want to move this along so um, um, and this kind of leads into the next question. Anyway, Renie Um, the main character seems to be, you know, kind of the only one in your stories. She's not initially viewing the vampires as monstrous. She's not drawn in as a Vladdict.

Um, so she is viewing them as a monster, right, as opposed to everybody else.

Yeah, I said that wrong. Thank you for correcting me. But, um, so I'm, I'm just curious how did you decide to make most of the vampires be empathetic and more human like, and, and less of the monstrous characters that we've seen in the past.

Um I think for some of them, perhaps I didn't as much. I think there are definitely moments in the book where, you know, you're sort of looking at someone who's around for hundreds of years and is going to view the world differently, you know. Um is as a character, for example, is much more ruthless than Renie would be and has a much darker outlook on human nature. But as Edmond points out, it's because she's seen so much of it. So she is much more likely to distrust someone because, you know, she's lived for a very long time and she has lots of reasons not to trust people. And, and again, there are sort of other things in, in the sequel that I can't maybe go into too much except that maybe not all the vampires are entirely happy with the current hierarchy and how they fit in with the world at the moment. And maybe, maybe some of them would prefer to be a bit more monstrous or to be allowed to be a bit more monstrous rather than having to, you know, play the happy celebrity all the time.

Yeah. Although I think you could argue that, um, being monstrous is, does not, you know, that's, humans can be quite monstrous. So, if you've been around and seen it yourself, well, really, that's kind of the vampire's POV, right? That's why Ysanne doesn't trust people because people suck.

And I think the other thing, of course, that vampires have, which is something that is addressed more in the third book is that, you know, however evil a human can be, a vampire is capable of much more physical damage just with their bare hands. You know, you, if you, if a human, you know, loses their temper, they can throw a punch and, you know, break your jaw. If a vampire does it, they could, you know, splint your entire skull, obviously, very different. Um, so there's definitely an element of, they are capable of much more than the average human is. I mean, they could literally rip you, you know, limb from limb if they wanted to, which obviously a human can't. So there's definitely they will have to stay very much in control for sure, for sure. And, and yet I, well, and of course, they have hundreds of years to work on their personal skills, right? Their interpersonal skills.

But, um, but I, you know, but I also think that the human-like qualities that stand out for me are the ability to see another, another um another's perspective, I don't wanna say human or a vampire, but to just see another's perspective. Um And you see that many, many times throughout both of these books that one of the characters recognizes that another character has been through XYZ and that's why they respond the way that they do or that maybe we don't know what their life has been like before. And so we need to take that into consideration before we condemn.

Yeah. Yeah. Which, yeah, again, they've lived for a long time so they have just so much experience with, with having to see things from different perspectives. It's actually kind of a nice tie into, uh, to being able to understand people how they're behaving due to the trauma that they've experienced. These vampires have experienced a lot of trauma.

Yeah. Changes their behavior pretty much. No one gets out of the world unscathed in that area. Right.

Well, that leads nicely into our next question. Um, I was curious, your first two books are mostly told from Renie's perspective and first person point of view. But you also give us Edmond's perspective and third person point of view occasionally. So how did you decide to use those POVs and to give us both of their perspectives?

As soon as I started working on the book, I knew you had to see Edmond's perspective as well because you're looking at this entire, you know, reimagined vampire world and there's no point if you can only see it just from Renie's perspective, especially because, you know, she doesn't like vampires to start with and she's pretty against everything that they're doing. You need Edmond to, to balance that, to bring the other side of. Ok. But here is it from our point of view because it's not, you know, it's not as simple as, you know, vampires are pretty or vampires are evil or vampires are this or vampires are that there's always nuance everywhere and, and shades of gray, which I think is something that Renie has to learn, but she won't learn that without a sort of counterbalance.

Sure. And how did you decide to make his in third person rather than first person?

So that was a choice because Renie as a character is, she's much more open and she wears her heart on her sleeve. She kind of always, you know, it's quite emotional and first person definitely seemed like the right choice for her. Whereas Edmund certainly initially is a lot more guarded. He's a lot more careful about who he lets in. So it just seemed to me that would translate to third person because that's him, you know, literally keeping even the reader at bay to begin with. Like, you know, whoa, whoa, I'm done. Can't get too close yet.

Sure. Now that makes a lot of sense. And I think we get to see a lot more of his thoughts as we continue to go through the books. Yeah. Yeah. So, um, another thing I was interested in was your books, especially *Revelations*, have some major plot twists and most of them I did not see coming at all. So how did you decide what to hint at and what to surprise the audience with? How, how did you make those choices as you were writing in the very original versions of the books?

On Wattpad they, the first book ended a little bit differently in that you don't find out anything, you don't find out who's, you know, done this or who's done that. It just ends on a big question mark, which for me was an OK choice to do because I've had the second book ready to go. So we just didn't have to wait, you know, they did it like the next book starts tomorrow. But as soon as the, the series was acquired for publication, one of the very first things I thought was, I'm gonna have to change the ending because it's OK to leave questions unanswered, but you have to give readers something you can't be like, I'll see you in a year but any answers the call, you know...

Speaking of vampire books after I've, I think I've read *An Interview with a Vampire* and then I refused to read the book after because I was so mad about the way that list ended. I was pissed off.

Well, you know, that's what I thought. I just thought I can't, I can't leave readers with nothing. So we're going to have to take one of the reveals from book two and move it into book one. But then changed the whole beginning of book two and had to kind of cast doubt on is Renie actually, you know, people doubting her version of events, we know she's telling the truth if no one else believes her, I was trying everything all that had to be completely written from scratch because yeah, the thirteenth third of the book had to be scrapped.

Oh, wow, that's so interesting. And I, I loved the fact that there was no evidence for what she had witnessed. And so, and like you said, it's just what she said versus what someone else said. So, um the fact that she should have not, yes. You know, I thought that worked really well. Um Another question we had was about um how you write for a young adult audience and um especially in the second book. But in the first book too, you know, there's a lot of romance and um discussions of sex. So how do you decide how to portray those things with a young adult audience in mind? And, um, did you ever have to change how you wanted to do things because of writing for a slightly younger audience?

I haven't changed anything because I, when I started writing it, it was with a young adult audience. But because to me, vampires have always been, you know, this sort of, they're quite erotic, aren't they? Everything they do is there is a real edge of sex to it. So I thought even if it's a young adult book, I, I don't, you know, I'm not really interested in sort of blushing virgin vampires. To be honest, you know, you're talking again, people who've been around for hundreds of years, they, they're quite likely gonna, gonna know what they're doing. Um, so I think for me it was a case of I'll put in as much as I think is acceptable for that age range and I'm not gonna be too graphic because that then should make it for an older audience, but it's not for really young teens. Um, and if it was then I think it's up to the parents to read it and decide if they think that that's acceptable or not, it would probably depend on their kids reading level.

Yeah. No, I don't, I don't think there's anything in there but I would object to a younger teen reading if they were into vampire books. I mean, really the whole question is if they're into vampires, that's a certain level of maturity to begin with. Right.

You think so? But, I mean, I suppose there are sort of younger vampire books.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I guess it's, it's a little more, um, you know, you have more scenes in *Revelations* that I could see a parent being like, well, I'm going to wait for my child to be a little bit older for those scenes. But, um, when, when I was reading them I was like, wow, these were really, really well written and like, I can imagine these scenes really, really well. So, um I think as you said that it would be up to a parent to decide if their child needs a little more time for those.

You did a fabulous job being very, very sexy without being explicit. I just thinking that too. Yeah.

And I appreciate, you know, it's almost like the, the old, you know, well, not old but just different movies that, you know, you see just enough to know, you know, kind of what's going on and then there's the fade out of like, ok, now we're going to give you privacy. Yes. You know, and I, I thought that was really well done.

I want to jump into the idea of the donor system, which I think is kind of the hook, right. That kind of gets us interested in. Why am I going to pick up this vampire book? Oh, this is an interesting system. Um, but doing what we do and I, I work, I work with middle schoolers. Um I, I teach middle schoolers and when the woke uh era that we're in now and I consider myself pretty awake. I kind of, I kind of cringe to say the word now, but because the negative connotation. Yeah. But anyway, um I was just wondering if you'd have any pushback on the idea of uh the donor system as it might be a little bit like self harm or, you know, there's certainly issues around consent. Like, can you sign away your consent ahead of time? You know, like that they have to be able to give them blood at any time? Just a whole interesting can of worms I thought was, you know, would be fun to discuss.

Hm. Ok. So first of all, obviously, the main thing is you can't go into a house unless you're over 18. Uh which obviously in the UK is what we would consider, you know, you're 18 now going out to do whatever you want. Um. Mhm. So that immediately is obviously children or anyone under 18 cannot be in there at all. Um, but there'll be more on that in future books. Interesting, but obviously the contract is, is voluntary. No one you have to apply is, is the first thing and, you know, you don't have to go. It's not like anyone's forced in. Um, I think I, I hope at least it's made clear in the book that it is possible to become addicted to a vampire's bite. Just is it possible to become addicted to anything that gives you physical pleasure? Like, you know, people get addicted to all kinds of things and, and although it's not common, it can happen. But I, I hope, like I said, the book made it clear that if, if that was suspected to be happening, then that donor, their contract will be terminated. They will have to leave the house and once you leave the house, you cannot ever come back or go to any other house. So if they think you might be getting addicted, your supplies cut off, they're then done. You can't never be again. Um, because obviously it's important and they have to take care of, of donors for everyone's sake. Um Which would again cross into the fact that no, you can't refuse a vampire blood, but it is also stressed that they make sure that no one's taking too much. For example, they have to, to keep the health of the donors very much into consideration. And you are always given the choice of where you're bitten. For example, which Renie is asked, you know, several times you'd want to

be bitten from the neck. Would you be the wrist? Which you know, as, as you can see in the book does create a situation when a vampire bites her without asking and she's up on the hill, you can't do that. Yeah. Yeah. Um So, yeah, I think, I think the system as it is, there certainly takes that into consideration.

Cool. Um, yeah. No. And I, I realize that that's like, really digging in but we're, we're used to dealing with people who will, who will find it any, you know, little tiny, uh, problem and blow it way out of proportion. So, I, and, and, uh, just for the record too, I think it's ok to, you know, if you, if you're gonna write about self harm too, not that you did, but, you know, that's ok to do. Uh, but I was just curious whether there was any pushback.

I mean, people can, maybe people are saying it behind my back. I don't know, no one said it to me and...

I don't think there's much happening in the world behind one's back anymore. Everything seems to hit social media, but it's out there, you would know.

That's good.

Um, uh, we also have a few more questions about, yeah, now that we've enjoyed talking about the books about your writing process. Um How would you describe the experience of writing on Wattpad? Uh How did it affect your storytelling? It seems like you kind of came up on Wattpad. So maybe that is all, you know. Uh But no, I'll let you tell us.

Yeah. So I was actually writing for, I mean, I've, I've been writing for as, as long as I could physically write. Um, and I had already tried submitting books to agents for years and years and years before discovering Wattpad and I'd found Wattpad because I had a, a book that I knew wasn't gonna sell in a traditional market at that time period. I was like, if it had been five years ago. Yeah, maybe. But that trend is over. So my choices are either let it, you know, just sit in a drawer forever or, hey, what's this website? Let's post it here. Which, which kind of took off. Um, but I don't think it's affected my writing process much. I mean, I, I think all the things that I used to do, which is, you know, I loved cliffhangers anyway, which works really well for what format, but I already loved them so well. That's how, that's how they say to. Right. Right. Every chapter you should be like, you can't not turn a page.

Yeah. And, Bella, because we're not as familiar with Wattpad. Is it a, a place where you post chapter by chapter or how does it work?

Yes. So you upload a chapter of time and I mean, you can upload, you know, multiple chapters a day if you wanted to, I would typically do say one or two a week. So my, I mean, I'm not writing anything on that just at the moment, but normally for me, it would be Tuesday and Friday, you get a new chapter and people they can read it, they can vote for it or they can comment. So you have what we call in line comments. And if you see a particular line of dialogue, you're like, oh my God, I love this. You can literally say that but a comment on the book on that exact line of dialogue saying that so I can then interact with the readers, which obviously is super fun and you can't do that in.

Yeah. Yeah. Did, did they ever influence how you were telling the story or did you ever change your mind about what you wanted to do or was it just more exciting to have people read as you were going along?

I was, I was almost influenced with a different book because there are a couple of characters in that book. I'm not, I don't want to say which book that readers had got very attached to and, and I was kind of watching each chapter and you're like, oh, it's gonna be awkward when I kill them both off. So I did think like, oh I killed one and it caused a lot of comments of, you know, oh my God, how could you do this? Maybe I should not kill the other one. But I just don't know like this is the book you want to write. This is what you feel is best. You're gonna have to stick to the gut and don't be, don't be influenced because you know, if if you let yourself be influenced by what, you know, these readers want, then you're kind of opening yourself up to you and you can't please everybody. And so, you know, the perfect ending for this group of people might be the worst ending for that group of people and so on. And you think, well, you know, just write what you want to write and people will either like it or they won't.

And that, that speaks to the creative process as a whole, whether you're a songwriter or an artist of, you know, um a visual artist, whatever you, you have to tell your story or you lose the joy of doing what you're doing.

Yeah. And I think you could cripple yourself thinking, oh, but what if they don't like this or what if they don't like this or what if someone doesn't like that? And you think, oh, you'll never write anything then that's so true. Yeah. But um how did you respond? Like, how do you develop that hard shell of responding to the negative comments? Because surely, I mean, you never get all, like you said, you can't please everyone and I think you just have to remember that not everyone is going to like your book. You know, the best books in the world are gonna have still huge number of people who hate every single word. You just, I mean, ideally you would hope that people don't come and say it to your face because that's unnecessary. Sometimes they still do, you know, you'll, you'll get tagged in a review and you really like, why did you tag me? Um, I think as well. I used to be part of sort of online critique groups for books, like a really, really, really long time ago and those people will not pull their punches. So you, you kind of either toughen up and accept that this is part and parcel of being a writer or you're gonna, you know, fold like a cheap umbrella and you're gonna have to choose another career basically.

Right. Right. Yeah, that makes sense. Um I, I wanted to ask one other follow-up question on that, which is you mentioned something earlier in our interview about um word count. Is there a, a word limit on Wattpad for each upload that you do?

Um I'm gonna be really honest. I'm not sure what it is at the moment. It used to be chapter limits and I believe it was 200 chapters was maximum, but I know there have been changes made but because they haven't affected me yet because none of my books have ever been quite that long. Um I'm honestly not 100% sure right now, what the format is, there are people who have been given allowances. I, I think I have met someone who had more than 200 chapters and how she managed that. I don't know. But yeah, it is. I suppose that's in one way. That's another good thing about it is that you're not, you know, restricted by a word count. On the other hand, the word count can be really good for, like reining you in a bit and, you know. Yeah, that's true. I was, I was thinking, yeah, the editing and, and making sure what you have is essential and beneficial to the story and not just, um, which is definitely something that I had to do with, with the published versions are much shorter than the original versions and yet they are better book for it.

Yeah, I'm sure, I'm sure. Um So moving on to the next question in your, when you come up with a story idea, would you say your writing style is more of a plotter who plots out everything with

like, you know, like, you know, everything that's gonna happen sort of in your head before you start or are you more of a fly by the seat of your pants kind of a writer?

I am a plotter to the point of being obsessive and other authors that I talk to recoil in horror.

Um So that must be helpful if you're under a deadline though, that you already know where it's gonna go.

Absolutely. Um So I will draw up a plan of everything that's going to happen in the book. You know, every, every scene, every important character, it will be literally a step by step guide to everything that happens and plan could be, you know, it could be upwards of 30 pages long. Uh And yeah, most authors I've ever spoken to are absolutely horrified by this because they feel that that completely stifles all creativity. Whereas I can't, I've tried other methods and I was like, this is the only way that works for me.

Well, it opens up creativity in different ways, I think, I mean, everybody's brain works differently. But, um you know, if, if you need the structure, then you can, you know, have maybe more fun with the nuance while you're writing it instead of worrying about what's going to happen next. So I, I think it really can go both ways and it has a lot of benefits to me because as you said, you're never gonna really get stuck in the same way of like, oh, what happens now? Because you can think, I know what happens now. Well, whereas, you know, the, the other end of that, of course is that if some of us myself included, if, if I had to know where it was all going, that that would, I would never start because I'd never, I don't sit down and make plans because I don't plan my weekly grocery list even. So that's just me.

But I mean, one way that it really, really benefits me is a book that I was writing years and years and years ago and I did the plan and I had, you know, all the characters planned out. But as I was writing this plan, I had this one character that I was like, he doesn't actually have anything to do or anywhere to go. I don't really, now know, like, what I had planned for him doesn't really fit into the framework of the book. So he just got cut out and that worked much better to do it before I'd written the book rather than having to then go back to the whole book and remove any mention of him and stitch up all the bits where he had been. I just love it.

You know, I, I remember hearing uh Holly Black talk about that. One of her series is she's a, more of a pantsers. Um, but she wrote a series that was, uh a con, you know, it took the whole grifters and that sort of thing happening. So she had to plan it out because, you know, you can't set that kind of thing up if you don't know where it is. And, uh she said it was interesting to, you know, to do it that way and it was a whole different process.

Well, I think it can be beneficial if you're writing a series as well because, you know, by book three you might think, oh, actually this isn't working. I need to change something in book one. Obviously, if you've already written book one, you, you're like Oh, well, ok. So you could come up a major, you know, sort of 3, 4, 5 book plan. Yeah. Can be, it can be beneficial. But most authors I know are pantsers.

Yeah. And, and that's interesting too because I've, I've heard really good arguments on both sides of that and, you know, when you say that the, the pantsers are saying that if you're a plotter that stifles creativity, but, I mean, you can still be a plotter and get to a point in your plot where you realize this isn't working. I've tried to write this and it isn't working and you still have the freedom to change things around that will still fit in with your overall plan. So I, I can see that too.

Yeah, I think it's just for most authors, the excitement is not knowing where you're going next or the journey for them. Whereas for me, I'm like, I don't want to know where I'm going next. I get very easily lost. Plus uh you know, hello. Uh creating a whole plot. That's creativity. So, yeah, I, I mean, for me it's always, there isn't, there is no one way to write a book. There is literally just the way that works best for each individual author. The fact and each individual book for that matter and the fact that most authors seem to prefer pantsing is OK. Go for it. I tried it, it didn't work. Yeah, I guess that's part of the, the whole learning process.

Um So when, when you decided to write *Belle Morte*, did you know that it was gonna be a series or were you originally thinking that it was a standalone? I had thought that I wanted it to be at least two, but the very original plan for it was not quite how it is now. So the very original idea was a bit more of a horror and I kind of realized really quickly. Well, you can't do as much in my opinion with that. And if, if in that version, all the vampires are, you know, much more monstrous. I don't particularly want to write that. Like there's not as much scope for romance. I have read authors who have made that kind of romance work. I don't think I could pull it off. I

wanted it to be much more romantic. So I was like, right, we're gonna have to change the horror bit. It's gonna have to be maybe more like an urban fantasy, um, time and also doing that, opened up much more of a scope of what, you know, this world could be and where it, where it can go. And I think it was probably by the time I was planning book two, I was like, yeah, I can do a lot more, you know, go to book four and, and then, I mean, honestly, if, you know, if the book sells, well, if the whole series does. Well, I've got more books I can write. There is definitely more that I have planned for the world and if the series doesn't sell well, I'll probably write them anyway.

Well, I mean, right. And I get, I mean, because just in our discussion, you know, I've had so many thoughts pop into my head of, of where different directions that it could go. And I'm, I'm sure you've already thought of everything that it just popped into my head. So, um but yes, there's a lot of possibility out there. Um I'm, I'm curious though, um as you were writing *Belle Morte* and, and then continuing on, like, you know, you said, you know, you, you came up with the idea for the second book and realized it could be a series. So, um you know, can you describe kind of the learning process uh that, that transpired between writing and publishing your first novel, *Belle Morte*, and then writing and publishing um *Revelations*? And as you said, knowing that there are more books to go and did you get constructive advice that you were able to implement, um that has really helped your writing to continue to evolve?

Yeah. And just to interject, I, I was curious too because I was way more invested in *Revelations* than I was in *Belle Morte*. So I was just curious if there was, or maybe it's just a matter of momentum, you know, because once you've created the world. Ah, but anyway, I'll let you answer.

Um, so again with this series, because it was written originally and posted on Wattpad, I mean, uh, I trying to think it's probably six or seven years ago that I think it was originally posted. So I don't remember the exact thought process that made me realize, you know, there's more to this world as much as thinking, hey, there are all these other characters that I want to explore more of them, more of, you know, their experiences and the events of revelations. You know, I want to explore how that's going to impact everything, say in the third book, which is going to, I think in many ways, it's going to be a very different book to the first two. So hopefully that gamble pays off.

Yeah. Uh I've definitely, by the way, read those chapters and I'm looking forward to that. I did as well. I was, I was a little disappointed, I'm not disappointed with the book but, but sad when *Revelations* ended because I, I was ready for it to keep going. Um And so I appreciated that you put those, put those little teaser chapters in there of the start of, of the next story. And um and I'm if I'm allowed to, I, I just am I allowed to mention a character's name? I, I guess so. From the third. Well, I just am fascinated to know if you're planning to do anything, um, from Nicky's point of view in the future. Oh, yeah, she was great.

If I can, then definitely in the future I have all I can say at this point is if I'm allowed to, I have big plans. Obviously, I have a whole folder here of great.

Yeah. I am so looking forward to Nicky's story.

Well, unfortunately, uh, it, there's no guarantee that, you know, obviously the publisher will want to continue with the series. I, I can hope, but like I said, one way or another, I'm going to still write the books. Um, and if, if nobody actually wants to publish them, then they'll go on what they'll get written one day, but it will be after the main series finishes. But I definitely have lots of exciting ideas that I'm really looking forward to.

Do you, do you have a contract for a certain number of books at this point or like, what can we expect in terms of published? Just four? Ok. Uh, that's great.

And Bella, is there anything else that you'd like to tell us about your books as we wrap things up? Oh, I don't know, other than go read them.

That's great. And I assume people can find them in bookstores and online in lots of places.

Yeah. Having some shipping issues with the UK at the moment, which I'm not sure what's going on there, but everything should be fine in the U.S. That's great. Well, we definitely hope that you get lots more people to read them soon.

Do you have, do you, do you mind if I ask, do you have a sense of where most of your readers are coming from or are you getting more readers from the US or more readers from the UK? And Europe?

I think the majority are going to be North American because it's the biggest market. Um Obviously, it's where my publisher is, is based. So their marketing efforts, you know, sort of contest giveaways, all of that has been focused on North America. So any UK giveaways has been done by me, not, not my publisher. And because the market here is, it is just smaller because, you know, we're so tiny.

Are you doing book tours?

Uh The, I don't think there's anything planned at the moment. I did go out to LA in November, well, last November to do a book signing. Um I don't know if there's gonna be anything like that this year. I think I'll just have to wait and see what my publicist comes up with. Hopefully something exciting as well.

We would certainly love to meet you in person at some point if that is in the future plan.

So, um, yeah, well, greatly and Bella, could you please tell our listeners where they can find you online?

You can find me either on Wattpad, which is just Bella Higgin, or I'm also Bella Higgin on Instagram.

Awesome, Bella. Thank you so much for talking with us today. I had a really good time. This was really fun. Thank you so much and we really enjoyed reading your books. Yeah, that's what I like to hear. Thank you, Bella. Thank you.

We really enjoyed talking with Bella. It was such a pleasure to speak with her. You can find Bella's contact information in our show notes.

And I just want to add that it was just a delight to hear Bella speak. She uh obviously being British has just obviously a different accent, but it was just very charming to hear her speak and it was really charming to hear her say the names of the characters with in her voice. Um especially having read, you know, because we all read in our own heads and um hear our own voices. So that was really, that was really a lot of fun.

Yes. And uh as a Patreon perk, if you want to hear us discuss our favorite vampire books, you tune in for that.

Yeah, absolutely. Just join us at Patreon.

Yes, please join us and also please join us next time for a discussion of *Looking for Alaska* by John Green. If you would like to leave us a question or comment, please visit [theroguelibrarians.com](http://theroguelibrarians.com) or follow us on Instagram or Facebook @roguelibrarianspod or on Twitter @RLibrarians. If you're enjoying this podcast, please subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you find your podcasts, and please leave us a rating and review. Your ratings and reviews help other people to find our podcast. If you would like to help support our podcast, please join us at Patreon at [patreon.com/roguelibrarians](https://patreon.com/roguelibrarians). One of the perks is that as, uh, Dorothy mentioned, you can listen to our discussions of other books that we love. Another way that you can support our podcast as well as indie bookstores across the country is by purchasing a book from our affiliate shop at [bookshop.org/shop/roguelibrarians](http://bookshop.org/shop/roguelibrarians). You can find lists of the books that we have discussed and others on our site. And finally thank you to Chris, our music creator for the brilliant intro music, Heather for running our Twitter page, and Lizzie for doing our fabulous audio editing. We couldn't have done this podcast without any of them and most especially, readers, thank you for listening to us because books are meant to be read. Bye!