

House of Hunger

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Holly: This is Bimbo Book Club with Holly.

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Harley: And Harley. Welcome fellow book nerds back to another episode of Bimbo Book Club.

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Holly: This week we are doing *House of Hunger* by Alexis Henderson.

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Harley: Basic premise of the book is that Marion, our main character, answers a job ad to become a blood mage to the strange lords of the North, a position where you lead a life of luxury in exchange for just a little bit of your blood.

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Holly: Which, on the surface, sounds like a pretty good deal to me.

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Harley: Yeah, basically you're signing up to be a vampire's property for a little bit. And then you get to live a life of luxury for the rest of your life. But given this is a somewhat gothic novel, things don't go to plan.

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Holly: No, they do not.

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Harley: I would say, overall, I enjoyed this book. But I did have some major issues with it. How did you feel about it, Holly?

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Holly: Yeah, I enjoyed it. I did have some issues. I think different issues to what you had.

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Harley: So not the neon sign over one of the main characters' head that's like, 'Hi, I'm the bad guy. Want to know how you know? Because I'm literally named after the person described in history as the female Dracula.'

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Holly: I mean, I didn't really have a problem with that.

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Harley: You didn't spend the last two thirds of the book, being like, *so when are we discovering her torture chamber in the basement?*

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Holly: Like, we knew it was coming.

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Harley: But even when they were trying to sell her is like maybe there was a bigger, darker secret. And she was not part of it was like, *Yeah, okay*. But you've literally named her after the female Dracula in history, like the Blood Countess herself. So, there is a historical figure that shares a name with the main noble in the book.

02:01

Holly: Yeah. So, Alexis Henderson has definitely drawn a lot of inspiration from the story of Elizabeth Báthory. Do you want to tell them what the name of the big bad character?

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Harley: Lisavet Bathory.

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Holly: Does she have a surname?

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Harley: I mean, I'll double check.

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Holly: I thought it was just of the House of Hunger, but it probably was. Anyway, while you're looking that up, I'm going to talk to you guys a little bit about Elizabeth Bathory.

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Harley: So, we're talking right now about the *real* historical figure, to be clear.

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Holly: So, she's described as the most vicious female serial killer in all of recorded history. So, it's a pretty big call. She was born in 1560. And she was endowed with looks, wealth, an excellent education, and a pretty bloody stellar social position to start with. Her family ruled

Transylvania as an independent kind of nation within the Kingdom of Hungary. When she was like 11, or 12, Elizabeth was betrothed to a noble guy of another aristocratic, Hungarian family. But a year or two later, she gave birth to a baby by a lower-order dude. So, her betrothed was reported to have had this guy castrated and then like torn to pieces by dogs, and rightly so. Because remember, at this point, Elizabeth is like 13.

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Harley: Although to be fair, he's not doing it because he's like, 'How dare you? She's a child.' He's doing it because he's like, 'How dare you? That's my property.'

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Holly: Yeah. So, right results, wrong motivation. A little bit bloodthirsty. So, the child who was a daughter was quietly hidden from view until they got married in 1575. When little Lizzie was all 14 years old. Because Elizabeth socially outranks her husband, she kept her surname, and he took her surname, rightly so. And the couple lived in his family castle in Hungary, and what is now also considered Slovakia. But he was a soldier, and he was often away. Elizabeth ran the estate alongside taking various lovers. She then bore her husband four children. He kicked the bucket in 1604 when she was 43, just as word was starting to spread about her sadistic activities. Supposedly, and here is where we start to see where Alexis Henderson has drawn a lot of her inspiration. It was said that our mate Lizzie enjoyed torturing and killing young girls. Elizabeth believed that drinking the blood of her of these young girls would preserve her youth and her looks, which is basically the premise of House of Hunger. Spoiler alert. At first, these young girls were servants at her castles and daughters of the local peasants, but later they included girls sent to her by local families to learn good manners. Witnesses told of Elizabeth stabbing her victims as well as biting their breasts, hands, faces, and arms, cutting them with scissors, sticking them with needles or burning them with red hot irons, coins, or keys. Some were beaten to death, and some were stabbed. RIP Cecilia. The idea that Elizabeth used to bathe in the blood seems to have been added later on, but honestly, who knows?

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Harley: Yeah, so there's theories that the extent of her being a menacing character and things like that was actually from male clergymen and things like that trying to minimize female power, take control back from a woman who is essentially ruling a land unchecked by her husband because he kicked the bucket. So that's not to say that she was like a super nice person who just got a bad deal.

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Holly: And that's it, she wasn't actually persecuted, put on trial, because of her standing. So, they were just like, 'Hmm, these look like accomplices. Let's kill them.' And they chucked her up in a tower and like, boarded her in and she lived there for a couple years till she died.

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Harley: Whoever's thinking of sticking me in a tower, probably would drive me mental, especially in time before you've got like books and internet and shit.

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Holly: Oh, yeah. Surprised she lasted four years, I wouldn't have.

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Harley: Yeah, so there's Lisavet Bathory, I was right. It took me a lot of pages to find it. But I was right. Countess of the House of Hunger.

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Holly: So, is this a deliberate name change? Or did she just maybe misspell the name?

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Harley: Well, it wouldn't surprise me if Elizabeth Bathory would be an anglicization of the name, that's not a Hungarian name. So maybe she's just dug further into the history. I've got to say I only really know about Elizabeth Bathory, the real one, through my tendency to Wikipedia freefall and like, just get curious about random shit, and end up deep diving on stupid topics. Not necessarily stupid topics, but like, largely irrelevant to my life. So, even just knowing that kind of generally about the historical figure, it really took a lot of the suspense out of the book for me, because it was such an obvious reference to an existing person who's got like, a rather significant reputation.

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Holly: Yeah, which also kind of, it's understandable why people are referring to this book as historical fiction, which it is. A bit of a stretch, but that's the fiction bit, right?

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Harley: Loose on the history, heavy on the fiction, I would call it a gothic novel, more than I would call it historical fiction. I think that it's certainly inspired by historical events, or like a fantastical version of historical events. And I did very much get the energy of like Eastern Europe in the way that she described, even the slums where Marion started and then the cold North with its brutal warlords and running the kingdom and who's got good blood and who's got bad blood and all that stuff.

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Holly: Yeah, she did a really good job of creating that ambiance.

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Harley: Yeah, it felt like almost a steampunk-y version of Eastern Europe. Yeah, it makes sense. Like, you know how people do that alternative London where everything went steam-powered instead of industrial?

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Holly: That's exactly I get the same impression.

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Harley: Yeah, that was the vibe I got is like an Eastern European version of steampunk London. So, I did really love that about the book. And this is what I mean, where it's like, I liked the book. I just feel like if you changed, even if you wrote the book with the countess being Lisavet Bathory, or even if it was just Lizavet and she changed the last name, or things like that, it was just such a close thing that I was like, *well, obviously she's going to be this like seems lovely, but ultimately villainous lady whose torturing these girls*. When Marion discovers the secret tunnels and the torture chamber and all of that kind of stuff. It's supposed to be a big reveal. And if anything, my reaction was like, *Well, fucking finally*.

08:47

Holly: Yeah. I mean, so I was kind of waiting for Lisavet to be actual vampire. Because they put breadcrumbs. There were lots of breadcrumbs about that, how she would leave the bed before dawn was never around during the day. And also calling the House of Hunger, House of Mirrors, House of Fog. Was there what a House of Wooden Stakes, a House of Garlic? I mean, there wasn't, but it was they were all very, very bread crumbing in the houses.

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Harley: I do think though, there is the element of the like she like sucks for youth out of Cecilia. And they do talk about like, the reason why they're getting sick is because she's sucking the vitality out of them. So, I do think she's supposed to be a vampire. They're just not like, *Oh, look, here's her grave dirt and her coffin*.

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Holly: Yeah, see, I was waiting for like a from dusk till dawn kind of here is the vampires reveal. And it just it didn't happen.

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Harley: I feel like that's maybe somewhere where if you're determined to keep the name, then I think much, much earlier, she needs to discover the secret tunnels and the torture chamber and all that kind of stuff. And rather than immediately being like, 'Oh, she's the bad guy. Let's go get out. Let me collect my fellow blood maids and make a run for it.' You need to have that thing of being like, well, who's the actual bad guy here? Is it her? Is it maybe the house mother?

Is maybe her father secretly still alive in the catacombs? And he's forcing her to do this. So, the premise basically, of the book is that the blood houses all use blood to keep themselves young and vital, and all that stuff, but particularly for the House of Hunger, which is the one that Lisavet rules. There's some kind of disease within the house a hunger that can never be satiated. So, they're constantly like feeding on people. Essentially, at one point, it's like, 'I would drain you dry if I didn't stop myself, because I am starving constantly, and I could drain you dry and still be hungry.' Which then also makes it weirder that she's only got four to five blood maids at any given time. Because if you've got an insatiable hunger, wouldn't you take every blood maid you could find?

11:04

Holly: But is that because, like, we obviously know, that they don't actually get released at the end of their servitude, which is meant to be between like three and seven years. They're meant to be released with this like pension essentially, but none of her previous blood maids have. And we find out later that Thiago, who is the blood taster who brings her these blood maids, kind of understands, he knows that they don't leave. So, if they're in cahoots, and like they know what's going on, they still need to be careful that they're not just bringing hundreds and hundreds of blood maids.

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Harley: But there's like, a pretty vast number between five and hundreds.

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Holly: Yeah, true. But then at the end, so they brought in a few new blood maids towards right at the end of the book. And it just seemed like they were being ravaged in a way that they were not going to make it through the night.

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Harley: Yeah. And also too, the timeline of the turnover isn't really clear, because it seems like they've been there for a couple of years, the girls that are already there, or at least a year. And surely, it's like no more than six months if she really is keeping it to five or so. And that kind of turnover.

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Holly: She found the documentation of the previous blood maids, they never really overlapped. So, Celia was considered for the majority of the first part of the book, at least, the first blood maid.

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Harley: So, being a blood maid is somewhere between being in a vampire's enthrall and being a mistress to a king, or a queen, in this case. So, the idea of the ranking is very much that

nobility thing, but it's also that harem kind of thing. Yeah, so she's like the first mistress, only instead of being a mistress. She's a blood maid. But she's also a mistress, but like, first and foremost, she's there to give blood.

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Holly: So, she doesn't ever cross paths with anyone before her, only the current ones. And then I don't believe that any of the other current ones have also crossed paths with any of the previous ones.

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Harley: Because she was the first of all that batch. But there is some degree of like, so Marion overlaps with Cecilia. Unsurprisingly, for any novel ever Marion turns up and has like the tastiest blood to ever be tasted and immediately just about becomes first blood maid, knocking Cecilia off her porch.

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Holly: Even though Cecilia cost more right. She bargains with Marion.

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Harley: Pays to purchase poor people, I guess? They don't know their worth. I mean, she literally says that when she sees how much she got paid for her. She's like, 'You scoundrel, you're out there acting like I'm only worth 1000 or 2000. And I'm worth like three times that you dodgy fucker.' So, she literally doesn't know her worth because she's grown up in the slums and she's poor. Why do you think creeps hit on baby strippers? But don't know their worth yet. Yeah, anyway, when we talk about like, first blood maid, second blood maid, all that stuff it is think king's mistress. And the idea is that then when you're like the king is done with you, again in this case, the lady is done with you. You are given a pension and a piece of land and you get to retire, but we find out through the book that nobody retires. So, the only blood maid we see leave is Cecilia. I use the 'leaves' term loosely. So, she has a mental breakdown when she loses the position of first blood maid. And there is some stuff throughout the book, as I think especially when it's drawn directly from your body. So, they like often use needles to extract blood and it's like mixed into wine and things. But Lisavet she's got like fangs that she's made. Yeah, gold kept canines. Yeah, like so like dentures but they've I mean essentially the way that people get things these days but instead of being ceramic they're gold. So, she likes to bite people directly which again is a nod to Elizabeth Báthory who did bite, at least in legend.

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Holly: Very vampiric.

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Harley: There is some stuff that it's like that kind of feeling in particular, she does put her blood maids in thrall to her. So, Cecilia is not just obsessed with her position, but actually obsessed with Lisavet. And when Marion takes that spot, she becomes quite obsessed with loads of it and is super in love with her and all that stuff.

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Holly: Which is a little nod to Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

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Harley: And I mean, being enthralled to a vampire is a pretty classic vampire trope. I know a lot of people don't know their classics now that it's been tainted with all the modern vampire lore. But yeah, it was a pretty common thing to use that exchange of blood to keep a mortal under your spell, or to be able to look into their eyes and hypnotize them with your vampire powers. Suddenly realizing I probably have vampiric boobs. Look into my titties, give me all your money. Cecilia, of course, doesn't leave she gets demoted to the torture chamber in the basement.

16:29

Holly: Demoted to the torture chamber. What a beautiful way of summing it up.

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Harley: It's not inaccurate.

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Holly: It's not inaccurate. So, there was one thing, that theme that kind of centered around Celia for a bit of the novel, which was the name wretch or the word wretch. So, we see it carved into Marion's first room. It's carved into the leg of the bed, I believe, with the tooth. And then Marion moves into Cecilia's room, and it's carved in many, many more places. She also picks up a throat ribbon that Cecilia drops, and it's also written on the inside of that ribbon. So, we see it pop up a few times. And we also know that Lisavet calls Cecilia her little wretch or wretch girl or something like that, when she has been demoted into the chamber. But we don't really see much else about that.

17:27

Harley: So, I think it's supposed to signify that, I guess transition into being demoted, for lack of a better phrase, because she goes from being this beautiful, pampered pet to being barely human, like this kind of creature. And it does have a little bit of a nod to Renfield, who is this miserable creature just eating as bugs, trying to gather his life force and all that kind of stuff. But isn't a little more than a wretched servant to his dark lord.

18:04

Holly: Yeah. So, is this a title that comes with being the first blood maid or is a Celia specifically?

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Harley: I think it's a title that comes with losing your position.

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Holly: But if we see the word carved in what we can assume was Cecilia's first bedroom in the home before she was promoted to first blood maid.

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Harley: But I think that, if anything at all like because Marion starts to discover what's really going on when she becomes first blood maid. It seems like Cecilia already knows what's going on, like, ahead of time. So, I wonder if it's a case of repeated girls in the past have discovered that it does feel like it's a message that's supposed to mean more than it does, and she doesn't quite follow that through in that way.

18:48

Holly: Doesn't quite follow through with the teeth.

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Harley: Yeah, so there is a recurring theme. So, Marion finds a tooth with the word wretch in her first bedroom. And then, Celia, when she is trying to keep her position and has already lost it, basically pulls out some of her teeth. Like she smashes everything in her bedroom, she pulls out some of her teeth to give to Lisavet to prove that she loves her. And then Lisavet says to Marion at one stage when they were alone together, she's like, 'If you really love me, give me one of your teeth.' Like, pull out your own teeth with a knife, off you go to show me that you love me, and she stops her before she does it. But there is a recurring theme of that. And I think this is where if you were gonna go with Lisavet keeping the name Lisavet Bathory. Discovering the torture chamber earlier and then more of that, like, is she just psychotically desperate for love or validation or like, what's going on there where it becomes more of a character study of like somebody's deranged and demonic. Yeah, could have been really interesting from that gothic novel theme, and especially to if you did tie in that level of being enthralled where it's like she's in love with her, in this way where it's like I know that she's like, 'I've already figured out that she's the sinister bad guy. But I can't figure out how to untangle myself,' and realizing that a lot of that has to do with the blood and feeding.

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Holly: And so, this obsession is like many faceted. It's obviously mental. It's physical in both the giving of their blood and their lifeforce, but also giving their body in a sexual capacity. So,

Cecilia, often ends up in Lisavet's bed, and we start to see early on that Marion is very keen to do the same, and actually gets jealous when - so two of the blood maids are twins - when she watches Lisavet in bed with the two twins having a little romp. And she gets super jealous about it. And this is right before she's promoted to first blood maid. And then, she's also climbing into bed with her. Now, I have thoughts about these sex scenes, and you have thoughts about the sex scenes, and I think they're a little different.

21:08

Harley: Yeah, I really thought that she was a little bit matter-of-fact about Marion being gay, because she talks prior to her turning up to the castle about her having relationships with other women. And she does mention at one stage that the women kind of wanted to deny their passions or whatever. So, it is kind of maybe alluded to that being gay is not wholly acceptable in the slums where she starts off, but it's not necessarily frowned upon either. She's very matter-of-fact about how she talks about it. And then when she gets to the North, to the House of Hunger, the sex scenes do go into more detail. It really feels very matter-of-fact, to me. But you got a bit of a different vibe from it.

21:53

Holly: Yeah. So, I kind of I still saw a lot of the elements from those sex scenes as being male gazey, particularly when Marion was like spying on the twins. And I think also, some of the ways that it was very matter of fact, I just came across as a little bit male gazey. So, I have seen this novel marketed as a sapphic novel. Which essentially means like, it's a lesbian novel. And I just don't really feel that it hits that genre on the head.

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Harley: Yeah, I think, for me personally to qualify something as a sapphic novel, the lesbianism has to matter to the novel. And I don't feel like it particularly does, even if she'd gone into more detail about passion and things like that. I think it's very, to me anyway, it read as a little bit matter of fact, in terms of like, Marion is already gay, and we're not in the head of anybody who doesn't already feel an attraction to women. But also, the attraction that she feels to Lisavet is less sexual and more again, that blood thrall thing. Where it's not an exploration of women falling in love, or even women discovering each other's bodies in a purely physical sense. It's just an extension of that, like, again, that like Elizabeth Báthory thing of her being like, essentially, a lot of the reason why it was believed that she maybe got a bit of a bad rap for being a woman that had too much power, is because every single box she ticks is things that were alarming to the good Christian folk, including being sexual with other women and it also ties into that vampire thing of them having just like an endless appetite for life and passion and all that kind of stuff. So yeah, it just like it read is really uneventful to me. And I personally think if you're going to describe something as a sapphic novel, I already said, it needs to matter. The lesbian part of the thing, the sapphic stuff needs to actually matter. And I don't feel

like it really mattered in this, which I don't think is necessarily a bad thing. I think that sometimes how you normalize stuff is just by being like, *yeah, it's like, who cares?*

24:15

Holly: But it just feels quite hollow. And I feel like it's missing that romantic element that should be present. I guess we're compensating for that romantic element with the *I'm drinking your blood and therefore you're obsessed with me*. I think the component that feels very male gaze to me.

24:33

Harley: Yeah, I suppose maybe that's just the tone with that, like obsession and sex, but I don't I guess for me because I read it as an extension of that obsession. And I've always had a bit of a thing for vampire lore and like, especially old vampire lore, I guess in my head it just slotted into that category. So, I didn't even really register it as anything other than a like—honestly the only register that I really heard about it about any of the sex stuff is very early in the book, where I was like, *oh, they've written her as gay in a very normal way*. Which I appreciate because it's first brought up as like, they're looking at ads in the paper for like, essentially, like men seeking wives. And somebody was banging on about in one of the ads about must be pure and this that the other and her friend says something about it and she's like, 'Oh, I'm not pure.' And it mentions the like, 'Oh, I've had enough previous relationships. Nobody's been important, but I've had enough previous relationships,' and kind of casually mentioned that they were women and moves on. And I appreciated that. And then yeah, by the time they were getting it on, at the house of hunger, to me, that was more about the being enthralled obsession than it was about sex of any kind.

25:43

Holly: But I guess I'm interpreting that as in place of the romance. And you're interpreting it as an extension of which I think, yeah, that makes sense why we're viewing it slightly differently. But yeah, ultimately, we kind of have the same feelings. So traditional sort of vampire novels, lore, everything, they tend to kind of focus around that like, intersection of sex and desire, privilege, wealth, abuse of power, blood. And I think it does do that. And I think these relationships also do that. It just feels it's missing that little.

26:26

Harley: I actually don't think that what it's missing is what you think it's missing. Just in terms of like, I don't think that it needs to be more of a romantic thing. I think she isn't quite scary enough. In her writing.

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Holly: Yeah. And she's not sexual enough in her writing.

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Harley: Yeah, for sure. It definitely reads to me a little bit like maybe she's not super comfortable writing a sex scene, which is cool. It's a different thing, writing a sex scene to having sex. You know, it's like, not everybody who has sex is comfortable talking dirty. And there is an element of sex writing that requires you to be comfortable with speaking about sex in a way that should be more normalized but isn't. And also, just some people aren't verbal in that way, I guess.

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Holly: Now I know you're a big stickler for sex needs to further the plot. Do you feel like the sex in this book furthered the plot? Or could we have just removed the sex from it?

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Harley: I think it furthered the plot. I don't necessarily think she leaned in hard enough to why it was there. But I do think that her reason for putting it in was valid. So, if you think about it, it feels like she knew she needed for example, for that lack of obsessiveness and that jealousy to rise up. So, seeing Lisavet with the twins, forced that kind of upset, pushed her to the point of challenging was a bit and being like, *Why are you ignoring me?* and that kind of thing, which kind of directly led to her becoming first blood maid and all that stuff. So, it's served its purpose. If anything, it feels like she resentfully left it in there, rather than gratuitously putting it in there.

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Holly: I get what you're saying. I actually think that, that jealousy could have been achieved in a different way. If say, Lisavet it was dining, she doesn't dine with them, does she? But spending time with them?

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Harley: I don't think playing cards with your other mistresses really sums up the level of the kind of obsession that Marion is feeling that we see. Because it's feeding into a fear that Marion has that she feels something for the other blood maids more than she feels for Marion.

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Holly: But I think we could have seen it through small moments of intimacy.

28:57

Harley: It took forever to up and bang on and get to the point you get on with it. You're not gonna like, give me some meat then? I don't know. I actually think it could have stayed there. Yeah, I guess it's a agree to disagree moment for us. Because, you know, I think it served its purpose. And I really don't think that a game of snap is going to quite deliver in the same.

29:17

Holly: But I think we are agreeing on the same point is that she could have leaned in harder. I just think she could have changed it. If she really was that uncomfortable writing sex. She could have changed it was small moments or change it to small moments of intimacy.

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Harley: But that takes away from the like, menace of a vampire.

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Holly: But she's not a very menacing vampire to begin with.

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Harley: The point is, it's like you can't lose any of the little things that make her that like, vampire.

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Holly: At what point in the novel if at any point did you find her menacing?

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Harley: To be honest, I found her... I suppose we arrived at the end where they were doing that like she was chasing her down with the crossbow but if anything, I actually thought that the menacing thing was the overarching power of her position and all that kind of stuff and then realizing how trapped they were. So, I don't necessarily find it, I don't know that I found her specifically menacing. But I found elements of the castle of the power of her staff menacing in a way that obviously represented her. I've really honestly, I think that if I was going to critique the book, it certainly wouldn't be the sex scenes, I would have pushed for her to find her way downstairs faster, even if it was like maybe give her tutor a little bit more autonomy, because essentially, she finds the passages on earn comes out there, and the house mother or whatever she's called, catches him about to be like, make a fucking run for it. He gets fired.

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Holly: I'm pretty sure he'd get demoted to the dungeon.

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Harley: But maybe he left a book out and she discovered the passages or things like that that got there earlier. And then it makes more sense that he's then taken away as her confidant.

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Holly: Absolutely.

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Harley: And then it makes it more like, hard for her to trust people. Because who do you trust? If even if somebody is on your side, they could be taken away at any minute.

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Holly: Yeah. So, I think the pacing of this book was a little bit off, I felt the start was about right. The middle was kind of dragging a little bit, where they could have put some more breadcrumbs towards finding these passages or needing to get the fuck out of the castle kind of thing in there. And then I just felt like the last maybe quarter was this real rush. And I understand that she was probably trying to create this sense of urgency to get out. But I feel like from finding the demoted dungeon to the book finishing, it was just too much of a rush.

31:52

Harley: I feel like if say she found the dungeon earlier, and then was like, I've got this conflict of being like I'm obsessed with Lisavet. Maybe she's found something in the catacombs that makes her be like, is Lisavet the bad guy, or is like maybe her father is still down there, or there's some other spirits in this house, or there's some of the curse here?

32:12

Holly: Or even finding it empty before being before Celia is demoted.

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Harley: But like, oh, she doesn't recognize like, there's something in there. But it's like a creature. It's not a person. As far as she's aware. It's not until Cecilia is down there that she's like, 'Oh, shit,' and then maybe even having her be like, I'm trying to find a smart way to get out of this situation that I found myself in. And then maybe right at the end with isn't May the young? So, she's not a blood maid yet. But she's actually in training to be a blood mate. And she's like a child.

32:49

Holly: She's like four. Or maybe they've found her at four. When she's like a she's a little bit older. Yeah, she doesn't speak.

32:54

Harley: She's a very, very young child at any rate. So maybe if she'd found out that may be finally hitting the age where she would become a blood maid. And they were like making a big deal out of that. And that was the motivator to kind of speed up the end of the novel and be like, right, I can't find a smart way out of this. I've just got to risk everything and get these girls out of here. Because yeah, not about surviving. But it's about me like, yes, surviving, but also trying to save somebody from this fate. But I may not be able to escape. And then it makes a lot

more sense that she's like running through the end of the castle, like, running further into the castle to lead Lisavet away from May.

33:31

Holly: Yeah, that makes sense. So, they mentioned in the novel that you cannot become a blood maid until six months after your first bleed. So, if we did see, May, having her first bleed. And then it's like, fuck, time is on or even is this countdown now.

33:49

Harley: Realizing that late so there's some conversation between the house where there was you find some paperwork or whatever, that makes her realize that they're not going to wait for her. So, she's like, I've got time, because she's just thinking of herself. And she's got time to get back there. And then expose them and come back here and save the rest of the girls and save me and all that stuff. And then realizing that she actually can't save them at all. Like they all have to get out or they're fucked. And that they're not going to wait for May to be old enough.

34:18

Holly: Overhearing a conversation with Thiago about how he can't get her enough blood maids. And she's just like, 'Oh, yeah, well, May will do she'll tide us over.'

34:28

Harley: May is down there for something and they're not quite doing it yet. But it's very, very clear that they're starting training to use her in a way that's like not okay. I think that there's a whole lot of stuff there that you could have done that would have changed the pacing and made it a more interesting story. That said, I read it in one sitting, I really enjoyed it.

34:49

Holly: Did you? I mean, it doesn't surprise me.

34:51

Harley: I read most things in one sitting. It's true. Not everything. I feel like it is one that the only first duration that I really felt as I was reading the book was *Why have you given me such an obvious tell?* Because it made it really hard for me to go with what the rest of what she was doing was and this is the hard thing for me is I'm like, all of this stuff works with her still being Lisavet but all that kind of stuff changes if you changed her name. I wonder if that would change the pacing. Because you would be more like, *Is she good? Is she bad?*

35:29

Holly: Call her Stacy or something and then you can be surprised when you find the dungeon.

35:33

Harley: But yeah, it's like that if it wasn't so obviously marked. Would that have made it more effective pacing-wise and more effective as a story? I mean, that's the hallmark of kind of a gothic horror is that sense of menace but they're not really knowing always being on the back foot about who's good, who's bad. Yeah, and often in a gothic horror the characters who seem bad like Lord Ivor is the bad guy throughout most of the novel and then right at the end, he is not directly, but the way that they save themselves. And they're kind of the last hope that they have. And, that's very, like traditional gothic horror, where the characters that you initially think of the good ones turned out to be the bad ones. And the bad ones turn out to be the good ones and all that. I can get on board for all that stuff. But when you red flag that the character that she's obsessed with, the whole time you like don't fall in love with the evil torture countess.

36:42

Holly: We should look into if we can find the names of any of her victims and see if she's directly ripped those off as well.

36:49

Harley: Honestly, I was a little bit disappointed, I was waiting for the pool of blood in the torture chamber.

36:54

Holly: Yeah.

36:55

Harley: That's how well I know the legend. That's how much of a like obvious signpost that was for me. Yeah, I don't know. I don't know if changing the name would change it. Obviously, I can't reread it now without knowing how things work. I don't know if changing some of the elements of the story would need to change. When the plot points happen. I feel like after making critiques on things like this, we are going to be fucked if we ever write a novel.

37:21

Holly: Oh, yeah. I'm only ever going to write an autobiography. So, I can be like, 'Well, you weren't there.'

37:27

Harley: Like we've critiqued all this stuff. And then we've failed. Listen, I do think that it's something that as a reader, sometimes picking apart this stuff makes the concept of writing something more accessible. Because you're like, here are areas where authors that I like, and also is that I respect have maybe not delivered 100%. And it's still a perfectly functional perfectly good story.

37:50

Holly: Yeah. And I'm sure it sounds like we've just spent what, half an hour tearing it apart. It probably sounds like we don't like it. I enjoyed it. I would have liked the pacing to be a little different. But aside from that, I actually did. I'd read the sequel/

38:05

Holly: Do you think there will be a sequel?

38:06

Harley: No idea, but I would happily read one.

38:08

Holly: Maybe she'll pick a different murderous countess.

38:14

Harley: Yeah. Anyway. I feel like doing this kind of thing often does require us picking stuff apart. Actually, you know what else I thought was a good note for it is I actually think one of the things that was done well in this book is like, Marion's brother dies very early on he falls or she, like, pushes him any, he gets knocked over whatever happens. But essentially, he smashes his head, and she sees the concave and like a little bit of his bone and brain and stuff and realizes that he is not going to make it. And that comes up for her a few times. That comes up for her a few times is this kind of thing of like I have participated in this. And I'm a terrible person and all that kind of stuff. So how can I judge Lisavet for drinking blood and for the kind of gory things and all that kind of stuff? And I think that that's done really well.

39:24

Holly: Yes, I think the gore has done quite tastefully.

39:27

Harley: And like when it's there, it very much is there to serve a purpose even when it kind of doesn't feel like it, initially. Because certainly the first time you with her brother, you're kind of like, *that's a bit full on*. But then when you see the way that she calls back and calls back and calls back for her where it is that thing of kind of *what kind of person am I?* and that memory that you can't let go of and that like it haunts her basically, I think it works and it makes sense. I think she's done a really good job of that.

39:53

Holly: Yes, I know we're moving away from tearing the novel apart, but I've just had another... So, it was briefly touched on that Lisavet can access memories through people's blood. What happened with that?

40:09

Harley: Well, I mean, that's how she figures out that they're betraying her. She drinks her blood. And she's like, well, I already knew. There's my proof.

40:16

Holly: I thought Irene had just told her but no, that makes more sense. Through the blood.

40:23

Harley: Yeah. See? And that's again, where if all of this had come up earlier, and all that kind of stuff, and there's all these questions and concerns, and she's like, *how do I hide this from her?* And then even her thinking that she's managed to hide it from her. And her being like, *I've seen every single one of your doubts about me this whole fucking time, dickhead.*

40:40

Holly: Yeah, *I knew everything. So of course, I knew that you found the chamber.*

40:44

Harley: And I think that that is supposed to be her being menacing where it's like, she's omnipresent, or whatever, because she can read their thoughts.

40:52

Holly: Okay. So, if that was a little bit more emphasized, I think she would have been a much more menacing character. I think she is almost a menacing character, *almost*. There are a few moments, like when they go out hunting, and she's like, pointing the weapon at what's his face, and it's like, 'Kill him.' And Marion almost does. And that moment with the little knife and extracting tooth for me, those moments, they are a little bit menacing. And if we just saw a little bit more of that.

41:25

Harley: And you know what, I think she could have leaned in quite hard to that, I want to say almost that like, drug addicts love, where it's that like obsessive us against the world, we'll do fucked up shit to prove that we love each other and all that anything. That's like, maybe we are not the most rational. And that's very much like somebody who already has a history of addiction. And then as well as often an active substance addiction develops an addiction to a person, you get that really unhealthy, obsessive kind of thing. And I think maybe elements of that could have been brought to the surface. And I really think that things like, *Would you cut out your heart for me? Would you cut out your tooth for me? What would you do to prove that you love me?*

42:07

Holly: Oh, my God, the scene where she's got the quail heart on the tip of the scalpel, and just feeds it to Celia. Oddly arousing.

42:21

Holly: On your own there.

42:22

Holly: You should have seen the look Harley just gave me. But again, I think that's the control. That's the obsession. That's the blind obedience.

42:30

Harley: Yeah. And they do talk about if you're a blood maid, you need to be blindly obedient to your master. But they talk about that as just a rule. Like, if you're a noble for a kingdom, you probably shouldn't betray your king. So, guys, we just wanted to say again, thank you so much for listening. We hope you enjoyed this episode. If you have any thoughts about this episode recommendations for future episodes, let us know.

42:57

Holly: links to other things will be in our show notes and also available at bio.link/bimbo. If you want to see a little bit more exclusive episodes behind the scenes and other random hot girl shit. You can find that at our Patreon again, that link will be in our show notes.

43:12

Harley: Join us again next week for more books, babes, and banter.

43:16

Holly: Bimbos out.