SYP - In Conversation with Georgia Leighton

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Spellbound, Georgia Layton, feminist retelling, Sleeping Beauty, writing process, publishing industry, creative writing, marketing manager, Penguin, fairy tale, motherhood, gender politics, world building, fantasy novel, book promotion.

SPEAKERS

Speaker 1, Podcast Intro, Gemma Mathers, Georgia Leighton

Podcast Intro 00:01

Gemma, welcome to this episode of Inside publishing, the series where we interview industry experts on everything publishing.

G Gemma Mathers 00:12

Hi everyone. I'm Gemma, the podcast officer at SYP, UK. And for this episode of Inside publishing, I sat down with the lovely Georgina, the debut author of the novel spellbound, we discussed her writing process, working in publishing, her journey into the industry and all things spellbound. I hope you enjoy.

Speaker 1 00:35

Hello. So welcome to Inside publishing. Today, I'm here with Georgia Layton, who is the debut author of spellbound, which is hitting the shelves on the 24th of April, so by the time you're listening, it should actually be out. Thank you so much for coming on the podcast Georgia.

Georgia Leighton 00:48

Thank you so much for having me. I'm delighted to be here.

Speaker 1 00:53

So for anyone who may not know about spellbound, could you give us a bit of a rundown about the novel and what it's all about?

Georgia Leighton 01:00

Yes, so spellbound is a feminist retelling of Sleeping Beauty. But if you know the tale of Sleeping Beauty, there are some kind of significant differences in my kind of retelling, my version of the tale. So in the classic tale, a princess is born and she's cursed at birth, but in my version, whilst that happens, not too long later, a second child is born, and everybody has the idea to switch the princesses to try and put off the curse. And then what follows is the lives of the four women who were involved in this ruse, who then have to work together to reverse this terrible curse. And there are no handsome princes that run into running to save the day. The whole, the whole kind of fairy tale is told from the perspectives of the women.

G Gemma Mathers 01:49

That was honestly one of the first things that drew me in about this book was that there's no princes are going to run in to save the day. It's completely up to these women to take this of like, this strange, horrible thing that's happened to them, and how can they make it work? And how can they come together to solve what seems to be a completely unsolvable problem, and especially the nine Prince is running in I really love that. So what was the writing process like for you from kind of the conception of the book? Was it always going to be a retelling? And how did it come about that you sat down and said, I'm going to write this now.

Georgia Leighton 02:25

So I've always loved writing, and have always been writing, and kind of one day dreamed of writing a book that we published ever since I was young. And, you know, as a teenager, I absolutely loved fantasy novels and and still do even now, but that's kind of where that began, and I would often read retellings as well. So I've always been obsessed with fairy tales. And as a kid, you know, I loved the Disney fairy tale retellings that there are, yeah, so I kind of always tinkered around with that kind of stuff. But actually, where spellbound began was when my daughter was born. She's my first child, and becoming a parent for the first time was amazing, but it was also quite kind of overwhelming and terrifying. And I sort of found myself just longing to just do something that remind that was for just for me, that reminded me of me. So I kind of started writing during her, her nap times, and then the evenings as well, probably when I should have been resting. But I just felt really compelled to write, to write this story. And I think I was kind of, yeah, writing myself out of kind of an identity crisis, I suppose, and kind of reminding myself of of the of the the kind of real me, despite having kind of changed into this sort of new version of like a mother, I suppose,

G Gemma Mathers 03:46

yeah, oh, that's really wonderful. I think I really like what you said about how you're reminding yourself of what you love and what you're doing and who you are. And I think writing for everyone who does it and can do it is such a personal thing, and to find something that you love in it, and to be able to make that into something like you could hold, I think that's really wonderful. One of the things I found so interesting about you is that you did a masters in

creative writing at Royal Holloway, which I also attended. Yeah, I did my undergrad. I did English and Creative Writing actually amazing. I did English there too, but undergrad or masters undergrad.

Georgia Leighton 04:22

So I did, I did English undergrad, and then I stayed on to do the Creative Writing masters.

G Gemma Mathers 04:26

I wish I'd done that, and I'm still tempted to go back and do it now. So what, how did, how do you feel like your masters kind of gave you a background in writing before you came to write the book? Did you like obviously, I'm sure it helps in a lot of ways, as like my creative writing degree does, was that kind of thing with approaching a novel? Did you feel a bit more like I know what I'm doing, or was it still like a free for all blank page just go?

Georgia Leighton 04:50

I think there still was the free for all blank, blank page, but I still think about so much of what I learn on that masters, and I'm sure it must be the same for you as well. Uh, when you just there's something so kind of exposing about writing something and then having kind of workshopped by a group, which I'm quessing is kind of similar to your experience having, yeah, with creative writing and English classes. And you just learn a lot about yourself and as a writer, and you know, kind of your tics often and form, I guess, and kind of like how, how you approach the page, I suppose, because everybody kind of does it differently, yeah, and there's just certain things that either people in my workshop group said to me, or the teachers I had said to me, but I still remember now, and kind of still even earlier on today, actually, I was kind of working on another piece of writing, and I was sort of remembering my teacher at the time said, said this, this kind of piece of advice that I write very sparely and that I need to go back in and fill in the kind of information. And I was like, oh yes, that's exactly what I've done here. I can see writing, so I just think, yeah, it helps me immensely. I don't think that you don't, you don't need to have, like, qualifications to write, but it certainly helps, I think, and just kind of gives you confidence and just gets you used to having feedback as well. I think when you, if you know, if you, if you, if you write something, and then it's, it's kind of going to be published, then you're going to have to, you know, work on it with an editor. Yeah, yeah. That process kind of helps you understand and get used to that.

G Gemma Mathers 06:35

Yeah, I definitely agree that you don't need to do a course in it. You don't need to go to uni and study it to be able to be able to do it at all. There's some people who are brilliant writers that have never studied it a day in their life. I do agree. It definitely gives you, like a thicker skin we used to do. We call it silent workshops, where you sit in silence and let someone else basically rip your work to shreds in, like a nice way, in a constructive way. But it really makes you take on feedback, and I think working editorially in any sense, with a publisher, you are going to have to listen to, probably stuff that you don't want to hear at times, and cut this and cut that,

and change this, and you just go. But also, what you said about filling in the gaps, you definitely did that with spellbound. It was so descriptive, and it's so like magical to read. There's so much about the world that you get on the page. And I you definitely listened to that feedback, because it was incredible. What was it like for you, going from so you did the Masters in creative writing, how was your journey into publishing? Because obviously, I know it can be quite a tough industry to crack for a lot of people. And you are a senior marketing manager, so how, what was it like? Going well, I think I might want to make a career working in books and working with books. And, yeah, what was that like for you?

Georgia Leighton 07:46

Yeah. So I finished my creative writing masters, which I did straight after my undergrad, and I thought, yes, you know, I still want to keep writing, but I do need to have a job as well. And I love books, and I would love to work in publishing at the time I I was, I was doing online I was part of, like, a group of UK people who were doing books on YouTube, so, like, it was called BookTube, kind of still is, I guess, a little bit, although I'm very much like out of that scene, although I watch a lot of the videos, still, I don't make them myself anymore, but I was doing that, and this was back when this was, like quite new, and that's actually how I kind of got my first role in publishing was I was, sort of my first role in publishing was actually an Academic theology publisher, so quite different to what I do now, which is, I'm a marketing manager, and I work on mostly fiction. I work at Penguin, so, yeah, this, this first role was very different, and it was kind of an assistant role across marketing publicity, and I used my kind of booktube background as a kind of a way to kind of, I guess, showcase that I had skills in an area that they might need, and that I could kind of bring, to bring to the publisher. Because it was just, yeah, just at the beginning of publishing, kind of taking notice of social media in a way. And since, obviously, things have massively changed since then, you know, first came Instagram, and then now come now has come Tiktok. So yeah, but I do think that is still a route that often people can take, because when there's new platforms that come out, if you have knowledge about that particular platform and then the audience there, then that's like great currency for publishers. So

G Gemma Mathers 09:41

definitely, oh, that's really, like, so interesting to know, especially because, like, the thought of YouTube, especially, like all the platforms are so populated with booktok itself, so to be at the kind of beginning of it and go, This could be something that really works. That's great. That is like,

Georgia Leighton 09:54

I was like, I will say I was like, so small fry, though I, you know, like I wasn't. I. Doing, no, but I got invited to some great events, which

G Gemma Mathers 10:03

was one, yeah, I think that's all you need, isn't it? It's just the one person to go, come to this, and then you go, and then it just spirals into the next thing, yeah, one of the things I think is

really, really interesting, particularly about you, is with spell band being published, you kind of have been on every side of it. You have now the author, but you've also been on the marketing side, and you've worked in the publishing route while a books being formed. What was it like for you going through it as as the author? Was it kind of like you take a back seat or because you know how the publishing kind of landscape works? Were you like? This is how I want to do it. This how we play it. What was that like for you?

Georgia Leighton 10:38

Yeah, so, I think I was really hands off, and have continued to be. And I'm just so impressed with what the marketing and publicity team, and, yeah, the whole publishing team at Trans World have done with spell bond. They've just, they've just done such a fantastic job. But I really didn't want, I really went, wanted to go in, you know, hands in a kind of hands off way, because I think, I don't think it would have been helpful for me to sort of come in with lots of opinions and thoughts, and I didn't need to, anyway, because they've done such a Fantastic job. But, yeah, I think, I definitely, I think my background has has helped in some ways in the I think it is very strange. As an author, often you're you're often not told very much, and then suddenly these kind of like bits of information will drop into your inbox, sort of out of the blue, and you sort of don't really have any control over anything. But I feel like, I think because of having been on the other side of that, I know how hard the people are working on the other side, and how much that, you know they're on my side, they really want the book to do well as well. And so I sort of have have that experience, lived experience, so that I know that. But I think that if, if I hadn't, I can, I can really see how often authors sort of feel like alone, a bit alone and in during the publishing process, and a bit kind of like nervous and and worried about what their team or their publishers are doing. Yeah,

G Gemma Mathers 12:17

definitely. I think that's the thing with writing, especially it's like, you as the author, you spend so long with this book and it becomes kind of your baby, and you're like, This is, in a way, like your life's work. This is, like, probably a massive, massive thing to do, and then for to get it published. I think people would underestimate how long the publishing process can be, and that it takes time. It has to go through all the edits, it has to get, like, marketing, publicity. It has to actually get physically printed, and it does take a long time. And I feel like, definitely, from an author's perspective, you've got conception to actual publication. It takes a long time. So yeah, definitely, I think having experience in the industry is a bonus in that sense, because, you know, it's just how things work. It's not You're not being ignored. You just let them do their thing. I think it's so nice that you went into it and you thought, I'll just let them do it. Because think a lot of I feel that I would be tempted to be like, No, mine was probably good to be like, heads off, let them, let them, the professionals, do what they're doing, which I quite like, um, so was it always marketing? Did you think was it definitely marketing that drew you in?

Georgia Leighton 13:18

Yeah, I think because often so my route in was through kind of like social media, and often that sort of sits with marketing, but also my so my first role was a mixture of publicity and marketing. And there were some elements of publicity that I really enjoyed as well, but I think

that just ultimately, marketing just suits me better. I really enjoy the mix of creative, strategic and kind of data analysis that that, I guess, that that role holds, and, and I Yeah, and I just love working in marketing and publishing. I think it's brilliant. And yeah, despite Yeah, the writing that I've been doing. You know, I've just wanted to continue to work in my role, because I love it so much. I love that. That's like for people who like especially want to get into the industry, to hear people that have been in it for a while, to say, You love it, and it's like the best thing that you do. I love that. So back to spellbound. Obviously, very exciting. Comes out next week. There will be a link in the description for this episode for anyone listening who wants to order it or find out where you can buy it from.

G Gemma Mathers 14:31

So spellbound is obviously a retelling of the tale of Sleeping Beauty. So like, was it always going to be sleeping beauty, the fact that fairy tale and how important was it for you to make it a retelling, but also make a retelling that's perpetually different from the original story?

Georgia Leighton 14:49

Yeah, it was, yes, it was always going to be sleeping beauty. I think I kind of played around with different retellings of different fairy tales in the past, but yeah, this specific version. And I think Sleeping Beauty is always intrigued me as as a kind of a tale and and the way that it's kind of morphed over time, and, you know, the different versions that you have of it, it's quite a straight even if you actually boil it down to what actually happens in the Sleeping Beauty fairy tale. It's quite a weird tale of like, yeah, a girl falling, falling asleep for 100 years, and then, yeah, being woken up by a by a prince, and going, great, I marry you. And so what I wanted to do was I wanted to take the kind of the bare bones of that, which was kind of the beginning of the tale, the setup, the the the curse that's put on the prince. Princess. And what I what I wanted to do was I wanted to think about or explore what it would really feel like to be that girl, so that is taken away. You don't know that you're a princess, you're, you know, brought up, and you don't know much of your background and and what it was like to be the women around her who are trying to deal with this kind of huge thing that happened, yeah, and trying to protect her. And I wanted to try and Yeah, sort of realistically portray that. That was kind of what I was hoping to do. And I, and each of the women, I sort of purposefully wanted to inhabit kind of different social hierarchy, you know, that they sit in at different parts of society, and I wanted them to feel kind of hopefully uniquely different in their own in their own way. And so, you know, they're different ages and certainly have different personalities as well. So yeah, that was kind of what I wanted. I really wanted the fairy tale to feel as real as possible.

G Gemma Mathers 16:48

I guess, no, you definitely, definitely achieve that. I think, like with the characters I when I was reading it, I felt like they had very, very distinct voices. You can see, like the grief and the sacrifices that they've had to make, and the joy in the small moments and how they're like fighting so hard for this kind of one joined thing, but in so many different ways, I thought that's something really beautiful that you did with this novel. Was the perspectives of motherhood that you portrayed here. Some of these characters have had to make some huge cell in particular, obviously, trying to make this as spoiler free as possible. And she's kind of thrust

into this kind of, it's not even really a choice for her. She's kind of thrown this baby and gone, cool. You are in charge now protect her. And for her, that's a huge thing to do. To say, she kind of goes from a reluctant she's just part of it, to being a kind of mother figure and a guide and a very over protective other in some, some cases, what was that like for you? How did you approach each of these characters in creating their voices, and what kind of influenced it? Well, I think Sal that holds narrative, you know, if I was therapizing myself, I would say that that was definitely, you know, I was, I was just sort of writing my experience at the time of just being a mum for the first time. And I guess, yeah, kind of cell chill isn't me, but that part, that part of the story, I think, was kind of trying to sort of figure out on the page my own kind of experiences of what what Parenthood was like. So that's where, that's where that came from. And yeah, and I purposefully did want to choose women of different ages. There's a kind of older character who's the lady in waiting to the Queen whose perspective we hear from. And yeah, I wanted, I think often, we don't hear the voices of older women. Well, definitely not in fairy tales. They're either they're normally evil, a witch or the evil stepmother. So I wanted a positive older female character and voice in there. And I wanted, yeah, her, she, you know, she's kind of, she is high born, but she's kind of adjacent to the Queen, so she's not sort of like one of your kind of classic, focused central characters, yeah. And then I wanted to as well, hear from Sal who is a low born kind of character who is sort of more in the world of academia, but is thrust into this kind of very domestic experience looking after this princess, and then, yeah, the voice, as I kind of said there, there are sort of two princesses at the center of this and their voices, and I really wanted them to be two different, very different people who've been shaped by what happens to them. So whether they're the girl that's the real princess that's sort of been taken off, and doesn't know that she's a princess, and is kind of trying to live with with all these with all this kind of magic that's been thrust upon her, or they're the one that's been left behind in her place, who doesn't really fit the ideal of what a princess is thought to be or should be, yeah. And I just wanted. To put all those characters together and kind of see, see what would happen. Yeah, I loved it. It was especially, definitely with the princesses, the twins, they had so such different voices, I think especially that I have a lot of twins in my family. Like, Oh, do you I'm fascinated by twins. Oh, my mum is a twin. My grandma is a twin, and my boyfriend is a twin, and scary. And I feel like, when you know them, and you see how, like, they've grown up together, and that they're so similar in so many ways, but so different in so many ways. And I feel like the interesting thing with spellbound was the two sisters, they grow up completely separate, and they have, they're very, very different, but they also have, like, such little traits about each other that are so similar at the same time. And you can sense that like they're sisters who don't know their sisters, and they have, like, a complete double out there that they don't know about. And I really enjoyed especially growing up like the sister that stays behind and is meant to be a princess, but doesn't act like one at all, and she doesn't know anything about this kind of grand world that she should have. And I it was a really kind of funny dynamic between her and the lady in waiting of like, like, you should be a princess, and she's like, why? Yeah. And then with Briar as well, growing up completely out of it, and how she her relationship with cell and the journey between the two of them, I really, really enjoyed it. I thought it was so well done and so poignant as well. You so much. So one of the things, especially in this in this novel, is things about like gender politics and kind of the toxic masculinity of it. And one thing I really enjoyed was that the men in this book don't take center stage a lot like the fairy tales do, where the prince comes in and saves the day of a girl he's never met. Suddenly they're married, and it's glorious. I think one of the things is like, they don't necessarily take, like, a huge backseat, but they're not the point of the story, and they're not centerfold. And why was it important for you to include them in that way?

I think, yeah, I just wanted to give you, know, I sort of, I guess I thought about myself as a young child watching a lot of these fairy tales, and then, you know, as a teenager reading a lot of these fantasy retellings. And I just wanted to give that younger me another version of the story where the prince might well be there and, you know, they might well fall in love, maybe, but she sells, she saves herself, or, you know, or she's saved by the women around her. She doesn't need to sort of a hero to kind of rescue her.

G Gemma Mathers 22:33

I love that. Yeah, one thing though, because this, there are some kind of darker aspects to spellbound, but I really thought it was quite a very good reflection of kind of the world that we live in and the society, and while it's not built in our current world and reality and stuff, because that is one of the beautiful things about fantasy, is you strip everything away, and you build up your own bars and your own magic systems and your own intricacies. And there were still some things I felt that reflected in our society, particularly there's, I won't go into too much detail, but there's a moment with Sal in an alleyway, and she leaves a bar or a tavern late at night, and she's walking alone, and she gets apprehended by someone. And I think it was a really kind of poignant and important scene. And for me, it was her going, I'm not going to let this happen to me. I'm not going to let she I think it's the instinct of thing to go, Okay, this is going to happen, and what will be will be. And then she just goes, no, that's not happening to me. It's not happening to me again. I will not have this. And I thought that was really, really smart way to go about it, to have something that happens probably all the time in our world. Maybe it might not be talked about, but there are things going on everywhere. And to have that reflected in a book in such a in such a poignant way, I really, really loved, and I think what was it like to write those scenes? Obviously, you're getting a bit like darker in this world, and how was it to write and what kind of research went into it, maybe, or what influenced it, or where were you when you were writing it?

Georgia Leighton 24:03

Yeah, oh, no, thank you. I'm really pleased that that scene felt struck you and felt true that, yeah, that's wonderful to hear. A lot of care, I'd say a lot of care went into those scenes. And I, you know, I thought about, I thought about them a lot because I was aware of wanting to be really truthful in what I was saying, but at the same time or truthful in the experience of what can happen to often to women, but but also, I never wanted to Step into a place where it felt glorified, or like it was used as a plot point, if you know, I mean, that was really important to me. I didn't, I didn't want that to happen. And I had a kind of a few, like BETA readers at the beginning, and somebody did give me the feedback that they felt that it sort of should, I should push that kind of darker, and that I sort of came to a. You know, came to a point, but that, you know, they would have liked it to be kind of pushed further. But actually, you know, and I thought about that a lot, but actually, I felt that what I had depicted was dark enough, and that, in a way, you know, these terrible things that happen in our world are just awful. I didn't sort of want, you know, I just wanted to read so careful about treading that line between, yeah, between kind of glorifying something, but at the same time exploring it in a way that was kind of careful and truthful as much as I as I possibly could.

Gemma Mathers 25:37

I think you definitely did it. It was one of these things. I was reading it, and it was kind of a, you know, you have those moments you're like, put the book down and breathe. I was actually, and I was like, it was harrowing, in a sense, but it was also so powerful, because it was like, I completely agree with the decision you made not to go further. Because I think sometimes it can take away from the point you're trying to make. And I think you definitely got what you needed to across. Because it was like a Oh, I was like, almost like a breath of relief for I was like, yes, fight back. And she did. And I was just like, oh yes. And it was like, still so harrowing. And so like, the minute it was, I think, as a girl and as women, universally, even reading something which the minute she left that like tab in the bar, I knew, and I was just like, oh. And it was so well done. And I definitely think you made the right choice there to go. Where can we kind of put a pin in it to make it so impactful? And I think that definitely, definitely landed. So one of the things definitely did here is, obviously, there's, like, so many influences here. You've got the gender politics, you've got this aspect. Of the men taking a backseat. And one of the things that we touched on was how the women have very, very distinct voices. And one of them that I really liked was I don't know if I'm gonna pronounce it right, because this is what happens when you read, is that you pronounce things wrong and feel, yeah, yeah. Violanna?

Georgia Leighton 27:02
Violanna,

G Gemma Mathers 27:02

Violanna, her chapters in particular, really stood out to me because it it was a very interesting take that I almost didn't expect initially. With her, obviously, you have the two sisters, and they're separated. And it was her relationship to Talia that really interested me, because she seems someone who is so lost in her grief that she almost can't give everything to her, to this daughter that she still has, that is still here. How was that for you to write, and what kind of was the thought process there of that relationship between the two of them? Yeah, oh, I'm so pleased that you liked her, because I think a lot of people don't, which is fine as well. Like, that's fine, you know, if that's how readers feel, and then when they read it, that's fine. But I really like her, and feel a lot of sympathy and empathy for her, but obviously having written her, but, yeah, I think a lot of people kind of think that she is, like, horrible to her, to her remaining child, and doesn't kind of like give her the love that she deserves, which is true. But I, I suppose I kind of echo, I guess what I was saying earlier was that in the ken her case, so she's the queen who has had the two daughters. I really wanted to explore what it would feel or kind of ask myself, what would that really feel like if you had kind of, even if it was to save the child, but you'd sent one of your children away for kind of forever? And yeah, I don't want to go into too much like kind of plot things, but if you know, if part of the reason that this terrible thing had happened had something to do with you, and, and how would that guilt manifest and, and what would you, how would you treat the child that's left behind with you? And I kind of, yeah, I suppose I thought a lot about trauma and kind of how that would manifest and play out in a real kind of mother daughter relationship. And so that's kind of where, where I, where I sort of came from with her in that, I guess, from from my perspective, she she loves her daughters both equally, and she loves, she does love Talia, but she is just unable, because of what's happened, to give her the very kind of loving, clear relationship that she would like to definitely, I definitely felt that reading it, I was I'm Interested to know that people don't like her

because, me, it was like I I think when people go through grief and different traumas, obviously everyone reacts to different and maybe people would think that the rational thing to do be to cling on to this child that you have and hold her as close as you can. But I think in this case, it maybe that's too painful, and maybe she can't and like that. When I was reading it, that was and. You go. There were points where I was just like, please just hold just tell her. But then also you completely understand it, where you're like, she can't. I thought that was, it was a really interesting take on it for me, because I think maybe the safer thing to do would have been to have that and to go, I'm going to hold her really tightly. And I thought it was a really interesting narrative structure to go, she can't. And I did really, really enjoy it. One of the things I particularly like with a retelling is, how is it, kind of approaching it? Because it's like, what novels take a lot of time, and they take a lot of, like, research, almost, and it's a lot of world building. You had a really interesting magic system here. I thought, what was it like, kind of starting to write it? Was it kind of like, a lot of watching Sleeping Beauty, a lot of reading sleep beauty? Was it like, you know what you want to do with it? How can we change it? I'm just interested to see how a retelling would work.

G

Georgia Leighton 30:50

Yeah, I so, I think I so I knew the fairy tale of Sleeping Beauty fairly well, and had also read quite a lot of retellings just over the years, just because I really enjoy retellings. So Angela Carter has a lot of retellings. I actually, can't actually remember whether she has a specific Sleeping Beauty retelling, but she has a lot of feminist retellings of fairy tales, as I'm sure you know, you know. And so I was really familiar with the kind of the bare bones of the story, and I just had had this idea for a long time about what would happen if there were two princesses. Basically, that was kind of my idea, what would happen if the because, like I said, I've always been really interested in twins, and the kind of dynamic between siblings just generally interests me quite a lot. And, yeah, I wondered what would, what would have happened if the queen had another child secretly that no one else kind of knew about, and then they decided to swap them. And that was kind of, I guess, the kind of the sort of nugget, the beginning of the idea, and then world that I then sort of ran with and kind of took, you know, I sort of knew with the retelling. I sort of knew the kind of the bare bones of the story, and that, you know, the curse takes place a number of years pass, and we have to have the kind of the big showdown, as it were, for the curse to kind of come to fruition. So I sort of knew roughly, kind of the shape of the story, I guess, and then, and I was just kind of filling in the details. And then, although, one thing I would say, though, is that that did hold a couple of, like, tricky narrative things, I guess, because that's guite a lot of time that you need to feel like, as in, it's like many years that you have to wait for the princess to be old enough to, you know, from birth to, like, 16 years. And in the, in the, you know, in the Disney version, they just sort of, we have, like a musical number, and the years have passed, whereas, yeah, I wanted to, kind of Yeah. I wanted to know what they would do, you know, to fill in what they were all the characters were doing in that time. So, yeah, so it was challenging in that way, but but also fun as well. And then world building wise, I just absolutely love world building in fantasy novels. It's one of the My Favorite Things to read is, you know, when I think that an author has just written a really good world, I love it. So approaching that was so, actually, so fun. I really enjoyed it. And kind of thinking through, you know, what this country, what the culture would be like, and what the kind of countries around it would be like, and what would be the political atmosphere that the whole kind of story was taking place in. I really enjoyed all of that. But I guess for me, What I enjoyed most was, I guess, trying to kind of depict maybe what a lot of us have in our real lives, in that there is a kind of whole, sort of, like other world around us, and a kind of political atmosphere that we're living in. But it doesn't always necessarily affect our day to day, if you know what I

mean, oh yeah, definitely. That's what I was kind of trying to portray in the story, as well as there's, you know, there's wars going on, and there's kind of other aspects at play in the background of their lives, but they're not actively taking part in these things in the same way that we probably don't either, but we're aware of them happening, and they do kind of change the course of of our day to day in a kind of indirect way. So that's kind of what I was kind of trying to do.

G Gemma Mathers 34:23

I that that is very, very true. That's one of the things I liked, especially having multiple point of views here, is that they're all, like, invested in it, in different areas, and they're in like, different ways. And almost like sales character is like out in the world, very much trying to, like, almost run from it. She's just like must do what I need to do, whereas others are like, lost in it, or they're like, built around it. And what, like the dynamic you mentioned earlier with the Queen and the lady in waiting, and how almost they flip at some points because like circumstances that happen in the book that I won't go into because of spoilers, but I thought it was. Really interesting thing to do, to say you because you are so right that, like, there, God, there's so much going on in the world, politically and everything, and there's, well, everything, wars, politics, all of that stuff. But day to day, you just get up, you go to work, you come home, you do whatever you do in your day, and you don't sit there all day going, this is happening right now. And I really felt that through the book where it's like, it's, you can see where it's influencing them, and when the structures coming in without them being like, broken into turmoil all the time. So definitely that was, like, very well done. I really liked it. Thank you. I think some people find it a bit annoying, which I do understand. They were like, why they have all these wars going like, I want to be on the battlefield. I want to be like, out there seeing which I which I do, I do get but that was kind of like the opposite of what I was trying to do. Yeah, no, I liked it, though, because it's, like, it's, it's a different take. I think for a lot of books like this, like, there are so many ways they're completely thrown in. And sometimes it's nice to have the opposite side of it, because you are right in that we don't day to day, we're not at war, and we're not doing this or whatever, like I'm at work, I'm taking care of my family, although like things like this. No, I really, I really did, really like that. So one of the things I wanted to ask is probably every author's like, least favorite question. But what's next? Is there any other retellings that you have in mind will always be a retelling. Is there a potential for another spellbound, even though I did get the vibe it would be a stand alone, but I really liked it.

G Georgia Leighton 36:28

Well, I know how the story continues with spellbound, so you know, we'll see what happens there. But yes, there's definitely. I've written another, another novel, and it's a retelling. It's within the same world, but a different country, which, again, has been really fun to like, zoom in on different part of the world and kind of remake, recreate a whole new kind of culture. And that's been really fun. And it's a, it is a retelling. I just really love writing, and it's, I think I can say it's a retelling of George and the Dragon, but there are no knights that come into

G Gemma Mathers 37:05

I don't think I've ever heard of a retelling of George and the Dragon.

- Georgia Leighton 37:09
 Oh, wow, that's good.
- Gemma Mathers 37:12

I'll keep my eyes peeled for that, because that sounds very exciting. Thank you. Touching on a fantasy book, one like for me, absolute requirement in a fancy book is a map. And I know there's a map and spell, how am I an important decision?

Georgia Leighton 37:29

Oh,100% I, you know, I said I absolutely love the cover that the Trans World of crazy. I think it's really beautiful with all of my nerdy fantasy dreams come true, but, but I, but I even, even though I love it so much, I was, like, most excited about the map.

G Gemma Mathers 37:46

So I'm like, any fantasy book, I'll like open it, and if there's not a map, do I even bother? Where's the map? Look at this so exciting. So I have two final questions. One's a bit more publishing related, and the other one's book plated. So what advice would you give to anyone who wants to become an author, or is writing and wants to get published, or is just looking to start writing in any in any way?

Georgia Leighton 38:10

Yeah, I would say, do it. Just do it and and have if you can have fun with it, because it is really fun and I think that everybody has a story to tell. And, yeah, it's hard, I think, to sit down sometimes and to, like, kind of have the motivation, and not even the motivation, just like the confidence. Sometimes you could just lose your own worst enemy. But so I would say, Just do it. Just go for it. And also, I'd say, if you want to kind of improve your writing, or that's what I'm always trying to do, is to just read loads, you know, read, read in the areas that you want to write in. So whether that's like a specific genre, or something like that, or even read in the areas that you don't want to write in, either. Because I think that there's just there's just so much that you can learn from other other people's craft. So I guess those would be my main pieces of advice, and just don't give up as well. Just keep going. Definitely

G Gemma Mathers 39:13

One of my favorite things, which I actually got from one of my professors at Holloway, was I was talking to him about writing a book and drafting. He just looked at me, when a first draft is supposed to be bad, he was like, that's what it's for. It's just, he's like, just get it all down on the page and worry about it later. And that was, like, the greatest thing I'd ever heard, because I

was just like, What do you mean? This first thing doesn't have to be the absolute best thing I've ever written. Has to agree, yeah, yeah. And it's like, he's like, it doesn't have to be good, but it has to be there. And that was, like, the best thing I'd ever heard, good. My last question was for what advice would you give to anyone who is looking to break into publishing or just looking to get into the industry in general? Because it is kind of quite. Well known as quite hard industry to crack, especially these days. So yeah, what advice would you give to any publishing hopefuls?

Georgia Leighton 40:07

Definitely. I would say, please keep applying, because we, yeah, we want a real diverse range of people in publishing and yeah, and all the kind of talent across many different areas. I would say, try to get work experience, if you can that is so important and just really helpful and will just kind of give you a really good understanding of what you want to do in publishing. Because I think automatically, everybody thinks about editorial, of course, but there are so many different roles that are suited to all sorts of different kind of personalities and expertise. And yeah, you don't have to just work work in editorial. So if you can get exp work experience and working other departments, then do and again, I think, bit similar to the writing advice, I would say, just keep reading like read lots. Because, you know, one thing that I think would always, would always impress an interviewer, is a passion for for books and for the particularly if you are able to kind of demonstrate a passion for the books that they publish, I think that that goes a huge, a long way as well. So yeah, I guess that that would be my advice.

G Gemma Mathers 41:21

Thank you so much for that. That was great. And for everyone listening, spell bound comes out, well next week, for us, when you're listening to this, it will very likely already be out. So yeah, I'll put a link in the bio and just go, go check it out, buy the book. It's really, really good. And thank you so so much for coming on the podcast Georgia.

Georgia Leighton 41:39

Oh well, thank you so much for having me. I've had such a great time.

G Gemma Mathers 41:43

Oh, I'm glad. Thank you everyone for listening. Thank you for listening to inside publishing. I've been your host, Gemma. If you enjoyed this episode, please rate and review us on Apple podcasts Spotify, or wherever you listen to your podcasts, it really helps us to reach more people. Also feel free to let us know your thoughts on social media or send suggestions our way at podcast.syp@gmail.com. See you next time you.