

LitTea Episode 16: Jessica Lewis/Jazz Taylor

- Sabrina [Upbeat music begins and fades] Hi friends! Welcome back to LitTea! I'm your host, Sabrina Lotfi, and I'm thrilled to be joined today for episode 16 by Jessica Lewis, the author of the young adult novels *Bad Witch Burning* and the forthcoming *Monstrous*. Jessica also writes middle grade as Jazz Taylor. *Meow or Never* is out now, and her newest, *Starting from Scratch*, comes out tomorrow, April 4th! [Upbeat music ends]
- Sabrina Hi!
- Jessica Hello!
- Sabrina Please ignore my really messy office. I'm so sorry.
- Jessica That's okay. There's nothing wrong with that.
- Sabrina I know. I'm like, I just don't have the time, right this minute, and that's a character wall, but... [Both laugh.]
- Jessica Oh, that's cool. I've never done a character wall.
- Sabrina I like them. They're pretty fun. But I have terrible - I don't remember what it's called, but, you know, the, like, when you close your eyes, can you see a picture? I cannot see the pictures.
- Jessica Oh, okay.
- Sabrina But, you know what that's called? Do you remember?
- Jessica I don't, but I remember seeing it going around Twitter. Like, 'What do you see, like the apple or', like?
- Sabrina Yes, exactly. Like, the whole Apple. And then, some people go and be like, 'Yes, but the apple's on a hand and, like, someone's eating it.' I'm like, 'Seriously. y'all see that much, in your head?'
- Jessica I just tried to, like, see that. I can't see it either.
- Sabrina Is it just totally? I mean, mine's just like, blank.
- Jessica Yeah. Like I understand the concept, but not, like, I can't see the picture.
- Sabrina Me either. I typically think in, like, words.
- Jessica Yeah.

- Sabrina Okay, that's interesting.
- Jessica Yeah, but I do, I think it helps if I have music, because I choreograph fight scenes to music.
- Sabrina Oh that's so cool!
- Jessica Yeah. So like, I imagine it being, like, a music video. I think that helps. But just like...
- Sabrina That's awesome!
- Jessica But just like yeah, if I'm just thinking about it, it's much harder.
- Sabrina That's really cool. Do you do music for everything, or just for fight scenes?
- Jessica Um, well I don't know. I'm thinking. I'm like trying to analyze my process here. Um, I guess like music really, really, really helps. But I can think of scenes and stuff, like, without it.
- Sabrina All right, you ready to do this thing for real?
- Jessica I'm ready.
- Sabrina What book made you a reader?
- Jessica Well, I've always loved to read. Even at a young age, it was my favorite pastime. But I remember, distinctly really loving *The Maximum Ride* series. Have you ever heard of that?
- Sabrina Yes, I love *Maximum Ride*.
- Jessica Yes! That was one of my favorite books, of all time. And then, that was when I started trying to, like, write, really badly disguised fan fiction about it, so... [Laughs.]
- Sabrina Did you do the other one, the adult one, that's like, also, about only Max with wings, I'm pretty sure?
- Jessica Yes! Which was such a weirdest thing. The weird adult one came first.
- Sabrina Did the adult come first?
- Jessica Yeah, and then, he was like 'Oh you know what? This would be so much better as YA. Let me just like do it over.'
- Sabrina It is good as YA. Did you finish the whole series?

- Jessica No, I think I just read the first one of the adult one, and then I read a bunch of *The Maximum Ride*, like YA ones, but I don't think I ever finished.
- Sabrina I think they were, they're still coming out of like, every once in a while. I'm like, 'Oh, it's done.' And then a new one comes out.
- Jessica Oh wow. Okay, I didn't even know that.
- Sabrina But yeah, I don't remember finishing them either. That's why I was wondering if you finished them.
- Jessica Yeah, I think I read three - question mark. Maybe. But I did really love them.
- Sabrina Were you gonna say anymore? I kind of jumped in there. I got really excited about *Maximum Ride* with you.
- Jessica No, that was the main one. And then, like, of course, I have memories of, like, kid books that stick with me, like *Hank the Cowdog*, and *Goosebumps*, and stuff like that. But *Maximum Ride* is the one that made me a writer, for sure.
- Sabrina Okay, cool. That's so fun. Okay. So do you have any hobbies or interests, like, outside of writing, that you feel like sharing with us? And also, I love pets, and you love pets.
- Jessica Yes. So I am a huge anime fan. Just huge. And so, my current favorite right now is 'Bluelock'. I'm watching that, which is about soccer. I don't know the first thing about soccer, but you know what?
- Sabrina I don't know either, but that's okay.
- Jessica It's almost better that you don't know, because then, like, whenever they do like a cool soccer move you just like, don't know, like what it is. So, you're just, like, 'Wow, that's so cool!'
- Sabrina No, that's true. Well, and also, I mean it doesn't, I mean, who cares? As long as you're into it, and you're having fun watching, then that's all that matters.
- Jessica Exactly. So yeah, I watch I mainly like fantasy anime, but every once in a while I'll do Slice of Life where - I guess soccer now - so just whatever comes up. I mean whatever's good. It'll like, you know, I don't mind watching. And then, as far as pets, I don't have any official pets. But I do feed two stray cats. And, one of them's Butter and one of them is Thomas. They're pretty funny.
- Sabrina I thought those were your cats. I see them on your Twitter feed all the time.
- Jessica Yeah. But they're technically not mine. But also, like, I took them to the vet to get them fixed and shots. So, like, they're kind of mine.

- Sabrina I'm pretty sure you've been adopted.
- Jessica Oh yeah. Like even now they're sleeping on my porch, so.
- Sabrina Butter and Thomas. Butter is such a cute kitty name. That's a really cute one.
- Jessica I know. The best thing is I did not name either of these. So they came with these names. So yeah, my aunt named Butter. And then Thomas. My coworker used to live near me and then when she moved, she like told me about a stray cat and I was like, 'That's - that's the cat I feed.' She's like, 'Oh my goodness. I'm so glad that you're taking care of him,' and so I just use her name for him.
- Sabrina That's cute. Oh, that's cute that y'all shared.
- Jessica Yeah.
- Sabrina Do you want to get into some querying questions?
- Jessica Sure.
- Sabrina Have you had more than one agent before?
- Jessica No, I've only had one agent. But Holly, somehow she has not fired me. I am very chaotic, like as a client. So sometimes I'll just, like, email her at 3:00 a.m. 'Like, hey, I have a book idea. Here it is. I wrote the whole book. Here you go.'
- Sabrina You can email any time of day. Email is a 24/7 thing, that is fine, and that's awesome that you're producing like that. I love that.
- Jessica Yeah, she um, she just lets me do whatever, which I'm really grateful for.
- Sabrina That's awesome. That's what you need, you know. Free rein to let your creativity go.
- Jessica Oh yeah, for sure. Because, like, sometimes I'm just not feeling it and then I'll write something else in, like, a different genre, or category, and then she's usually just like 'Yeah, that's good.'
- Sabrina Typically what I'll do before I, like, nail down what I'm working on. I'll end up, 'Oh, I'm gonna play with this a little bit and I'm gonna play with this a little, and oh my God, I don't know which one I want.'
- Jessica Yeah.
- Sabrina Do you ever do that or do you just...?

- Jessica I have a lot of ideas, which is kind of annoying. So it's so hard to figure out. Because since publishing is so slow, it's so hard for me to be like, 'Okay, this is the one that I want to focus on for two and a half years.' You know, I always want to be busy, and, like, working on the next thing.
- Sabrina Do you write pieces of each of them, or do you make the decision and then start going on them?
- Jessica I outline everything. So then I can just pick it up whenever I get time.
- Sabrina Oh wow. That's awesome. That's really smart. I usually just jot down like the one sentence of the idea and then I'm like, 'Well that looks overwhelming' because I have so much work to do on all of them.
- Jessica I get that too.
- Sabrina Okay. So, do you want to walk everybody through your path to getting your agent, and whatever you're comfortable sharing?
- Jessica Yeah. Okay. So let me see. When do I want to start? I think I kind of, like, I've always loved writing, but then I kind of quit when I went to college, because I was on track to be a veterinarian. And I just didn't have time. I was studying all the time and I'm really not good at math. So like, you know, I had to, like, live in my math professor's office. So, I just didn't have time to write, but in my junior year, I think, I was starting to realize that I just did not have what it took to be a veterinarian. And instead of studying for biochemistry, I finished my first ever novel. I failed the exam. I did finish that first novel. [Laughs.]
- Sabrina I mean, it did start your path to where you are at now. So, I mean, that's fine.
- Jessica Yeah, so it's, it is funny looking back, but at the time, I was just like, really nervous about it. I was like, 'Oh man, like what have I done?'
- Sabrina That's fair.
- Jessica But that's I just like, yeah, I just really enjoy the process. At the time I didn't, I didn't read a bunch either, because I just didn't have time to read or write. So, I didn't know, like, the genre conventions. And I also didn't know that zombies were on the way out, so it was a zombie book. But that book is very important to me because I - it taught me how to write. So I traded with like, probably over 50 people, like, I edited their manuscript and they sent me feedback on mine. And then I was very happy with the end result, which I think, probably took me like two years to get it there.
- Sabrina Did you...? Sorry, you said you traded with a lot of people. Did you do it in chunks? I mean you didn't wait for each, and then do revisions on each? How did that work? Did you do a whole big chunk of 50, or ...?

- Jessica No, I think I did it in waves. So like I would send to 10 people, and then I would be, while I'm working on their 10 books, and they would send me their feedback. And then, after I got everybody, then I would see the trends, like, what was working, what wasn't working. That sort of stuff.
- Sabrina So, okay, that's so smart. Okay, cool.
- Jessica Yeah. So I don't know if I recommend doing that, but that is what I did, just to like, learn how to do it. And, I think getting feedback was good, but editing other people - that really helped me more than anything, because it was, I was able to realize what I liked as a writer, and what I responded to. And, like, if somebody did something that made me feel something, then I would write that down, so I'd remember it. Like, okay, this person made me cry here and here's why. I just like being very reflective and like consuming as much as I could. So, that was always really helpful for me.
- Sabrina I swear every time I do a critique on a new book, I get a little bit better at it. So that's, I was gonna say I bet that was super beneficial going through all of those projects, and giving feedback on each of them. And also seeing how people - I mean that's a lot of people to get feedback from, and, like, see what types of feedback can even be given. That's really daunting I feel like, and not something you necessarily like learn straight off the bat at the very beginning, so...
- Jessica Yeah. And it made me realize that pretty much it was unanimous. Nobody ever complained about my character's voice. Everyone always really loved it. So that's where I realized like, 'Okay, I'm good at voice'. And I honed, you know, all my skills on everything else. But voice I always knew to, like stay true to, like, 'That is good. I don't need to touch that.' I don't need to, like, if one person doesn't like it, then I don't need to bend, because the other 49 do, so...
- Jessica Yeah, I know that's really smart. I like getting being able to, like, compare the different and, like, 'Okay well only one person said this one thing, and everybody else liked it.' So, if I don't necessarily agree with it right now, then I'm like 'Okay, well maybe I'll just stick that in that pile for a little bit.' If it's something I agree with I'll typically change it, even if it's just one person if I'm like, 'Oh yes.' but...
- Sabrina Yeah, it can be really hard.
- Jessica Which is why I did - I'm glad I did that because it really helps me like, figure out who I was as a writer - if that makes sense - like what I wanted to say, how I wanted to say it, and what works and what doesn't. And then by the time I was ready to query, then I had a very firm idea of what I wanted to do and what I wanted this book to say.
- Sabrina And, this was the zombie book?
- Jessica Yes.

- Sabrina Okay.
- Jessica So I queried, I ended up querying 64 agents over a year, maybe a year and a half. It went nowhere. I got quite a few full requests. I did pretty well in like contests and like things like that, but basically the problem with that book was that the structure was not right. And also the zombie aspect was not good for that current climate.
- Sabrina It's still there.
- Jessica I mean, you know, that book always holds a special place in my heart. But the funny thing was I wasn't reading, but I was watching a lot of anime, and so the book, the structure, ended up kind of feeling like anime.
- Sabrina Oh, that's interesting.
- Jessica Yeah. And so the media that I was consuming the most, that's how it ended up being, so... I was like, 'Oh man, well, jokes on me.' [Laughs.]
- Sabrina It happens. That's cool though. I bet that's interesting.
- Jessica Yeah, like looking back on it is very interesting to like see, 'Okay, this is what this episodic, just like an anime would be.' So then, so I called it quits on that one, after 64 agents. It's just, you know, I was tired, and querying is honestly the worst thing. That's the worst part of the process to me. Submission was, like, nothing compared to querying. So then I wrote another book and that one was a contemporary fantasy, kind of a comedy. It was like from the bad guy's side kick point of view. Very fun, but I ended up not querying that one because I could sense that there was something wrong with it, but I didn't have the skill set yet to know what it was. And so I just felt like, you know, before exposing my heart to more rejections it was just better for me to just shelve that one. So I never queried that one. And then, my third book, it was called *Wildfire*. But it's now *Bad Witch Burning* because that's the one that did it. Third time's the charm. That one got into Pitch Wars, and so I worked with a mentor. She really helped me, like big time, because the book was, I entered. It was like 54k and then it came out as 83k, so I had quite a bit of revision to do.
- Sabrina Wow, hang on, I just I'm so bad at math so that took me a minute. I don't know if you saw my face while I was doing that, because... [Laughs.] Okay wait, did you say 54k to 83?
- Jessica Yeah.
- Sabrina Wow. Okay, yeah that's a lot. That's a lot of writing in the short little Pitch Wars window.
- Jessica It's like two months. Pitch Wars is like two months.

Sabrina Uh-huh.. yeah.

Jessica So, but then after that, I sent it to my now agent, and she offered, and the rest is history.

Sabrina How did that querying process go? Like, how many people did you send out to? Do you remember?

Jessica Um, I think it was 28.

Sabrina Okay.

Jessica And I had three offers.

Sabrina Okay.

Jessica So yeah.

Sabrina Yeah, awesome. Well and it clearly worked out wonderfully.

Jessica Yes. So glad. Thank goodness.

Sabrina I'm so, okay. What kind of things did you add? Can we go back to that? That was so interesting. That adding the, is that 30k? I think that's 30k.

Jessica Yeah, it's about 30. Yeah. So that one is *Bad Witch Burning* and the elevator pitch is like a girl raises the dead for money. So, in the beginning, um, that's pretty much all it was. So it was just like a very, like, bare-bones, no subplots that, I just had the plot. And so then when I did Pitch Wars, I did a subplot with her mother. So, her mother is like, very manipulative and abusive and that was not in the book at first.

Sabrina Oh okay.

Jessica Yeah, her mother was like a non-character. Like she changed a lot from that first version to the second. Yeah her mother didn't like do anything. She was kind of like a doormat, but then I changed her to be, like, very manipulative and more of an active character. But yeah, I think actually I also added more of Mike in Pitch Wars.

Sabrina Oh Mike. I did love Mike, too. I did love Mike.

Jessica Yeah. He's one of my favorites. I love Mike.

Sabrina I just remember being like, 'Oh, I'm so glad that there's a Mike in the story for her' Like, she needed a Mike, she needed a Mike.

- Jessica Like her world was just so heavy, but she just needed somebody just be on her side.
- Sabrina All of those things that you just said too, without giving any spoilers about anything. They just all really wove well together throughout the entire story.
- Jessica Yeah, I'm really glad. It was definitely the right call. Like, my mentor, she definitely knew what she was talking about.
- Sabrina That's so cool. Okay, that's really awesome to hear, and like, really interesting. So it was just deepening subplots it sounds like.
- Jessica Yes! The main plot did not change at all. It was subplot, and like, world-building, strengthening characters, that sort of thing, but the plot stayed the same.
- Sabrina So after Pitch Wars, and after you signed with Holly, what kind of revisions did you do? Is she really editorial? Or did you kind of go on sub pretty quickly?
- Jessica Holly is not editorial. So, which I think works for me, because I don't like a lot of feedback in my work. Now that I've, like, learned how to do it in my process. I prefer very little hands in the fire.
- Sabrina So, not a 50 girl anymore?
- Jessica No, I'm not a 50 girl anymore. I know what I'm doing now. But Holly, she, I think we had like a one-round. It was not big because I was just coming off of a huge round for Pitch Wars. Just like cleaning up some things. I did have like a small plot hole, so I filled that in, and then like that was it I think and not very long. It took me like two or three weeks to do, and then we went on sub.
- Sabrina What was the submission process like for you?
- Jessica Um I hate to say this because it was - this is not normal - but it was very easy.
- Sabrina No, that's okay. Everybody's process is different and we all cope with them differently. Like you said querying was harder for you than being on sub, and like, sometimes that's the case and that's okay. Nothing wrong with that.
- Jessica Yeah, so basically I said 'Holly, don't talk to me unless there's good news. Like, lose my number. Don't even think about me unless you have something good to tell me.'
- Sabrina Did you hear about requests, or no? Did you just want the offer call at the end?
- Jessica No, I did not hear a thing, nothing. I was just, like, chilling. I was getting ready for a vacation, and it took about a month. So, three weeks into the process, she called me. And I was 'Oh my God!', and so, I had to leave work.

- Sabrina 'I'm not supposed to hear from you!'
- Jessica Yeah, I know. And she was like, 'Good news, you have an offer.' So, then I was going on vacation, like that next week. She called me while I was on vacation, and we ironed out the details in the offer, and everything. And then, I accepted pretty soon after that. So, the whole process took about five weeks.
- Sabrina Okay. That's fun. How long until you got to announce?
- Jessica Oh, I don't remember. It was a while back. [Laughs.]
- Sabrina Okay.
- Jessica Three months, four months?
- Sabrina Okay. That's not too bad.
- Jessica Yeah, I remember, I had not signed the contract, but she was like, 'Let's go ahead and announce.' Oh, but she also - my editor - she told me that we had to change the title so we announced without a title.
- Sabrina Okay, I was about to ask that because I was gonna say you had a title change. When was that? Was that after...
- Jessica She told me up front, she was like, 'You've got to change the title because we already have a *Wildfire* coming out. That's kind of like, six months ahead of you, so you can't use it. That's like no.
- Sabrina That's okay. You have a great title. You have a really excellent title, it's so good.
- Jessica Thank you. I appreciate it. It's better than *Wildfire*, I think. But at the time I was devastated because I'm really bad at titling things. Like, it takes me months.
- Sabrina So how did the titling go? Did it get shopped around by a bunch of people? Like, how much - did you have to sit there and make a huge list and have a backup?
- Yep. And then I sent it to Holly. She's like, 'I don't like any of these.' I was like, 'No!' I sent some to my editor. She was like 'No, I don't like these either.' I mean, it took months for us to figure it out.
- Sabrina Oh no, oh man. Titles are - they're so hard.
- Jessica They are.
- Sabrina That's almost worse. That probably is worse than writing the book. I mean just sitting there thinking a list of titles, like, forever. Like, at least when you're working on scenes, things are moving.

Jessica Yeah, not fun. Not my favorite.

Sabrina Oh my gosh. Okay. So I love the, it wasn't specifically marketed as advice, but what you said about just you only wanted to hear the good things and you didn't want to hear anything else being on sub, but that it made it easier. How did you handle waiting during querying and stuff? Like, do you have any tips on protecting your mental health?

Jessica It was so painful for me. I mean, gosh like, I don't even like to think about it, it was so painful. The waiting was really hard. The not knowing if you're good enough was really hard. The endless, like, 'Oh, if I if I had just done, like, one word different on my query letter, maybe that would have been a request.' It's made me feel psychotic. It was horrible. But, what I ended up doing that, I liked for *Wildfire, Bad Witch Burning*. I had a separate email for querying, and I still use it now. So my email that I sent out to agents, I only checked it once a day, and I didn't check it at all if I wasn't feeling up to a rejection.

Sabrina Okay.

Jessica So yeah, I took it off my phones, so I could not access it unless I was at home on my computer.

Sabrina That's smart.

Jessica So that really helps. In fact, I have that rule now. So, like when a publisher reaches out to me, unless something's on fire, I will get to you after work. Like I will not be, like, available during these certain hours.

Sabrina Okay.

Jessica So that really helps, to like, have that boundary and just like, 'Okay at work I'm doing work, and then when I get home I can be writing, so...'

Sabrina Probably your job appreciates that, too. [Laughs.]

Jessica Oh yeah, for sure. Because it's like, you know, if you get an email at 2:00, or whatever, like, I can't do anything about it until I get home anyway. So, I might as well just not even look at it.

Sabrina Do you need a special day about it before you can actually do anything with it? Yeah. If it's stressful.

Jessica Yeah, I've gotta think.

Sabrina And, honestly, like, sometimes the really exciting stuff can be really stressful too, I feel like.

- Jessica Yes, I feel like everything is stressful. It's just like, is it good stress or bad stress?
- Sabrina That's so true! I'm with you 100%. [Laughs.]
- Jessica Yeah, it is.
- Sabrina It's all so stressful.
- Jessica Yeah, so definitely do the email - separate email. Be very like militant about it. And then, at the time, when I was querying, I would have to, like, bribe myself to check my email because, like, it usually had a rejection in it. I would be like 'If you check your email today, you can have, like, some candy,' or something like that.
- Sabrina And then also, at the same time, you actually do wanta check it, because like, if you get a request, you don't want it to be sitting there for three months.
- Jessica Yeah, true. The - my very first full request for this book, for Wildfire, I didn't see it for two days.
- Sabrina Oh, wow.
- Jessica Yep, I didn't. Yeah, I just was not feeling up to a rejection and it was, like, 'Surprise! It's not a rejection.'
- Sabrina Well, you did the Showcase, too. How did you do in Showcase?
- Jessica Um, pretty good. I think I got 20 something agents who were interested. Yeah, but I didn't query everyone, and I was very particular about what I wanted. I wanted somebody like Holly, who could take all of my ideas, who didn't mind if I hopped genres, who was very like, she represented everything, like my full scope. I wanted that agent, I didn't want to have to get like a kid lit agent and an adult agent, you know? So I was very particular about who I sent to. So, even if agents were, like, very nice people, and I think that they did good work. Like, if they only accepted kid lit, then I did not send to them, because I wanted to write adult books, too.
- Sabrina Yeah, no, that makes sense. Then, I mean if you don't have to go agent hunting again, then you really don't want to, probably.
- Jessica I was very determined not to do this again. Yeah. As miserable as it was. I just like, I can't. I just do not want to do that ever again.
- Sabrina One super exciting thing that we have not talked about on this podcast, with anybody before, is IP's. And then, this stands for Intellectual Property. Am I wrong?
- Jessica And no, you're right.

- Sabrina Okay. Do you want to explain to everybody what that is?
- Jessica Okay, so Intellectual Property is when the idea does not or, or property does not belong to you. So, in my case, well, a lot of it is like 'Star Wars', or like 'Marvel', or something like that. They need somebody to write this story. So they hire you. But for me, it's just that Scholastic, my publisher, came up with the idea and they needed somebody to write their idea.
- Sabrina That's so cool. Okay, so how does that go into play? So obviously somebody comes up with the idea, and then they want an author for it. So, did they reach out to you directly? Is that something you talk to your agent about ahead of time? In a 'Like this is something I'd be interested in doing. Can you be on the lookout?' How does that work?
- Jessica Yeah, so for my case, Scholastic reached out to Holly, because they had worked with her before. And so, they're like, 'We know that you have, I'm sure you have authors who would like to do this. So if you have anyone just like let us know.' And so, then she asked me if I wanted to, and I was like, 'Yeah, sure.' So for them I had to audition. So they gave me the idea, and then I had to write the first two chapters, and a synopsis. And so, then after Olivia - who is my editor - she said, 'Oh yeah, I like this. Can you make the following changes?' So I did and I sent it back in, then she's like, 'Okay great. Then we'll move forward with you.'
- Sabrina Okay. That's really interesting. So they have the idea but you write the synopsis. So how big of an idea is it that you get that you bounce off of? Can you share that?
- Jessica Yeah, they gave me a lot of freedom. Um, hold on. Let me see if I can find the actual idea they gave me. And I'll just, like, read it to you.
- Sabrina This is so cool. [Laughs.] Was this after you sold *Bad Witch Burning*?
- Jessica Um, yes, it was.
- Sabrina Okay.
- Jessica But this one came out first, so...
- Sabrina Publishing is so weird.
- Jessica Oh yeah, actually there's quite a bit so they gave me quite a few. Okay, so here's what they said. 'Lonely, seventh-grader Avery likes to hang out in the back of the theater to avoid lunchtime crowd at her school. She moved at the beginning of the year, to find that all the clics were pretty much in place, and nobody needed another awkward, shy friend, not even the drama kids.'

Jessica She's done crew for the past couple of years and loves working behind the scenes. But at her old school, the cast and crew were always great friends. Here, there seems to be a divide, and she has yet to find an in with the rest of the drama group. To her surprise, when she explores behind the stage, she finds a cat tucked away in a nook. It doesn't seem to mind Avery's company in there, and is there day after day. Avery names her Phantom, and tells her all her secrets. She even sometimes sings to her which gets Phantom purring every time. When she is singing to Phantom after school one day, one of the other girls, Nic, overhears her and tells the drama teacher Avery has to be cast in the Valentine's play. Even though it's a resource nightmare to be in front of the crowd, she gets pushed into auditioning, and is cast as the lead. Not only does she hate the spotlight, she doesn't want to do the fake kiss with the boy at the end. She's pretty sure she'll never have any interest in kissing any boy, pretend or otherwise. On the other hand, she and Nic, who plays her best friend, start to get closer. Though Avery can't give up her secret about Phantom. The cat is the only one Avery feels comfortable practicing in front of, and every time her stage fright gets bad, she gets Phantom to calm right down. But then, she finds evidence that someone else is taking care of Phantom, too. Avery can't take Phantom home, because her brother is super allergic. But what if someone else knows, and Phantom gets taken away? Avery's secrets about Phantom and about having feelings for Nic, start to catch up to her. What will happen if the truth comes out?' So, that's what the publisher sent me.

Sabrina That is a lot and also not a lot. That's really interesting.

Jessica Yeah. So like, I had to stick to details, like the, all the character names are there. And then, like, obviously there's a crush - first crush - and we have, like, her brother's allergic to cats. Like that kind of stuff I had to stick to.

Sabrina Yeah, there's a lot of character in there, and there's not a ton of plot points. But there are definitely some key plot points, that you can, 'Okay, this is obviously gonna be a scene' Okay, this is obviously gonna need to be a scene.' That's really great.

Jessica Yeah, so very, very cool. I, the reason I was surprised to see that is because with every cat book, they give smaller and smaller. [Laughs.] I was very surprised to see that it was, I'd forgotten that they gave me so much of it, so...

Sabrina That's funny. Oh, okay, you're little, your synopsis that they give you for the next book gets smaller.

Jessica It gets smaller and smaller.

Sabrina Okay, well by that point, you don't probably need as much character work on anybody...

Jessica Yeah, I think they kind of, like, trust me. They're just like, 'Just do it.'

- Sabrina Just do the next one. Yes, that's fair. Okay, so on your newer ones, do you get more of like a broad like overall plot, kind of?
- Jessica Um, yes, yeah. So with the one that's coming out, *Starting From Scratch*, she... All I had, I didn't have a main character name this time. And all that I got was that she's a dog person, and that she really hates cats, and her mom is getting married again, but the person that she's marrying comes home with a daughter and a cat. So she has to live with this cat that she doesn't like. And then, I had something about, like, a volunteer club, but that's like all they gave me this time.
- Sabrina Okay. Okay, that's interesting. That's really cool.
- Jessica Yeah.
- Sabrina So, once you get the green light on something like that and like it's a go, how long, how long are they - word count wise?
- Jessica Um, they're about 40 thousand words.
- Sabrina Okay, okay. That's not that huge.
- Jessica No, not giant, thank goodness.
- Sabrina Okay. No, that's a good size. Okay, yeah. How long do those take, and about how many rounds do you do with your editor and stuff?
- Jessica It really depends. So for *Meow or Never*, that was my very first ever middle grade. I had never written middle grade before. I had read middle grade. But like, when I was middle grade age. So, I like, went to the library and like, checked out a bunch of them. I just read a whole bunch and like, tried to absorb that in my brain. So, that one took me about six weeks to write. Well, they gave me six weeks. It wasn't - you know it was not optional.
- Sabrina That wasn't necessarily a you decision. And you just better, like, do it, and you were like 'Okay, here's my deadline. I'm gonna go write this now.'
- Jessica And then, um, I also for the other one, *Starting From Scratch*, I think I had a little longer, but I still ended up writing it in about six weeks.
- Sabrina Okay, that's interesting since we jumped over here. I was actually curious. How do you stay motivated during a deadline? Is it just that looming deadline that keeps you motivated, or...
- Jessica Honestly, it's very hard. My toxic trait is that I've never met a deadline in my life. Like, never. My editors, they know. They're just, like, 'Just tell Jessica two weeks early, because she's not gonna, she's not gonna meet it. Like, it's just not gonna happen.'

[Both laugh.]

Sabrina Oh, that's funny. Oh my gosh.

Jessica Yeah, I get like, I don't know. I get, like, I'm always at work with my brain. Like it doesn't work like it should. So, for sometimes, like if I'm not, like, if it's not my idea, it gets very hard for me to be motivated, and then, you know, it's like telling me, my brain is telling me like, 'Hey, you know, you should work on that other idea. That's really cool.' But it's like, I don't really have time to do that.

Sabrina I need to work on this one though, brain.

Jessica Yeah, so I get all my best ideas when I'm supposed to be working on something else. That's - it's just really hard. And I also work full time. So, I get home from work, I'm always really tired, and I usually do my best work on the weekends. But then, like, I've been really busy lately on the weekends so, like, I just - I'm suffering. [Laughs.]

Sabrina I'm so sorry. And you're on deadline right now too.

Jessica Yeah, deadline is April 1st.

Sabrina Okay, joke's on you, publishers. It'll be there. [Laughs.]

Jessica That's a Saturday. They don't mean April 1st. They mean, like, April 3rd.

Sabrina Is it a Saturday?

Jessica Yeah.

Sabrina That is totally a joke.

Jessica Yeah, it's gotta be a joke.

Sabrina It's totally a joke.

Jessica They're not getting it until April 3rd, for sure.

Sabrina Oh, that's so fun. That's mean. What are ya'll doing over there?

Jessica I don't know. They probably didn't look at the calendar. They're just like, 'Oh, we need it in April sometime.'

Sabrina Beginning of April. I mean, it is a good seriously, April Fool's Day, really good.

Jessica I know.

- Sabrina Just tell them you're continuing on with the joke. I love that. I've seen a few different things that are like this is - 'The date for this is April 1st.' And I'm like, 'Is this a joke?' What are you working on that your deadline's for?
- Jessica I can't really say, because we haven't announced.
- Sabrina Oh, sorry. I'm sorry. Okay, I'm so I was actually wondering. I know you've got probably - I was just doing publishing math - and it's probably too late, on *Monstrous* for you to actually be working on anything on it.
- Jessica Right.
- Sabrina We're too close to.
- Jessica Yeah, I mean I have pass pages that I haven't done, but I just got those. So once again they'll get it when they get it, okay? Like whatever.
- Sabrina You know I haven't actually had anybody explain pass pages, yet. Would you like to do that and what that means?
- Jessica Oh sure. They're just like your final proof of the book, so you're not changing anything plot, or like, even paragraphs. You're changing, like, little individual words. And, making sure like you said it was a Monday at the beginning of the chapter. It still needs to be Monday at the end, that sort of stuff.
- Sabrina Okay, and probably that's your last chance of, like, 'Oh I missed a period here.'?
- Jessica Right.
- Sabrina Okay. Does it look like a book or is it like...
- Jessica It does.
- Sabrina Is it in the pages? Or is it like a book form?
- Jessica Yeah it's formatted, and it's got like the full formatting. Like, for *Monstrous*, It has like the little snakey stuff that they added at the beginning, and the little, like - I don't even know what it's called - like the pictures or whatever around the chapters.
- Sabrina Oh cool. It's got like the page numbers on there that probably like, sits on the page like it's going to?
- Jessica Uh-huh. Yeah. Everything is formatted.
- Sabrina That's super cool. Does it come bound, or do you print it yourself, or...

Jessica No. It's, um, in a PDF.

Sabrina Okay. Okay. You get it, like, on the computer. Okay.

Jessica Yeah.

Sabrina That's still cool.

Jessica Yeah, it's pretty cool. I mean, I find them very annoying, but...

Sabrina I would want one printed, probably.

Jessica Yeah. I would love paper arcs. I never get paper arcs, because like right when it was time for arcs, that was during the pandemic. So they're like, 'No we're not gonna do your arcs anymore.'

Sabrina There's been a lot of paper shortages, and there have been a lot of cutbacks on physical arcs. I've noticed that too.

Jessica Yeah. So I only have eArcs.

Sabrina Also awesome. And you have books. You have books.

Jessica That's true.

Sabrina So, we talked a little bit earlier and you said you outline every project early. When you dive in, do you write chronologically? What's your process kind of like?

Jessica Yes. So, I am a plotter, to the extreme. I did pants one book, one time, just to see, like, how it was. Very fun. But it took me a year and a half to edit that book, so never again. Yeah. So what I do is I spend a lot of time on my outline. Spend a lot of time thinking before I even, like, put anything down in my notes or something. Just like, this man character is this, or I want to talk about themes of, like, poverty, or whatever or for *Monstrous*, I like, I want there to be a giant snake in it, you know, that kind of stuff. And then I have, like, a specific process. So usually the idea comes to me not fully formed, but just, like, in the elevator pitch form. So for *Bad Witch Burning* it was a girl raises the dead for money. That was the very first thing I thought of. And then for *Monstrous* it was 'What if a girl is sacrificed, but she makes a deal with the monster, instead of being eaten.' So that was that one. And then I build off of that. So, I don't know, I've talked to a lot of people that like, people don't do this, but I fit the character for the premise. So, for *Bad Witch Burning*, that was easy because it was like, okay, girl raises the dead for money. She's got to be pretty tough to raise the dead, because I couldn't be that. That would scare me. Me, I'm a wimp, so she has to be tougher than me at least. And then also it's like 'Why is she doing this for money?' So obviously she's got to be struggling with money so the character fits the premise rather than you make the character first and then you make the premise around it. So that's what I do.

- Sabrina Interesting. Okay, that's cool.
- Jessica Yeah. So then once I have that, I do themes. Like, what do I want to talk about with this book? And those are subject to change. But the idea doesn't change and like the character doesn't change. So then after that, I just do what I call tent poles. So like how it opens, then like the inciting incident, and that kind of stuff, and then I fill in, based on that.
- Sabrina Do you mostly do - I don't even know how to ask this of writers, so much of it is like you just do it. Okay. So do you sketch out any dialogue as you're outlining, or like any scene ideas, like more specifically? Or is it mostly plot points with, like, characters?
- Jessica And yes, sometimes I do. This depends on the project. So for the cat books I decided like a basic outline and then like, when I was writing, I followed the outline but then like I would add things as they came to me. Sometimes I'm very detailed, like, my longest outline was 27 pages and like 10K, which is like basically draft 0 at that point, you know?
- Sabrina Yes, exactly.
- Jessica Yeah, so it had a lot of detail, had a lot of, like, there were dialogue things that I just didn't want to forget, clues that I like made. I had like, brackets. Like, make sure this clue is here, you know, that kind of stuff.
- Sabrina Okay, no that makes a lot of sense. Do you, um, how do you keep that organized?
- Jessica I just use Word.
- Sabrina Okay.
- Jessica Yeah, I'm very basic.
- Sabrina Okay, I love Word. I use both. I think I do most of my organizing on - actually, that's a lie. I do most of my organizing in notebooks, like notes by hand, and then I have to type them up next to each other because I'm like 'Okay, there's like, you talk about this one spot in like three different notebooks and that's not gonna work.' [Laughs.]
- Jessica I love that.
- Sabrina What else do you do once you get the outline going?

- Jessica Um, then, like once it's finished, I like to let it sit, so I'll... Which is easy for me because I'm usually working on the outline when I shouldn't be. So I'll just like, let it sit until I'm done with whatever I'm supposed to be doing, and then I'll come back to it. And I'll make some changes based on, like, 'Oh, this sounds better in my head,' or, you know, that kind of thing. And then after that, it's pretty much ready to go.
- Sabrina Oh, so you go back. And you, you let the outlines sit, And then you adjust that outline before you dive in.
- Jessica Yeah.
- Sabrina That's a great technique! I'm gonna try that.
- Jessica Yeah. For me, I know everybody doesn't work like this, but when I do that, when I'm super detailed with an outline, it takes me like three weeks to draft a book. It's done, done, completely done. And most of the time, not all the time. Most of the time, there's no editing - hardly any editing - because I've done it already with the outline.
- Sabrina Okay, I mean, yeah, when you figure out everything that needs to happen ahead of time, it's definitely easier to stay on track, for sure. And, and you're already working out all the, like, issues through that. I mean sometimes I feel like sometimes we can like write ourselves into different situations but yeah, for the most part, if you stick with the outline then...
- Jessica Yeah. I mean, like you said, it doesn't work all the time. Like I've had plenty of projects where I get into it and I'm like, 'Oh no, this isn't working.' So usually, if that happens, I'll just stop and then I'll fix the outline first. And then I'll go back.
- Sabrina That's super smart. Okay, and you draft really fast, do you send it to your agent next, once you're done drafting?
- Jessica Sometimes I send her the outline, because because that's essentially the book. Sometimes she's like 'No, I don't like this.' So then that's good because I can be like, oh I don't waste all that time writing a book.
- Sabrina And you're not married to anything from those chapters that you would have spent on those chapters, either.
- Jessica Exactly. So it's a really good time saver. But also, sometimes I'm just like, 'Hey, I wrote a rom-com. Here you go.' [Both laugh.] She's like, 'Um, you didn't even tell me you were writing this.' It's like...
- Sabrina That's so funny. I love it.
- Jessica 'It's done. Here you go.'

- Sabrina 'It's a thing now. So how are we proceeding?' That's super fun. So, do you have any favorite craft books, or blogs, or both?
- Jessica I really loved *Story Genius*. That was my favorite. I really like *Bird By Bird* as well. But that one's less of a craft book and more of like a memoir, but I still really like it.
- Sabrina Okay. Cool. Do you want to get into some bookish questions? Actual bookie questions? Okay. Do you want to do YA or middle grade first? It's up to you.
- Jessica Um, we could do YA first.
- Sabrina Okay, so you write YA under Jessica Lewis.
- Jessica Uh-huh.
- Sabrina And your first book we've been talking about, I'm not gonna make you tell everybody about it again because we actually just did the premise and everything but you also have - oh and that one's called *Bad Witch Burning* everybody. And then we also have *Monstrous* coming out, and remind me when that is. I want to say September, but I could be wrong.
- Jessica No, that's right. September 12th.
- Sabrina Okay. Yay. Okay. Which is way too far from now. I'm looking at my - it says March on my computer. What is happening? This sounds amazing, but we did not talk about this one too terribly much. So would you like to share what it's about?
- Jessica Yes. So my main character - name's Latavia. She goes to her aunt's house for the summer, and she lives in a really small town, and there's something kind of off about the town. And she realizes what it is when they drag her into the woods to sacrifice her to a beast who lives in the woods.
- Sabrina That's nice.
- Jessica Yeah. So she makes a deal with the monster that she will get it out of it's prison. If, and it can devour the entire town, if it spares her and helps her get back at the people who tried to kill her.
- Sabrina I love this. It sounds so good. I'm so excited.

- Jessica Yeah, it's um, it was really fun to write. So, with *Bad Witch Burning*, that book, it borrowed heavily from my own experience. And so, it was really difficult to edit because it felt like, it felt too personal, if I make sense. Like, it felt like the critiques were about me, or my life, or my choices, and that was really hard. So I just wrote a character who is completely opposite to me. So Latavia is like an athlete and a runner, she's really tall and skinny and I'm like 'That's not me at all!' She's completely different from me. And then, even though the premise is very serious, and she doesn't deal with serious issues, like she has PTSD after the attack, but she and the snake are pretty much, like, it's a buddy cop, kind of comedy, except they're like, murdering people. [Laughs.]
- Sabrina Oh, that's so cute.
- Jessica It's really fun.
- Sabrina You do this, like, you put it perfectly the other day on Twitter. I am actually not a stalker. I look at your feed before I do this, so I can see what's going on with you. [Laughs.] But, you put it perfectly the other day about - I think on Twitter. It was about like, I don't know, like, monsters protecting, like, the girl they love, or whatever. How did you word that? That was not it.
- Jessica No, it was like a video of, like, this really adorable child and there's, like, this really horrible scary monster and she's, like 'Oh, a Dinosaur.' And they're like, best friends.
- Sabrina I do remember that. It was so cute.
- Jessica It was. It was really adorable. But that is - that's the vibe of the book. Latavia is much older. But she's like, at first she's afraid of the snake, and then she's just like arguing with the snake. Like they're like, he's her Grandpa.
- Sabrina Oh, this is gonna be so fun.
- Jessica It is, it's fun. It's definitely an escapist type book. So yeah, it's a little lighter than *Bad Witch Burning*.
- Sabrina Did you have to do any interesting research?
- Jessica Um, yes. So, when I was picking the beast, it was, at first it was a wolf and then I thought, 'Well, everybody loves wolves.' Like, she won't be scared of a wolf. If I saw a giant wolf, I may be like, 'Oh my God, a puppy.' And then, it would eat me, but, you know... [Laughs.] So. I was trying to pick what is, like, scary for people. And so, I thought of a spider and I was like, 'Oh God, I can't do that.' Me personally, I can't do that, so...
- Sabrina I'm just thinking about, like, the buddy cop with a giant, with a giant spider. No, we'd have totally different vibes, probably.

Jessica Yes. So then I decided on a snake, and because, like, most people are afraid of snakes, and then like, you have, like fun, like biblical type references as well. So I picked snake, and I had to do a lot of research on snakes. And, at first, I was afraid of them, but by the time I got done writing the book, I'm like 'I really like snakes a lot now,' because I learned so much about them.

Sabrina Have you - did you get to meet any snakes during your research?

Jessica Um, no. But I have met snakes before. Yeah, so.

Sabrina Snakes are awesome. I mean...

Jessica They are, they're so cool.

Sabrina ... I'm more of a, like, from a distance snake fan, but yeah, they're very cool.

Jessica Yes, I admire snakes. I would not want one in my house.

Sabrina Yeah, I have had one in my house before, actually. I had a friend with a snake, and they were like 'Can you take care of it for a little bit?' and I had to feed it. It was an experience.

Jessica That's a lot.

Sabrina It was a lot and I don't want a snake again.

Jessica Yeah.

Sabrina It was an experience though, and it was kind of cool, so...

Jessica Yeah. And also, it reminded me when I was little, I used to be fearless so I had all sorts of things. Like, I would, like, dig out worms in, like, my backyard, and like, keep them as pets and stuff. I was scared of nothing. And so, when I was little - like five - I remember there was a snake, like a garter snake, that used to sun itself on our porch, and I, like, trained this thing to, like, sun itself on my arm. So I was just, I was not afraid ever.

Sabrina That's awesome. That's so cool.

Yeah, so I use that in the book. So like, the snake, he can, he is very large, but he can get very small, and so, like, he'll curl around her wrist, or like he hangs out on her, as like, in her hair, as like a scrunchie, a lot.

Sabrina Oh, this is so cool. Oh, this is gonna be so fun. I'm so excited.

Jessica Yeah, very fun. Fun book.

- Sabrina I mean, I love *Bad Witch Burning*, and I love your voice and I love your writing style and everything. So yeah, just like hearing all the ideas and like, 'Oh, I'm so excited to see what Jessica does from this.
- Jessica Okay.
- Sabrina And then you also do Middle Grade. These are your IP books under Jazz Taylor, and the first one is *Meow or Never*. Every time I see or hear that title, I just smile. It's so cute.
- Jessica I know. It's so cute.
- Sabrina Did it have the title already?
- Jessica It did. So all the titles are picked by the publisher.
- Sabrina That makes sense. I mean they had a project ready to go. Okay. It is, it's so cute.
- Jessica Yeah it's adorable, like Olivia, her naming skills are just top-notch.
- Sabrina I love it. Okay, so you talked about both of these actually pretty good already. When we were talking about the creation of an IP, I mean, you read the whole thing. So, that was really cool. What kind of research did you have to do on those?
- Jessica So, for *Meow or Never*, I honestly, I'm a dog person. I like cats, but their little knives on their hands I don't like. Yeah. And then my family is also not a cat family. When my grandmother was little, her brother threw a cat on her, so she's like afraid of them now. So then we just never, I never had cats growing up. So, I had to like, I had to do a lot of research on like, actually like what it is to own a cat because I don't know.
- Sabrina That's cool. I bet that's fun research though, actually.
- Jessica Yeah. I mean, it's not bad, as far as research goes. And then, of course, my stray cats popped up after that. So then, now I have lots of real world research.
- Sabrina Great minds. I was literally about to ask you did you already have the cats or did they show up? Okay.
- Jessica They showed up. They heard about *Meow or Never* and they showed up.
- Sabrina They said, 'Do you need some help with that?' [Laughs.]
- Jessica Yeah. So, the one in *Starting From Scratch*, I was able to pick the cat that time. So I based it on them.

Sabrina Oh cute.

Jessica Yeah, her name is Pumpkin in the book.

Sabrina Oh, that's a cute name too.

Jessica Yeah.

Sabrina And then there's also a dog in *Starting From Scratch*.

Jessica Yes, Noodle.

Sabrina Noodle, oh my God, you have the best pet names. [Both laugh.]

Jessica So, fun fact about me. There are three things I put in every single book that I write.

Sabrina Okay.

Jessica And so you can look for em next time. One is Waffle House. So, there will be a mention of Waffle House in every single book. Two, is a dog - has to be at least one dog.

Sabrina Okay.

Jessica The third thing is, there will be a character who is either named Kenny, or has a Kenny derivative. This is like an inside joke between me and my best friend.

Sabrina Oh, that's cute.

Jessica Yeah. Sometimes Kenny is like a very small one-off character, and sometimes he's like a huge character.

Sabrina That's cute. Okay, well um I'm just I'm still thinking about those cute names. I actually...

Jessica I know.

Sabrina I had a - well, it actually wasn't my horse - but I knew a horse named Noodle before. It was a jumper. [Laughs.] I've never heard it as a name before. Horses, they're another interesting one. Like you either really love them, I feel like, or you're just like, not into them.

Jessica Yeah, I'm not into horses, not a horse girl.

Sabrina That's okay.

- Jessica Yes, because I was in animal science. So, I know like way too much about em.
- Sabrina They're big.
- Jessica They are. Oh my gosh, I'm 5'2". Like you have to understand.
- Sabrina I make no judgment. I - well, we were talking about being fearless when we were kids, too. I remember just watching, like, what was I watching? Oh, I was watching 'Rim of the World.' Have you seen that one? It's some alien attack and these kids are like at camp when it happens. But anyway, there's like a climbing thing and like a zip line, I was just like, 'Man, I would have done that when I was a kid' and I'm so terrified of heights now, and I remember doing the climbing stuff, and being fine.
- Jessica I was that way too. I used to really love, like, scary books. Like, I read, all of the *Goosebumps* scary stories to tell in the dark. I was like not afraid. And now, if you even mention a horror movie, I'm like already in tears. I'm like, 'No, please. I don't want to see it.'
- Sabrina Yeah, yeah. I used to like all those, the really bad horror ones. Now, I'm just like...
- Jessica But they bother me so much now, I can't do it.
- Sabrina Honestly, I feel like they probably mess me up a lot because, like, there's a lot of things in general that probably did this, but like those did not help in terms of, like, what I see is threats of like, very not threatening things out in life. [Laughs.]
- Jessica Like, the 'Final Destination' effect?
- Sabrina Oh my gosh!
- Jessica You won't drive behind a log truck.
- Sabrina Oh, the log truck is a bad one. The roller coaster one is a bad one too, combined with the heights like that one and was like, 'Oh, that's cool.' So not gonna ride roller coasters any more. They have an airplane one, too. We don't even need to talk about that. We don't need to talk about it. Okay. So, are there any recently released, or upcoming books you'd like to recommend to anybody?
- Jessica I recently read *She is a Haunting*. Great book. It was really scary, so, be warned.
- Sabrina It's on my list. I have so many things on my list. It's on there.
- Jessica I will say, don't - do you read fast?
- Sabrina I feel like I read pretty average. I'll probably audiobook it.

- Jessica Okay, that's good, because I read really fast, but that's not how you should read this book. I had to like go back several times. And like reread. You have to read it slow.
- Sabrina Okay.
- Jessica Yeah. And then I just I'm like, looking at my TBR shelf. *The Witch and the Vampire* is coming out soon, or actually just came out.
- Sabrina It did. It's also on my list. That looks so good.
- Jessica I know I've learned it, so.
- Sabrina Oh, that's cool.
- Jessica Yeah, I just have - my TBR shelf is out of control, so we could spend the whole hour talking about how many books I have not read yet, or want to read.
- Sabrina I um, I use my library a lot. And I just make a new, like, tag every couple months of like these new releases, you know, and they just fill up. They fill up and I do, I read a lot. I actually get a lot of books read, but yeah. No matter how much I keep reading, they just, it just keeps growing.
- Jessica There's more.
- Sabrina There's always more, I definitely add more to it than I'm able to take off, as like scratch-off.
- Jessica Yeah, definitely. And like, for me, I prefer to buy my books, because I always get so scatterbrained with the library, and I hate keeping em over time. So, especially if they're like a bigger popular book, then I like, I hate me holding on to it and I'm just, like, letting it sit there for two weeks gathering dust since somebody could be reading it.
- Sabrina I buy, but then I don't want to mess them up, so I don't want to touch it.
- Jessica That's fair, that's fair.
- Sabrina So I buy and then I use the library and honestly, like I said, I've been doing audiobooks a lot so I usually do that.
- Jessica My toxic trait is that audiobooks put me to sleep.
- Sabrina Oh okay. Okay, so that's fair.

- Jessica So I can't ever listen. I just get immediately sleepy. And then, if I'm doing something, like if I'm washing dishes, or like cleaning, or whatever, then I get... My mind wanders and then I come back to the book and I don't even know what's going on.
- Sabrina Okay, okay, that's fair. No, that's totally fair. I can usually sit up and do it. But yeah, I think if I laid there, I would fall asleep.
- Jessica Yeah, night-night.
- Sabrina I'll listen to em when I'm doing, like, an easy mindless craft a lot. But I'm a pretty big, I need to be doing something person. So like my hands need to be moving. My brain needs to be working. Something needs to be going on, or I'm get restless, and I have a hard time, like, it's okay to just chill and watch a TV show for 45 minutes, it's okay.
- Jessica See, I am a big, like, binge watcher, so like, I can sit there for hours and just, like, be focused on this one thing. But if I try to do, I don't know, something about audiobooks. They just like, they get me. I can't, I just can't stay focused.
- Sabrina You've got the double stimulation, I feel like, with the show, that it is, it's easier to like, close your eyes and just listen to the book and then go to sleep.
- Jessica Uh huh. Yeah. Because you're right, you're watching it, and you're listening to it. So then you're like, okay, you're fully engaged.
- Sabrina But I will say once I get into bingeing, I'm like, I'm a good binger. It's just like, if I've been working a lot, then I'm like, I've been doing all the things, I should be doing something right now, right?
- Jessica Right.
- Sabrina Right. Do I need to be doing something?
- Jessica Yeah, I just I watch anime once a week, because 'Bluelock' comes out every Saturday.
- Sabrina Okay.
- Jessica So, and then I recently watched 'Wednesday' finally.
- Sabrina Oh, I started that when I need to finish that one.
- Jessica Yeah, I liked it. I liked it a lot. But, of course, I have, like, my own writer things. Like, I hate myself because I cannot enjoy media anymore. I'm just like, 'Oh, well, this has structural problems' or like, 'I would have this character villains. It's not enough, I would have done this, this, and this.'

- Sabrina Oh, that's so funny. You start analyzing it.
- Jessica Yes, literally everything. I do that with the books I read, too. It's so annoying. [Laughs.]
- Sabrina I do that a lot, too. I think that's why I got into - one of the things that, like, was helpful with audiobooks for me. I know you don't like them, but I couldn't see the words to be able to want to mess with them.
- Jessica Hmm, okay, yeah.
- Sabrina Like, I'm just like it's - it's coming into my ears, and not even - you know, like, it's I can't do anything about any of it. [Laughs.]
- Jessica I understand. Yeah. I also feel like maybe it's better. I - my attention span is not good. So, if a book doesn't hook me right away then it's, you know, it's a rap. But I've been trying to read more adult horror for research, and I found that they're much slower than YA, and it's just been a struggle to get into. So, I feel like audiobooks would help with that, because you're like being told the story, and so you can't see how many pages it's been since something happened.
- Sabrina Yeah, that's one of the - yeah, because I'm like, 'Oh I remember it happened.' They go at a pretty steady pace. They take out any of the pauses and stuff, like it keeps a pretty steady pace. I've noticed that, like, unless it's a really long, or really short book, like most YA audiobooks are, like, nine or ten hours. Sometimes they're eight, sometimes they're 11. And then, sometimes you get them higher up in the teens, and sometimes you get like a five or six, but for the most part they're in that little - it's interesting. *Bad Witch Burning* is 10 hours, so...
- Jessica That's good. Nice and average. I got to hear, like, the audition but I've never actually heard the full audio book...
- Sabrina Really good!
- Jessica ...because I'll fall asleep, so.
- Sabrina Okay.
- Jessica Well, I don't know, it might be different with my own book, but... [Laughs.]
- Sabrina Oh, that'd be so cool. To hear your book read to you, I don't know. I've actually, I've had a lot of friends who - not for the same reason - they just didn't listen to them because they were like, 'It's really weird having someone read my book to me.' [Laughs.]
- Jessica No, it is weird. It's weird to hear your words coming out of someone else's mouth, because there's something final about it. It's just like, 'This is the story. This is how it's written. This is how everyone reads it,' and you're like...

- Sabrina I mean, you work on it, so hard, in so many different ways. Even if you're just tweaking on the, like, sentence level, it changes things. So yeah, that's super interesting.
- Jessica It's, like, scary. That's why I always get so nervous when arcs go out for the first time. I'm just like, 'Oh my gosh, somebody's actually reading my words, with their eyeballs.'
- Sabrina It's happening, it's happening, they are - they are getting the words now, yes. Honestly, I do that when I send it to my readers and stuff, just for like feedback. I'm just like, 'Oh, what did you do?'
- Jessica Well I don't do that as much, because I feel like they're my friends, and so like they, they put up with my nonsense all the time. They know what kind of nonsense it is.
- Sabrina This is true. And that's true about my friends, and I'm always like, 'They love you, too.' I don't know what's wrong with me. I just every time I send my book to anybody, I'm just like... [Laughs.]
- Jessica It is scary though. Just to send it out it's so scary. I have this, like, vampire book that sort of turned into my darling, where I only showed it to one person. And then they - but then they didn't like it. So, I didn't show it to anyone else, so it's just like sitting into my in my little, um, draft next to my heart, I guess.
- Sabrina Look, I don't know if you need to dust that one off or what, but I just want it to be known, on the record, that I am here for Jessica Lewis' vampire book.
- Jessica Thank you. It's weird. It's so weird, and...
- Sabrina I love vampire books. Give me all of the vampire books.
- Jessica Yeah, it seems like I'm very - I have very specific taste when it comes to vampires. Like, I don't - I'm not super into the ones that, I... There's two camps, right? There's sexy and scary. I don't like the sexy ones.
- Sabrina Okay. I want the sexy ones, and the scary ones. Either, or. [Both laugh.]
- Jessica I prefer the scary ones, but then sometimes I - something in that bothers me about the scary ones, is that if, like, there are vampire hunters. And so, then if you have a vampire that, like, maybe their friend turns into a vampire, right? But then, they don't kill their friend, but they kill everyone else. So I'm like, that bothers me, because the vampires. So like, 'You're okay with mass-murdering intelligent creatures as long as they're not your friend?' I don't like that. The vampires in the book that I wrote, they're like really dumb. They're, they're not intelligent. It's like, yeah, it's more of like, an execution, you know, you put down a rabid dog, that sort of stuff.

- Sabrina Okay, almost like, zombie, like, a little bit. Okay, okay. Oh, that's a cool take on them too.
- Jessica Yeah and so my, my characters are hunters, so pretty fun. It's pretty fun, but my CP didn't like it. I shouldn't say she didn't like it. She just had, like, notes, and there were too many notes, so I just didn't do it.
- Sabrina I have been seeing a lot of vampire things coming out. I mean, you just mentioned one, too.
- Jessica Yeah.
- Sabrina There have been. I've been seeing a lot of deals with vampires that are coming out in the next couple years I feel like, too.
- Jessica Yeah they're having a Renaissance, for sure.
- Sabrina It's the day of the vampire. It's interesting. It does seem to be - it seems like I'm seeing a lot of thrillers and like paranormal creatures lately.
- Jessica Uh huh. Which I love. I love a paranormal creature. What I would really like to see is like a really scary werewolf book, because usually werewolves are not that scary.
- Sabrina You don't want to go cuddle with Jacob? [Laughs.]
- Jessica No. I want Jacob to kill people.
- Sabrina I love it. That's so funny.
- Jessica Yeah, so maybe I'll do that next. I'll write like a scary....
- Sabrina Scary werewolf. You almost did a wolf one. You should, you should play with that. It sounds like it's something that you're thinking about.
- Jessica Yeah. Like, you know, the snake was almost a wolf.
- Sabrina Yeah.
- Jessica But like, like you said that you've got the cuddly problem, like, people love dogs.
- Sabrina Yeah. You can make em scary. I feel like there's some scary ones. I didn't, there are definitely a few. I'm trying to think like I'm thinking of more like werewolf shows right now.
- Jessica Yeah me too.

Sabrina Than, uh, books.

Jessica There's that game - what was that game called? Oh no, I can't remember it, but it was like werewolves and they were at a summer camp and I like that take. They were, they were scary because the werewolves were like mindless, you know...

Sabrina Okay.

Jessica ...but then like, you couldn't tell. So like if your friend got bitten, in the game, then you know, they were just running around as a werewolf, but they all look the same. So you can't tell. So if you shoot one of them, you don't know if you're shooting your friend, or not.

Sabrina That's interesting. Yeah, okay. Yeah, that's really cool. I'm gonna have to look that up. I don't play enough games.

Jessica Oh man, I cannot remember that game.

Sabrina I like the - I like the camp with it, too.

Jessica Yeah. It was like literally set in a camp, and it was also campy.

Sabrina That sounds like a book, actually. That's all I get. Should be a book. That sounds like, uh, if you told me the premise of that I'd be like 'I want to read that.' So...

Jessica Yeah I do think, like, games that get it pretty well. Like they get the scare factor a lot better than books sometimes can capture, just because you're engaging the three senses. Like, you're watching it, you're hearing it, and you as the player are in the driver's seat.

Sabrina Yeah, you're interacting. I mean, yeah, you're not like in there, obviously, unless it's Jumanji...

Jessica But right.

Sabrina But, yeah, I know you're totally a part of it. That's so interesting. I love, I don't do a ton of games, but every time I talk to gamers, and when I do do games, like people don't give games enough credit, I don't think, because they have some of the best story lines. Like, they really do have actual, good storylines, so...

Jessica Especially the recent ones, like, I would say, from the 2010's on, like, hit after hit, man. Like, they know that gamers now want a really good story, and so they invest their time and effort into it.

Sabrina Yeah.

- Jessica Pretty much everything that I see is just like, really good, and my favorite's like 'God of War'. Excellent, excellent story. And then, of course, 'The Last of Us', which is, you know, of course, is being adapted now.
- Sabrina Yeah, I haven't. I'm sorry everybody. I haven't seen that yet.
- Jessica I refuse to see it because the 'Last of Us' game is perfect. I don't know. You can't improve on perfection, so I don't want to see it.
- Sabrina People have been talking about it, and I heard that it's really good, but when I, when I looked at it, I think there were only like two episodes out, or something. And I do, I need them to catch up because I won't go back to it, or I'll forget about it, and I'll then have to restart it and...
- Jessica Of course. Yeah, yeah. I'm the same way.
- Sabrina So, give me how many are there gonna be, and let me wait til the end.
- Jessica Yeah, I think it's done now. They're starting filming of season 2, but of course, it's gonna be a couple years before.
- Sabrina Okay. Where have I been? Because I swear that was like, a week ago that they were on every week. So, what cave have I been in? Oh, yes, editing and then querying cave. That's where. [Laughs.]
- Jessica Yeah.
- Sabrina Okay, cool. Now, I have a new thing. I haven't got my game.
- Jessica So, yeah. So, you should watch the show, because I've heard the show is really, really good, but I just can't, I can't bear to see...
- Sabrina Well, sometimes if I'm slow on stuff, I will actually, like, watch the movie before the book, because then I can like the movie separately from the book. And not hate the movie because they messed it up from the book.
- Jessica Yes, I agree.
- Sabrina They do usually do good movies out of adaptations, whether or not that marries to what they got from the source material, or not. But I don't hate things as much, I feel like, if I do it in that order.
- Jessica Yeah. And sometimes it's better. Like, my most, my famous example is 'Blood and Chocolate', if you've ever seen that movie. I don't think it did very well in the box office, but back when Blockbuster was the thing...
- Sabrina I loved Blockbuster.

- Jessica ...yeah, I rented it from Blockbuster, and I really love the movie. It was just like a traditional, like, werewolf type romance story. But then I got the book, and that book is weird. Like she's like, she actually, like, marries her uncle or something. I'm like what is going on? Like how did this, yikes! But so the movie is much better than the book, I think.
- Sabrina I'm probably gonna get - I don't know if I'm gonna put this on the thing. [Both laugh.] You know what? I did the same thing with on that, that I thought was way better as a movie, than the book? I'm so sorry author, *Warm Bodies*. Did you do that one?
- Jessica Oh no I haven't. I have not read *Warm Bodies*.
- Sabrina Okay, did you watch the movie, and like the movie?
- Jessica I think I've seen, like, snippets of it. I think it was on somewhere, and I watched half of it, I just didn't see the whole thing.
- Sabrina The movie has definitely, like, more of a YA feel to it. The book is an adult book.
- Jessica Oh, yeah.
- Sabrina It was really interesting, and I did them really close together too, because I was like 'This was a book for adults?' But I want to see that again. I actually really liked that movie.
- Jessica Yeah, I want to see it, too. All the way through.
- Sabrina We - this was very zombie and werewolf focused, I feel like. [Laughs.]
- Jessica It was.
- Sabrina We talked a lot about zombies and werewolves.
- Jessica So like how, you know, *The Revenants* are sort of zombieish.
- Sabrina Yes.
- Jessica So, you know, I always joke that, like, I couldn't get in - I couldn't get my foot in the door with my first zombie book, so I just came back with a different one.
- Sabrina I love it.
- Jessica And this time it worked.
- Sabrina Well, just don't call him zombies. It's perfect. They weren't really zombies, though. They were definitely their own brand of magic, which is super cool.

- Jessica Yeah, they were their own thing. That's my favorite part of writing a book is like, writing in her thoughts and dialogue coming out of their mouths. That's my favorite thing to write about that book.
- Sabrina That was really fun. It was really fun as the story progresses.
- Jessica Yeah.
- Sabrina I love it. So fun. I just honestly, just that one sentence little pitch you've been doing through the whole thing is so good, too.
- Jessica I think I had a dream about it, and I wrote it on my notes app, and then I came back a couple weeks later and I fleshed it out.
- Sabrina Oh my gosh. You *Twilight*-ed it. I love it.
- Jessica I did. I don't remember the dream now, though.
- Sabrina That's okay. It doesn't matter because it produced an amazing book.
- Jessica Yeah. So happy with that book. The way it turned out.
- Sabrina Okay. Do you want to tell everyone where we can find you, and your books?
- Jessica Yes, on Twitter I'm @jlew100. I'm also have an Instagram, but I hardly use it, so let me actually look up my handle, because I don't know it, off the top of my head.
- Sabrina Oh my gosh.
- Jessica Yeah, I never use it. Jessica Lewis Author. I'm trying. I'm trying very hard. It's just really difficult.
- Sabrina You're doing better than me. I made the account so I could take the name and that is like with the extent of what I did. I think I've done, like, one post.
- Jessica Yeah Instagram feels like work to me, and Twitter feels like fun. So, this is my social media, and then my website is - let me go to that, too. It's authorjessicalewis.com, and all of my books are there. Pre-order links are there. You can buy any of the books that we talked about today. You can buy them now, or pre-order them.
- Sabrina Yay. Oh my gosh. And, *Starting From Scratch*, comes out on the 4th, yes?
- Jessica Yes.
- Sabrina Which is gonna be tomorrow for everybody on the podcast.

Jessica Yes. And you can get it right now in the book fair. So it's in the book fair a month early.

Sabrina Oh, is it in this, is it the Scholastic Book Fair?

Jessica Uh huh. The Scholastic Book Fair.

Sabrina Oh, I have so many good memories of the Scholastic Book Fair.

Jessica I know. It's so nice.

Sabrina That was the the best, like, day or two at school, when they brought all the books in. I miss that. Oh, that's so fun that you're in the fair.

Jessica Yeah, it is. It's cool. Scholastic is a great company to work for, so they're always like, 'Just don't worry about it. You write the book. We'll do the rest', so they're awesome.

Sabrina That's so awesome. Oh my God, it's 8:00. How did we do that?

Jessica I know. It's okay.

Sabrina Go finish your book and enjoy. And seriously, this was such a great interview, and I had such a wonderful time chatting with you.

Jessica Yeah, it was so much fun. Yay.

Ginny [Ginny barks.]

Sabrina Babe! Ginny says hello. My dog.

Jessica Hello, Ginny.

Sabrina Can you hear her? She's shaking her head. [Laughs.]

Ginny [Ginny barks.]

Sabrina That's Ginny. 'Hi, baby!'

Jessica Oh my goodness, she sounds amazing.

Sabrina She's pretty cute. She's - and she's a talker, if you could not tell.

Jessica Yeah.

Sabrina Yeah, she said, 'Hi.'

Ginny [Ginny barks.]

Jessica I have no greater joy than picking out the dog for each of my books.

Sabrina Oh, I love it, I love it.

Jessica Yeah, the dog - I have two dogs in *Monstrous*. One is a Great Pyrenees. and one's a German Shepherd.

Sabrina Oh cute.

Jessica Yeah, Peach and Charlie are their names.

Sabrina I have a German Shepherd in one of my books, my last one. And, in the one that I'm querying right now, I have a Saint Bernard. I love that we both love big dogs. [Laughs.]

Jessica Yes, I love big dogs. I've never had a big dog. I had a Schnauzer when I was growing up.

Sabrina She's the biggest dog I've ever had and honestly, she's big enough because, like, she's just at that weight, that like, if anything happens, I can maybe pick her up by myself. So any bigger and I wouldn't lie, I don't even know how I'll get you to the vet. But, I don't know. Like, no but she's a - she's a good one. She's pretty much by my side constantly.

Jessica I love it.

Sabrina Yeah, 'You a good one?' Okay, you go and enjoy your book, and thank you, thank you. thank you.

Jessica And no problem. Thank you.

Sabrina It was so fun.

Jessica It was.

Sabrina Have a good night.

Jessica You too. Bye.

Sabrina Bye.

[Upbeat music begins]

Sabrina Okay everyone! That's it for episode 16! You can find the content list and all the Jessica links in the show notes page of my website, linked below. Thanks so much for joining us! Okay Ginny, say goodbye!

Ginny Barks!

[Upbeat music ends]