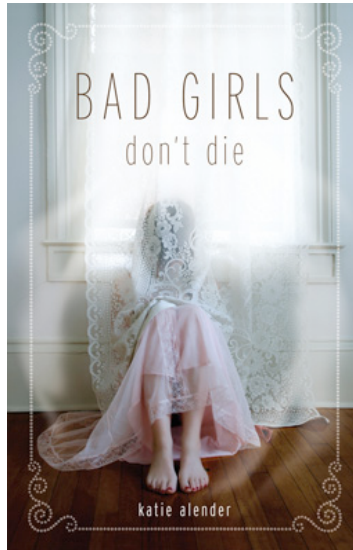


BAD GIRLS don't die
a YA thriller from Disney-Hyperion

Q&A WITH AUTHOR KATIE ALENDER



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**** PLEASE NOTE: This document contains some spoilers!**

1. What makes this book stand out from other young adult novels?

I didn't set out to write a strong female protagonist, but once I had written Alexis, and reading a lot of the books currently available to teenagers, I realized that Alexis was kind of special. She's strong, outspoken, independent, stubborn, and sarcastic. She's not popular, but she kind of got herself where she is, and she knows it.

There are a lot of really wonderful authors writing for teens. There are a lot of books that I think send great messages about being a teenager and growing up. But there aren't a lot of main characters who really get their hands dirty and solve their own problems. Alexis is almost like an action hero, in a way. She's tough—tougher than she even knows.

Also, one early review emphasized that almost every major character is female (with the exception of Carter and Alexis's father). This is not a book about girls in context of boys. It's not about boys in context of girls, either. The characters are all their own people who make their own choices.

2. How did you decide to write for teens?

It wasn't really a decision as much as it was like finding a pair of shoes that fit after trying a bunch on. My favorite film school project was about teenagers, and when I decided to try to write a book, I started writing an adaptation of that project. Of course that was 100-plus pages of not much, but it planted the seed. When I started writing *Bad Girls*, I was working in development for children and teen TV, so that probably had some influence on me. But then, even after I had a draft of *Bad Girls*, I would start other projects with adult characters, and I always found that they seemed lifeless until the moment I thought, "But what if the main character is a teenager?" And then they came alive.

I just think it's the voice that happens to come out of me right now.

Not to mention, I love kids and I love teenagers. What a fascinating time in your life! Every tiny thing that happens helps to shape you into the person you eventually become. It's exciting and dramatic and I'm drawn to it. Maybe because I had such a fantastic time in high school. I mean, I had drama just like everybody else, but I always knew I was having fun.

3. Which character, if any, do you relate to the most? Why?

I relate to Alexis. I'm not as much of a troublemaker as she is, but I can be very judgmental and jump to conclusions. I also understand that it's sometimes easier to

“give in” to solitary pursuits rather than to make the effort to connect with others. Because hey, if you don’t try, you won’t fail, right?

4. Do you think your film background has affected your writing?

Definitely! I think of writing as directing in my head, with actors who always get it right the first take (unfortunately, my job is to revise, revise, revise the script!). I tend to think of things visually and then write down what I’m imagining. I have also had to try to wrap my head around the idea of things that are more internal than external—because for so long, I had to think of big moments in terms of what they would look like. But in writing a novel, you have so many more resources. You can have a huge moment come down to a tiny interaction. It doesn’t have to be visually significant—only emotionally significant.

I’m very grateful for my film background, though. And for my work in the entertainment industry. Every job I’ve had has helped me in my writing. My earliest jobs were writing script and book “coverage,” which is basically a book report with a review at the end. Coverage has to be concise and well-written, because you have to give the executives a real sense of what the material is. And it teaches you to look at the elements of the story itself—the pacing, structure, characters—and how those fit together.

In other jobs, I learned to collaborate, to tolerate, to defend, to listen to voice, to sell, and sometimes just to work like a dog. Which comes in handy when I’m feeling lazy.

5. Why did you choose to make Alexis a photographer?

Well, starting with the practical reason that photography is something I have some experience with, so I knew I’d be able to write about it with some degree of believability. Also, because the dark room is a good symbol for where Alexis is when the story begins. Solitary, brooding, somewhat single-minded... it’s definitely a place she goes to escape, much in the same way she escapes from other things in her life.

6. How does this book reflect your own high school experiences?

Not much—I was lucky enough to go to an arts high school, where there was really next to no social hierarchy—we tended to organize by interests, and no interest was really seen as being superior to the others.

But I tend to think of Alexis as the person I might have become if I’d gone to the local “regular” high school. And I mean I would have had both her frustration, her feeling of being an outsider, but also the limitations she puts on herself. She doesn’t exactly go around giving people the benefit of the doubt. It’s easy to get used to being on the outside and to get comfortable in our perception of ourselves as a misfit. Whereas, now that I’m older, I tend to think that people are actually more friendly and more accepting than we give them credit for being.

7. Do you believe in ghosts?

I have never personally experienced a paranormal event, but I would never say, “There’s no such thing as a ghost!”, because, really, who am I to say so? I have friends who’ve had what they consider to be supernatural experiences, and until I find absolute proof either way, it does no good to lay down a blanket denial or confirmation. I do think there’s something going on that’s bigger and deeper than what we see and know.

In *Bad Girls Don’t Die*, the ghost is simply a device to help create the story. It doesn’t actually matter whether I think they’re real or not. I’m definitely not trying to make any statements about the paranormal.

8. Do you think this book can speak to adults as well as teens?

I hope so! At its core, the story is about trusting and protecting the people we care about. And I hope that’s a fairly universal concept.

I think it’s also important for adults—parents in particular—to remember that their sons and daughters are real people trying to find out who they are. Alexis often lashes out or gets into trouble inadvertently. She also cares deeply for her parents while rebelling against them for the ways in which they aren’t properly nurturing and paying attention to her. Teens don’t need to be babysat, but they need to be listened to and paid attention to. Not just to keep them out of trouble, but because they’re changing from children into adults, and a parent’s job is to help navigate those waters.

9. Many books for teens feature pretty heavy doses of sex, drinking, drugs, and adult language. *Bad Girls Don’t Die* has basically none of those things. Was that a conscious choice?

It was and it wasn’t. First and foremost, the story dictated the content. If somebody had needed to drop an “f-bomb” at some point, I might have considered putting one in. I didn’t deliberately set out to write a solidly PG story. There’s probably plenty of that stuff going on at Alexis’s high school—but it doesn’t figure into the story. And I wasn’t about to add a party scene just so I could show teen drunkenness and sexual situations.

The thing is, those issues are big ones for a lot of teens today. But there are also a lot of teens who don’t deal with those things every single day. They were certainly out of my sphere when I was in school. And they happen to be outside of Alexis’s sphere, as well.

But I also know that I wanted to write a book that a parent could find on the couch, skim through, and not be horrified by. Because my parents own were concerned with things

like that, and I know there are a lot of teens who don't want to have to explain to their parents why they're reading a book about such-and-such.

10. What about readers' responses has surprised you the most?

I've been uniformly surprised and pleased by two things—first, that the book actually scares people. I'm a total fraidy-cat, and I honestly never set out to write a scary book. Only when my agent first read it and said, "There were parts that really scared me!" did it occur to me that I might have accidentally written a spooky book.

Secondly, that people consider the ending to be a bit of a twist. I have been so fascinated to find out what people thought was going to happen, and what they thought characters were going to end up being. Recently, a friend of mine read the book while we were on a long flight together, and she kept turning to me and saying, "So-and-so isn't evil in the end, is s/he?" and making guesses about the way things would turn out. And I thought, well whaddya know, I went and wrote a mystery!

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