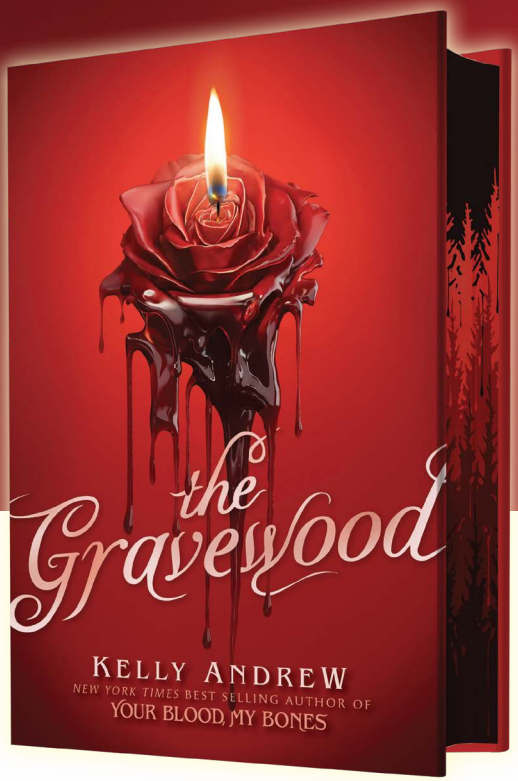

BOOK GUIDE

the Gravewood

BY KELLY ANDREW

The Gravewood
By Kelly Andrew
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The Story

Shea Parker has lived her life in the shadow of the Gravewood, an impassable forest that's cut off her town from the rest of the world. With supplies scarce, Shea is forced to carefully ration her hearing aid batteries. When her stash runs out, she'll be left in the silence.

Desperate, Shea turns to Oliver Lysander, the volatile leader of a vampiric gang that rules the Gravewood. The arrangement between Shea and Lysander is simple. She gives him her blood. He tracks down batteries. They don't cross any lines. They don't make it personal, despite their growing attraction. But when Shea's best friend is lured into the Gravewood, that delicate balance is broken.

Eager to keep her in the dark with him, the opportunistic Lysander renegotiates the terms of their deal. If Shea agrees to Turn, Lysander will help her navigate the carnivorous Gravewood. For the first time ever, Shea finds herself leaving home. Swallowed up in the dreamlike dark of the forest and traveling in the company of killers, it isn't long before she risks becoming one herself.

Reading Group Questions

1. How important is the setting of the Gravewood to this story? What about the Gravewood makes it so dangerous?
2. Now that you've finished the book, what are some of the things you remember the most about it? Are there certain scenes or images that you think really worked to help you understand the story?
3. Shea and Lysander have a complicated relationship. How do they feel about each other? Do you think these feelings are genuine, or as Lysander says, "synthetic"?
4. Who do you think is the most misunderstood character in the book? What don't the other characters understand about them?

About the Author

Photo ©

Kelly Andrew lost her hearing when she was four years old. She's been telling stories ever since. Kelly lives in New England with her husband, two daughters, and a persnickety Boston Terrier. You can find her online at @KayAyDrew.

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Author Q&A

What inspired you to write this story?

The core idea for this story arose from a desire to write a female protagonist who wasn't necessarily a hero or even particularly skilled. When we meet Shea Parker, she is purely looking out for herself. She's stuck in a bad situation, and her cleverness is born out of a need to formulate an exit strategy. She's willing to lie, steal, and barter to get it—there is nothing she won't do. She's also Deaf like me, and as someone who cut her teeth on paranormal romance, I've always wanted to see a Deaf protagonist in the sort of books I grew up loving.

Did anything about the writing process for *The Gravewood* surprise you? Did you manage to scare yourself?

As this is my first duology, I was working off of a fairly heavy outline in an effort to keep myself on track. That meant each character had a clearly delineated emotional arc. None of them end the book where I planned for them to end it, but I think they're exactly where they need to be.

As for scaring myself, I've found that *The Gravewood* is objectively the least terrifying book I've written thus far. It tends to skew more "paranormal romance" and less "horror romance." Still, there's some moments I hope readers find deeply unsettling as they make their way through the Gravewood.

What made you want to tell a vampire story? How did you decide you would make your vampires different from previous vampire fiction?

I love that vampirism has historically functioned as a means to explore themes of sexuality, class, power, and a fear of the unknown. Vampires are a terrific stand-in for societal outcasts. As a disabled person, I wanted to contend with that "otherness" in a world where there is a vampiric pandemic that has been left to run rampant. After COVID, there's a lot of room to explore what it means to live with the long-term effects of illness, as well as what it feels like to be disabled in a space without accommodations.

My perspective on vampires is heavily shaped by both pop culture and folklore, but I wanted to make the lore in *The Gravewood* really feel like my own. Throughout the story, the characters are dealing with the aftershocks of a massive outbreak. The vampires abide by the most typical rules, but they aren't immortal. For them, vampirism is a gene mutation, not a curse.

While you were writing, was there anything you did to "get to know" your characters?

One of my personal favorite "zero-drafting" activities is to decide which astrological sign each character is and to rigidly apply those personality traits from there on out. It helps inform the character decision-making and gives me a guideline to follow to ensure that I stay true to their individual traits. Shea Parker, for instance, is a Scorpio. Whenever I reached a crossroads, I'd ask myself "what would a Scorpio do in this scenario?" Typically, the answer was "burn it all down."

Are there any people, experiences, or other stories that particularly influenced you as you were writing this book?

Like many millennials, I grew up on Buffy, Twilight, and The Vampire Diaries. I also never particularly left my early '00s punk rock phase, and so much of the book was written to the musical stylings of My Chemical Romance and Linkin Park. There's a very grunge-vibe to the story, overall. I think a lot of the angst in *The Gravewood*—and there is quite a bit—might feel a little bit like it belongs in a gritty garage band music video.

Which part of the story came first for you—the characters, the setting, or the plot?

I am a very character-driven writer, and so I tend to develop the characters and their wants and needs prior to plunging them into a world. In fact, Shea, Lys, Asher, and Poppy didn't always go on a road trip through a forest. The world used to function just a bit differently, and it took a bit of tweaking in those early drafting days for me to build a world around them that suited their journeys, both as individuals and as a found family unit.

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