

► **SCI-FACT!** Cross's first novel, *My Summer Of Love*, was made into a film in 2004 starring Emily Blunt and Natalie Press.

WRITER EXCLUSIVE

New York Stories

A Northern vampire travels to the Big Apple in new Radio 4 horror **English Rose**



"LET THE RIGHT One In meets *Girls*"

– that's how the BBC is hyping its new BBC Sounds drama *English Rose*, a sizzingly contemporary and often brutal horror story set in New York City, from the pen of novelist and playwright Helen Cross. Cross herself, however, simply calls the five-parter "a feminist vampire story". It's certainly a bracingly different take on a genre that's been bent into many different shapes over the years.

Perhaps horror's first post-#MeToo vampire tale, *English Rose* follows a bloodsucker named Rose from her home in Whitby to New York as she takes on the job of babysitter to the mysterious Gulliver for his secretive, enigmatic parents, wealthy artist Austin and actress Maya.

"I had Rose come from Whitby as a nod to *Dracula*," Cross tells us from her home in East Yorkshire. "I had this idea that Rose and her clan were probably there before *Dracula*, and when Bram Stoker went to visit Whitby in the late 19th century, maybe Rose's family were already there and maybe her mum and sisters were vampires he encountered."

While Whitby is a kind of Mecca for literary vampire nuts, it's actually local for Cross. "I go there a lot," she says. "I'm just along the coast from Whitby, and it does have a sort of eerie supernatural power."

English Rose, she explains, was conceived during the first lockdown, a time when "the world didn't make sense any more." Most of Cross's stories



Alexandra Mardell plays the titular Rose.

before this have been solidly realistic, with barely a hint of the supernatural, but the uncanniness of those lockdowns inspired her to pen something more fantastical.

"It's about a girl who is finding herself as a vampire," she reveals.

“Over hundreds of years they’ve tried to live a kind of vegan vampire diet”

"Rose has been brought up in Whitby by her mum, who wants to keep her and her little clan safe, so over hundreds of years they've tried to live a kind of vegan vampire diet. They've tried to eat little animals and rodents, and they've tried not to cause havoc or destruction.

"But that's taken its toll on Rose, and so the story is about reaching your fullest potential. What Rose has to do in the story is take charge of her sexuality; she needs to fight back against sexism and she needs to address negative attitudes towards women."



Prolific actor Demetri Goritsas also features.

Upon arriving in New York, Rose gives in to her hunger for human flesh, leading to some fairly gruesome slayings. Although *English Rose* is debuting all at once on BBC Sounds as a podcast box set, it's also being broadcast weekly on Radio 4, a station more used to plays about dysfunctional middle-class marriages and "everyday stories of country folk". So how much freedom did Cross have when it came to embracing the violence that's part of every vampire's life?

"I've gone as far as I wanted, and no one told me to stop," she laughs. "The great thing about radio is that none of it's dumped in front of your face as visuals. So your mind will take you as far as you want to go. So if your mind conjures up blood and gore and guts and spurting necks and fangs, that's your mind doing it a little bit more than mine!" **so**

English Rose is on BBC Sounds on 15 July, with the episodes going out weekly on Radio 4 from the same date.

