

Literature on Screen: *Shadow and Bone*

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Shahenda Helmy: Hello everyone and welcome to PEN/Faulkner's first Literary Conversation of the season, Literature On Screen: *Shadow and Bone*. My name is Shahenda Helmy. I'm the Director of Literary Programs at PEN/Faulkner. I'm so excited to welcome you all here with us tonight. For those of you joining us for the first time, first of all, welcome.

The PEN/Faulkner Foundation is a literary non-profit organization based in Washington, DC. Our mission is to celebrate literature and foster connections between readers and writers to enrich and inspire both individuals and communities. We fulfill our mission by administering two annual national literary awards – the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction and the PEN/Malamud Award for Excellence in the Short Story – as well as through our many education programs, which bring free books and author visits into DC public and public charter schools. Of course, we can't forget about our Literary Conversation series, which begins its new virtual season tonight.

Thank you all so much for being here. If you want to learn more about what the PEN/Faulkner Foundation does, please visit our website at penfaulkner.org. Before I hand things over to Petra and Leigh tonight, I do just want to mention a couple of quick notes about tonight's webinar. There will be live captions provided this evening and for all PEN/Faulkner Literary Conversations as part of our commitment to accessibility. If you'd like to turn your captions on or off, you can do so using the CC button at the bottom of your Zoom screen.

There'll also be a brief Q&A session at the end of the event. Please submit your questions using the Q&A panel that can also be found at the bottom of your screen. You can also upvote your favorite questions and we'll make sure to get to as many as we can in the time that we have.

Finally, as this is a Literature On Screen event, we will be playing a few clips from the fantastic adaptation of *Shadow and Bone* on Netflix. As I'm sure we're all aware by now, virtual platforms are not without their limitations. There may be a slight lag in the video as we're broadcasting to so many of you all over the world tonight. Please bear with us as we work through the confines of this platform.

All right, it's time to get this conversation started. I'm very honored to introduce tonight's fantastic panelists who've so graciously taken the time to be with us tonight. Leigh Bardugo is the *New York Times* best-selling author of *Ninth House* and the creator of the Grishaverse which spans the

Shadow and Bone trilogy, the *Six of Crows* duology, the *King of Scars* duology, *The Language of Thorns*, and *The Lives of Saints* with more to come, which is great news for us Grishaverse fans.

Her short stories can be found in multiple anthologies including *The Best American Science Fiction and Fantasy*. You can find all of these books available for sale by our bookstore partner Politics & Prose, and we'll go ahead and put the links up in the chat shortly so you can purchase those books tonight if you'd like to do so. Finally, Leigh grew up in Southern California and graduated from Yale University. These days she lives and writes and is joining us from Los Angeles.

We're also very honored to have Petra Mayer facilitating tonight's conversation. Petra is an editor and self-proclaimed resident nerd at NPR Books, focusing on fiction and particularly genre fiction. You can also hear her on the air and on the occasional episode of *Pop Culture Happy Hour*. Previously, Petra was an associate producer and director for *All Things Considered* on the weekends, where she handled all of the show's books coverage. Petra received her master's degree in journalism from Columbia University and currently lives in Washington, DC.

All right, that is it for me. Thank you all again for being a part of tonight's evening. Without further ado, please join me in welcoming Leigh Bardugo and Petra Mayer.

Petra Mayer: Hi, everyone. I'm so excited to be here tonight. Hi Leigh.

Leigh Bardugo: Hi, Petra.

Petra: [chuckles] I haven't seen you in forever. We sit next to each other at the publishing lunch.

Leigh: We have a tradition where we sit next to each other every year in New York and eat a small salad and [chuckles] a large piece of chicken.

Petra: That's what we're going to do now that BookExpo isn't happening anymore.

Leigh: I don't know, we're going to have to find some other place to go to lunch that isn't Javits, and I think that might be wonderful.

Petra: Yes, definitely. Thanks, Shahenda, for that wonderful introduction. You've kind of said it all, so let's kick things off. Thanks everybody, also, in the audience for being here tonight. I know there's a ton of you. The questions are already flooding in, which is pretty exciting. I know that you wanted to start with a reading.

Leigh: Oh, well, "wanted to" is sort of extreme, they asked me to do a reading. I actually get super nervous whenever I read so, fingers crossed. They asked me to select a scene so I thought it would be fun to select something that actually translated pretty cleanly from the book to the show. This is when Alina is brought to the Darkling after she saves the sandskiff.

Leigh reading from *Shadow and Bone*:

The Darkling rose from his chair. He gestured and the soldiers stepped back, leaving me alone to face him. The tent seemed eerily silent. Slowly, he descended the steps.

I had to fight the urge to back away from him as he came to a halt in front of me.

“Now, what do you say, Alina Starkov?” he asked pleasantly.

I swallowed. My throat was dry and my heart was careening from beat to beat, but I knew I had to speak. I had to make him understand that I’d had no part in any of this. “There’s been some kind of mistake,” I said hoarsely. “I didn’t do anything. I don’t know how we survived.”

The Darkling appeared to consider this. Then he crossed his arms, cocked his head to one side. “Well,” he said, his voice bemused. “I like to think that I know everything that happens in Ravka, and that if I had a Sun Summoner living in my own country, I’d be aware of it.” Soft murmurs of assent rose from the crowd, but he ignored them, watching me closely. “But something powerful stopped the volcra and saved the King’s skiffs.”

He paused and waited as if he expected me to solve this conundrum for him.

My chin rose stubbornly. “I didn’t do anything,” I said. “Not one thing.”

The side of the Darkling’s mouth twitched, as if he were repressing a smile. His eyes slid over me from head to toe and back again. I felt like something strange and shiny, a curiosity that had washed up on a lake shore, that he might kick aside with his boot.

“Is your memory as faulty as your friend’s?” he asked and bobbed his head toward Mal.

“I don’t ...” I faltered. What did I remember? Terror. Darkness. Pain. Mal’s blood. His life flowing out of him beneath my hands. The rage that filled me at the thought of my own helplessness.

“Hold out your arm,” said the Darkling.

“What?”

“We’ve wasted enough time. Hold out your arm.”

A cold spike of fear went through me. I looked around in panic, but there was no help to be had. The soldiers stared forward, stone-faced. The survivors from the skiff looked frightened and tired. The Grisha regarded me curiously. The girl in blue was smirking. Mal’s pale face seemed to have gone “even whiter, but there was no answer in his worried eyes.

Shaking, I held out my left arm.

“Push up your sleeve.”

"I didn't do anything." I'd meant to say it loudly, to proclaim it, but my voice sounded frightened and small.

The Darkling looked at me, waiting. I pushed up my sleeve.

He spread his arms and terror washed through me as I saw his palms filling with something black that pooled and curled through the air like ink in water.

"Now," he said in that same soft, conversational voice, as if we were sitting together drinking tea, as if I did not stand before him shaking, "let's see what you can do."

He brought his hands together and there was a sound like a thunderclap. I gasped as undulating darkness spread from his clasped hands, spilling in a black wave over me and the crowd.

I was blind. The room was gone. Everything was gone. I cried out in terror as I felt the Darkling's fingers close around my bare wrist. Suddenly, my fear receded. It was still there, cringing like an animal inside me, but it had been pushed aside by something calm and sure and powerful, something vaguely familiar.

I felt a call ring through me and, to my surprise, I felt something in me rise up to answer. I pushed it away, pushed it down. Somehow I knew that if that thing got free, it would destroy me.

"Nothing there?" the Darkling murmured. I realized how very close he was to me in the dark. My panicked mind seized on his words. Nothing there. That's right, nothing. Nothing at all. Now leave me be!

And to my relief, that struggling thing inside me seemed to lie back down, leaving the Darkling's call unanswered.

"Not so fast," he whispered. I felt something cold press against the inside of my forearm. In the same moment that I realized it was a knife, the blade cut into my skin.

Pain and fear rushed through me. I cried out. The thing inside me roared to the surface, speeding toward the Darkling's call. I couldn't stop myself. I answered. The world exploded into blazing white light.

The darkness shattered around us like glass. For a moment, I saw the faces of the crowd, their mouths wide with shock as the tent filled with shining sunlight, the air shimmering with heat. Then the Darkling released his grip, and with his touch went that peculiar sense of certainty that had possessed me. The radiant light disappeared, leaving ordinary candlelight in its place, but I could still feel the warm and inexplicable glow of sunshine on my skin.

My legs gave way and the Darkling caught me up against his body with one surprisingly strong arm.

"I guess you only look like a mouse," he whispered.

Petra: So exciting. That was a really good dramatic reading, I have to say.

Leigh: Stressful. It doesn't help that our audiobook reader Lauren is so fantastic. Every time I have to read, I'm like, why don't we just play a recording because she's really, really good.

Petra: It was different hearing the person who actually wrote the words, speaking them. I think so anyways. Also, I can't deal with audiobooks. I read too fast. If it's actually the author reading the work, then I'm like, "Oh, I'll stop and listen to this."

Leigh: I will keep that in mind.

Petra: Through the magic of technology, we can actually see that scene. Shahenda, you have the video clip queued up, right? Shahenda is behind the scenes making everything happen.

Clip from the show, *Shadow and Bone*:

General Kirigan: What are you?

Alina Starkov: A mapmaker, sir.

[laughter]

General Kirigan: Quiet. So who actually saw what happened? Zoya? You manned the main sail.

Zoya: We were attacked barely two markers in. Someone lit a lantern.

General Kirigan: And?

Zoya: The volcra went after the rifleman and our Inferni first. And then there was a searing light.

Speaker: It was her.

General Kirigan: Our mapmaker. Is this true? Can you summon light?

[Alina shakes her head no]

General Kirigan: Where did you grow up?

Alina Starkov: Keramzin.

General Kirigan: Hm. And when were you tested? You don't remember? Well, let us just make certain.

[Kirigan walks toward Alina. Scene changes]

Mal: Alina Starkov, where is she?

Speaker: They took her to General Kirigan's tent.

Mal: What? Why?

Speaker: They think she's the Sun Summoner. Corporal, you're wounded.

Mal: She's in trouble.

Speaker: How so?

Mal: Because she isn't Grisha. When they realize they made a mistake, what do you think they'll do to her?

Speaker: How are you so sure?

Mal: Because I know her better than anyone else does.

[Scene changes]

General Kirigan: Lift up your sleeve.

Alina Starkov: What's happening?

General Kirigan: Your sleeve. Please.

[Scene changes]

Mal: Alina?

Speaker: What's going on?

Mal: Alina.

[silence]

Leigh: I think I'm alone here. [laughs]

Petra: I'm here in spirit. I'll just be a disembodied voice.

Leigh: Functions.

Petra: Oh, I can start my video now. Hang on one second. Hello, technology. Here I am. Weirdly, the one thing that I had forgotten in all of my neurotic overpreparation for this is that it's written – the book is in first person, you're hearing Alina's monologue and the show is certainly not. It just pops into three dimensions. Mal is in a completely different place in that scene. He's not in the tent actually watching her.

Leigh: Fun fact, the scene was originally shot with Mal in it and then we made some choices after in terms of the way he was wounded and how he needed to approach the coach after. We ended up shooting his part of that much later. That was actually a shift in the script that I think worked really beautifully. I think it's one of the great things about getting to do a show with multiple perspectives. And what is fundamentally an ensemble cast is that you aren't locked into one character's head the whole time. We were able to introduce a lot more texture in the world than we would have had otherwise.

Petra: It's interesting. I've read interviews with you where you've talked about how you were involved with the writing process. Actually, wait a minute. No, I'm getting ahead of myself because what I really want to do is go back and ask, you said there were some choices made about Mal's presence in that scene. Can you dig into that a little deeper? What was the thought process between –

Leigh: Honestly, it's not that sexy. It was really about the logistics of where he was supposed to be in the camp. There was a smaller scene with the Healer that the fans of the book will recognize that got pulled out. Just, it was really a pacing thing more than anything else. I can tell you when I first saw that ring and Eric was really nervous about it. He was like, "Okay I know there's no ring." I was like, "I'm all here for an excellent accessory so I'm very much here for that."

Petra: Show us, you got some rings there.

Leigh: This is actually sparse for me. I don't have a special, like, "I will cut you Darkling" ring. I thought it was a great addition. I thought it was super visceral and sexy and much more interesting than just a knife. It brought me back to writing that scene and considering that moment. Deciding to write the bit where she's able to push her power back down without really even knowing what it is and then deciding on the mechanism by which he was going to pull it out of her.

Petra: I also love the choice that he has. It's a ring, it's a tool. That says something about his character and what he does all day. That this is something that he has ready to hand. It's not just an –

Leigh: – you're going to be a ruler and are constantly under risk of death. Then you need to be prepared. I feel like he's the kind of guy where everything in his house could probably kill you. Everything has a secret use. Everything.

Petra: He lives in Australia, is what you're saying.

Leigh: Pretty much. The lamp is poison. The table is poison.

Petra: I have two questions before I get ahead of myself again. You mentioned Eric and, for people who might not know who that is, can you just give us a rundown?

Leigh: Eric Heisserer, he is our showrunner on *Shadow and Bone* season one and in season two he'll be co-show running with Daegan Fryklind who is one of the wonderful writers from season one.

He's the person who really pushed to bring these two stories together. I'll admit it was an easy sell for me but without him, we probably would not have happened.

Petra: You say it was an easy sell so it was the thing that you were like, "Okay, him?"

Leigh: Eric had tweeted me long ago when he was reading *Six of Crows*. I'm fairly sure that the picture he tweeted, he was on his way to the Academy Awards. That's quite a flex. "Surely, oh, I'm in my tuxedo." "I'm at home eating my chicken nuggets." I was like, "Wow." No. My friends and I were like, "Wow, he's reading it and he just had adapted *Arrival*. I didn't really have any expectation for where that might go. When we sold the option to Netflix, he was one of the first names you brought up. I said, "This guy is a fan, kind of a big deal. Let's see if he might be interested."

He and I met before he ever really went in to speak to Netflix and pitch to Netflix. To see if we were on the same page. My gut said that this was going to work and we had very similar ideas for what we wanted to change, what we wanted to do with the stories. It made me feel pretty confident moving forward with him.

Petra: I know a lot of people have asked you what it was like to see these characters come to life but I'm more interested in what it was like to let them go. They were yours. Once you let a book out into the world, that's not really yours anymore because people will have their own interpretations and have their own headcanon, the whole thing.

Leigh: There was a certain sense of grief about knowing that the alchemy that happens in a reader's head that allows them to pull your description from the book and make that character into whomever they want to live in their head was going to be defeated by this. So many more people see a Netflix show than will ever read the books. Those that pick up the books because of the Netflix show will forever have those characters in their heads. Quite candidly, I think it's invariable that all of us will have whatever headcanon we had replaced by these actors.

There was a certain concern in me about that. It felt almost like a narrowing. Then when I saw them on screen together, that fear really evaporated because I got this opportunity to see the characters interact together. There were surprises for me, whether it was a gesture or a hand on the shoulder or a shared glance – that to me was extraordinarily powerful. To suddenly see these things that aren't on the page that are implied actually come into being in a way that was a surprise to me. I hope that readers felt the same way.

Petra: I'm going to get into this later but I don't think I've ever watched a show and had it match my headcanon as closely as is, "This show [unintelligible] all the Crows." That could not be anymore Kaz, Inej, and Jesper. Wow.

Leigh: Something that was our motto was, you cast for the show, you don't cast for the poster. There were times when I remember when Amita's tape came in and I was like, she looked exactly as I pictured Inej. I was like, "Oh God, please don't be terrible." You just never know until some – and then she was spectacular. You don't know in that moment and you really have to talk yourself

out of, like, this vision that you may have been carrying around with you. In the same way that, in adaptation, the particulars are not necessarily important. The heart of the character, the spirit of the character, the spirit of the story is essential. That's true for casting the character as well.

Petra: You got to see most of the audition tapes?

Leigh: Oh, no. I would have lost my mind very quickly. They would call down and that's actually what the process is like even for most of the producers involved. The casting director will call down from the auditions that they have and you have to really have a sense of trust with that person. Then they will send batches of auditions every day and you watch the same scene again and again and again and again. I will tell you what we do now is we take the sides, the scenes for actors to read in auditions. We take them from the book instead of the actual scripts for the show just in case anything leaks.

Petra: That's really interesting because it's so different, writing on a page and writing for the ear and writing for the eye are so different. This is something I run into professionally because I deal with writers who write for web and for the radio and it's almost like a different language. I guess a skilled actor can read from a book and make it seem like –

Leigh: We don't just pull. We take the dialogue out and we mush it around. Daegan or Eric or one of the writers will make it give more shape to the scene. Or if we need something that has both banter and a sense of gravitas, then we'll put things together. We don't just offer them the book and we're like, "Here. Here's your first test."

Petra: [laughs] That was a cool mental image. Going back to the idea of the headcanon, though, like and the writers and all the stuff we have been talking about. Not many people have the opportunity to try and bring their headcanon to life, I guess. What I wanted to ask about was just the process, how involved were you with setting up the writer's room, with being involved with them during the writing of the episodes?

Leigh: My role was essentially, I was very active at the beginning of the process, talking with Eric about the initial pilot, and then when we had assembled the writer's room, which largely was left to Eric, we were able to see who he was considering and talk about that, but that I did not – He was the one who was going to be captaining that crew. I got to go into the writer's room pretty much every week or every other week and they would pitch me the episodes.

They would walk me through the outline and if I was concerned about something we would talk it through. If they had a question – They usually had a big list of questions for me at the end. Some of which I could answer, sometimes I couldn't. If I was particularly excited about [laughs] I could let them know, like, "Wow, I love this move you're making." For me, that was the most fundamental part of it. Then seeing the scripts come through, giving notes, making suggestions. As a writer, I hate it when people give me suggestions.

I'm like, "Just tell me what the problem is and I'll figure out how to fix it," but I am that jackass who's like, "Let me do it." [laughs] That was a big part of the process. As we moved into other things, I was more removed. I was in the middle of writing a book and I had just stepped back more and more. This has been a little bit different. With season two, I've been able to be a little bit more involved in casting, costumes, production design, meeting with directors.

Then I think I am going to step back. I'm not going to be as involved in reading the scripts. I think at this point, we are going to be diverging quite a bit more, and it's all I can say. I really cannot say more than that. I'm about to be descended upon by Netflix assassins. For me, there has to be a moment of saying, "This doesn't belong to me anymore." The books are mine, they will always be on the shelves, and this has its own life now.

Petra: I have a whole bunch of questions about season two, and I'm trying not to be spoiler-y because I don't want the Netflix assassins to come down on you. That would be terrifying. Are we going to get some Stormhound, please? No? Too spoiler-y? Okay. Well, I was thinking about it. I'm sending you brainwaves.

Leigh: Look, Netflix was like, "Don't say anything about it," but I had already sent a newsletter out to 80,000 people, so good chance with Stormhound [laughs].

Petra: Good. I'm excited. I have so many questions here that I prepared that were – I feel like I need to – No more fun. Let's talk about serious things.

Leigh: Okay.

Petra: No, actually. I do want to go back to the Crows though because we have a clip. Shahenda, would you be so good as to play the clip of the Crows that we have? Okay. I will turn my video and audio off.

Clip from the show, *Shadow and Bone*:

Jesper Fahey: Here's what I don't get.

Inej Ghafa: We're going to be here all night.

Jesper Fahey: Rude. Why haven't they tried going under it? Just dig a tunnel.

Kaz Brekker: Tried that, more than a century ago. Something... heard them digging.

Jesper Fahey: It was made hundreds of years ago by that crazy Grisha –

Inej Ghafa: The Black Heretic.

Jesper Fahey: Yes. The one who controls shadow. They've got one in their army now, don't they? General Kirigan?

Inej Ghafa Your point?

Jesper Fahey: If one of his kind made it, can't he unmake it?

Inej Ghafa: Have you ever put out fire by adding more fire?

Jesper Fahey: Then what's the opposite of this?

Inej Ghafa: A Sun Summoner.

Jesper Fahey: Right. Then one of those.

Kaz Brekker: Doesn't exist.

Inej Ghafa: Doesn't exist yet.

Kaz Brekker: Dreesen comes into town, doesn't waste a minute. Sends out for a crew to steal something, but doesn't specify what. Is it heavy, is it large? Is it worth more than a million on the black market? Maybe he doesn't know.

Inej Ghafa: We can let this one go, Kaz.

Jesper Fahey: Sounds like a trap, anyway.

Kaz Brekker: A trap would sound easy. This is something else.

Petra: I got to rewatch this to prepare for this event and it made me really happy. Let's start with the Crows. As people know, they are not actually in *Shadow and Bone*. I wanted to ask about the process. Whose idea was it to fold them in and how did you go about constructing a story for them? I think the first Crows book takes place roughly after *Shadow and Bone*.

Leigh: It takes place two years after the *Ruin and Rising*. That first day when Eric and I sat down together at the little Italian Bistro, and I tried to pretend to play cool. He was like, "Okay, so listen, hear me out. I have this wild pitch for you. I want to mush these stories together." I think he was prepared to be like, "I have prepared a PowerPoint." I was like, "Great, that sounds amazing." He was like, "Oh, put the PowerPoint away." Look, I really wanted it to get to me. I wanted the Grishaverse to be what it ended up being.

Shadow and Bone is first person. It's very much a "chosen one" story. It's very white. It's very straight. Though that changes throughout the trilogy, I wanted us to see the Grishaverse in all its glory, for better or worse. That for me was the driving purpose of this. I felt it was really important to see the Crows' story side by side with Alina. To see the story of the expendables, the people nobody cares about right next to the chosen one because they have more in common than you initially think.

For me, too, the real problem was, and I said this to him early on, you cannot Frankenstein these plots. You cannot put Jurda parem and the Darkling in the same room because it all blows up. All of your plot gets eaten right away. There's just too much power in one place. I said, "You cannot Frankenstein these characters, but you're going to end up having to write prequel heist. I feel your pain because writing heist is incredibly challenging. Although it gets easier, the more you do it."

They were up to the task and that's really what they set out to do. Also to excavate parts of the Crows' backstories, but to make sure that we had plenty of runway ahead of us if we got a second season and beyond. That was the challenge of bringing those stories together. I know there was a lot of anxiety among readers that this is crazy. It won't work. I felt so confident in our writers that I was like, "Give us a chance, guys. I swear to you this is going to work. I swear it's going to make sense." Also, it's very hard to start a series in one place, and then to suddenly introduce all of these characters later. Which again, presumes that we'll get more seasons, but we wanted to hedge our bets early on about being able to expand.

Petra: In retrospect, it makes lots of sense, like obviously –

Leigh: At the time, they thought like nuts. They were all like, "No, no, it can't be done."

Petra: I thought it was incredibly skillfully done because the problem just structurally is that you meet the Crows years later, you know where they're at so you know whatever they were trying to do. I'm assuming that all of the thousand people who are on this Zoom call with us have read all the books. I'm just going to say that. You've all read the Crows books so you know that whatever they were trying to do in the show, they didn't end up being able to do, but it was still suspenseful. The scenes of them crossing the Fold.

Leigh: For me, that was really thrilling to see the way that those stories intersect and the way the writers brought them together was really fantastic and, I think, really joyful. I made this offhand comment in an event months before the show came out, maybe years, where I was like, "It's going to be the most elaborate, expensive fanfiction ever." Everyone got really mad like, "This is going to be a disaster. This is going to be terrible."

Which to me is like, "Why are you so mad about fanfiction? It's amazing, first of all. Second, all adaptation is fan fiction. That's what it is. All adaptation is fan fiction." To me, this is the way adaptation should work, where you keep the core and you keep the heart, but you're allowed to play. Otherwise, you cannot ask, I think, a group of smart writers, talented directors, amazing actors to simply transcribe. I don't think that's exciting for anyone.

Petra: No, absolutely not. I think you already said this, but I just wanted to reiterate that having them there, the people who aren't part of the "chosen one" storyline, they show you another side of Ravka, of the whole world that you don't really see in the first book, which I really love.

Leigh: Yes. You have, I think, a much greater sense of the way these nations interact, the richness of Kerch, how impoverished Ravka is, these kinds of global politics get to play a role much earlier

on because you have these different perspectives. I think, also, it's almost like a game that they're playing. I actually feel bad for people who are new to the books from the show, because then they're going to be like, "Where are these characters? Where is my [unintelligible]?"

There's this fun thing that happens in the Winter Fete where the Winter Fete basically goes off the way it does in the books, essentially, except the Crows are there. I love that kind of retcon, I love the idea that somebody was there all along and we just didn't know it. Is that the case? No, but in the show, we can get to see this alternate timeline, which I found very thrilling.

Petra: That really is a fanfiction trope too. I read a lot of fanfiction, I should know.

Leigh: It's a comic book trope too. It's a comics trope. I love that. That kind of retcon to me is the very best.

Petra: I want to go back to something you said about how the first book is ten years old at this point. You have changed and grown as the writer. You yourself, out of your own mouth, came the words "very white, very straight." These are things that definitely the show tries to address. Just anecdotally, a dear friend of mine was watching the first episode with me and he said, "Is this whole show going to be this straight?" I was like, "No, wait till you meet Jesper." He agreed to keep watching it with me.

One of the changes between the page and the screen that has been talked about a whole lot is the choice to make Alina half-Shu. I wanted to ask about that. I was talking to a very smart, thoughtful polyglot mind who's Asian-American, but what they said was that they wanted to see more. That it was a first step to make Alina half-Shu, but they wanted to see her think about it outside of the context of people who's being racist at her because she's Shu. They wanted to know more about the culture of Shu and why the enmity between the two counties – is it more than just the war? It would be explored more than just like, here's a Shu face and this is your enemy.

Given that I know the Shu culture gets explored much more in the last book *King of Scars*, tell me what's happening with that going forward and what choices you might be making there.

Leigh: I guess what I would say is I don't think that's an unreasonable critique. I think I actually heard a conversation with you guys on NPR about that.

Petra: You remember I was talking about that you heard my –

Leigh: – I think in terms of war, war is fortune and glory. This is a funny thing that a lot of executives love, to be like, "why are they at war" and I'm like, "because war." That is human history, it's because war, and because this is what happens on borders, they shift and are fought over. However, I think we missed some opportunities, particularly, like, for instance, with Botkin where she's encountering another Shu person, particularly in a military environment. That is something that we have very deeply developed in season two.

This was something that was important to us. It was important to our writers. Christina Strain basically came onto the show like, "I was a huge fan of before." We've known about each other's careers for basically ten years. At one of my first conferences I went and camped out at her booth so I could meet her. She came onto the show because she wanted the opportunity – because she's half Korean and she wanted the opportunity to write a half Asian lead. Not just Alina's relationship to Shu culture, but her relationship to Ravka and what it means to be both of those things and neither of those things is something that comes up quite a bit in the second season.

Petra: I'm totally going to tell Mallory that I asked you that, and that's what you said, and also – Sorry? You dropped out.

Leigh: – I don't think every show is for everybody, but I also think we can always try to get it right. You do your best, you fuck up sometimes, and then you try to do better.

Petra: That's all you can do. Having established that now, if I had known you were going to hear that episode of *Pop Culture Happy Hour*, I would've been so rude about what I thought of The Darkling's backstory.

Leigh: [laughs] I don't mind that though. Look, man, I've been in this game for a while. Everything I do doesn't have to be loved by everybody. When I was writing *Ninth House*, I remember thinking this book is for like three people. [chuckles] I was lucky enough to find an editor who was like, "Let's do it anyway." That's not what creating fiction or writing fiction is about. That's not what creating anything is about. It's about doing the thing you think is best for the story and then hoping people come along for the ride.

Petra: Absolutely. I still wish he'd just been evil, but I don't want to ask actually – oh.

Leigh: I don't do just evil. It's boring.

Petra: I say just evil. Well, never mind. We're not here for my literary critiques, but I did want to actually ask, there is all kinds of stuff that, I feel like having watched the show, that there was just more room for you to stretch out and to add some things, because the humanizing bit of the Darkling's backstory that I think I rudely compared to Magneto, comes from a short story. A lot of people, if they've just read the books, they won't know about. Was that something you were thinking about like, "Oh, now I have an opportunity," or what were you doing in this case?

Leigh: Look, there's never been a problem creating sympathy for the Darkling. This is a very beloved character, sometimes to my great frustration. I feel like people give them a pass on things they shouldn't give them a pass on. I think it's important to remember that his cause is not unjust much like Magneto's, and that when I was writing *Demon in the Wood*, the goal wasn't to humanize him, the goal was simply to tell a story about where somebody begins and whether that's a hero origin story or villain origin story is up to the reader and is what's interesting to me.

Demon in the Wood, I remember my friend Morgan reading it and being like, "Oh my God, even I love him after this." I was like, whereas my attitude has always been, "cool motives, still murder," I

think that – I've said this before, I don't think that the most dangerous people enter our lives just as evil, they're often, they usually have good qualities and make you feel good until you don't. I think that it's important to say, somebody can have a good cause and also be a dictator. Somebody can have a good cause and also be a tyrant. Somebody can have a good cause and also abuse and exploit the people around him. That, to me, was one of the more compelling parts of the story.

I think in the hands of a different actor, he would have just been a cartoon, but I think Ben is a really great actor, and he read everything and read *Demon in the Wood* and wanted to talk about it and talk about who this person was. He didn't want to just play him as some kind of raving dictator, he wanted to make him human. He's really good and a very nice man.

Petra: It is embarrassing for me to admit, I feel like a failure as a fan. I did not know who he was before this show. I know. I know. I know. Maybe he'll get cast as the doctor, and then he'll enter my universe. I guess there was a lot of speculation that he would have been a great actor to play – were you thinking of him when they were casting the Darkling?

Leigh: Somebody fancast him, I don't even know how long ago. When Eric Keyser was like – his wife, who is a television writer, had written on *The Punisher*, so Ben came to me or – Eric came to me and was like, "What do you think of Ben Barnes as the Darkling, as Kirigan?" I was like, "Let me show you something." I went searching for it. I found the edit that somebody had made of him, maybe inside [unintelligible] with a quote next to it, or whatever, in some fabulous coat.

I think my reply had been like, "I like that coat and I like that man." I was like, "I think he'll do." Really, my response was, "If we can get him, please, let's get him." I just didn't know if he'd want to do it. He'd just come off of playing a villain, I didn't know how much he would want to play a villain again. I considered that we were incredibly fortunate to get him because it's not an easy role to cast.

Petra: No. He has weirdly, just sculpturally, the right face for it. He's got the big evil mesmerizing eyes, but he couldn't be a bigger guy, but he's not a regular guy. [laughs]

Leigh: I think all that is true. All that is true.

Petra: I actually have one audience question that I'm going to bring in here early because I think it's relevant, which is, is there any way without breaking canon to get Ben Barnes to sing in season two?

Leigh: Right. I have this whole like, I want to do a spin-off called *Darkling After Dark* where he just sits on a piano and just plays the hits.

Petra: I would tune in for that for sure.

Leigh: I surely don't think it's possible unless it was in some crushingly sad scene where he was singing a Ravkan lullaby to some broken soldier but I know, right? Allow me to stab you in the

heart, but no, he probably will not be singing in this, but he does have an album coming out and everybody should buy it, support your local Darkling.

Petra: Actually, so this is just me. I couldn't understand and maybe you can explain it to me because I miss things and this is why I pay other people to have taste for me because I'm a book review editor most of the time. Tell me about the choice to not call him the Darkling straight up?

Leigh: That was a little bit of a fight, I won't lie. Eric and I went back and forth on that quite a bit, but it's really hard to sell him as a potential good guy. His name is the Darkling, it's like somebody being called like Evil Mcstorm and then you're like, "Wait, he's bad?" I think some things work on the page that don't work elsewhere. We also had a lot, "Look, you're in Alina's head." The fact that nobody ever calls him by a name never really comes up. Okay?

It's not something that I had to write around. Whereas, in this, you have a lot of people, generals, et cetera, talking about this character. We also needed to make sure that, there's a game that you're playing with audiences who are maybe not that invested in fantasy and a title like the Darkling is a very fantasy moment. Having him be General Kirigan instantly locked in, "this is the general of an army, this is the role that he plays in this government, this is his relationship to the king," as opposed to having to explain all of that.

So there were a lot of good reasons to do it. I basically put forward a few names that I thought would work and they really loved Kirigan. I was like, "That's going to be real confusing to readers based on Count Kirigan in *Rule of Wolves*," but we threw in a couple of things about him taking the name of a nobleman. I think I may have even thrown in a little Easter egg in *Rule of Wolves* about it, but there's definitely – and also look, names are names, lots of people have them.

Petra: Okay. Now I understand actually, like when you talk about the mechanics of how he would work in a story that isn't just told from inside his head. Now I'm like, "Okay."

Leigh: It was not so much the name change, it was sacrificing how personal it is to give up your name to someone. This is something that's in *Demon in the Wood* too, your true name is tattooed on your heart, you don't share that with just anybody.

That name has power and giving up that intimacy was hard for me because it's such a gesture of actual trust and vulnerability, but I think that other things in the script accomplished that for us.

Petra: Which leads me to ask, actually, you talked about fighting with Eric about this. What fights did you win basically? What was so important to you?

Leigh: [laughs]

Petra: That sounded rude but you know what I mean. What was so important to you that you were like, "Uh, uh, uh, this has to be here."

Leigh: I am not dodging here but it is genuinely hard to remember because there was never a time where we were like screaming at each other. Most of it was the way that you brainstorm with somebody who you respect and who respects you. So, it's hard to look back and see clear things that were essential. I think that initial thing, of saying we cannot have book one of *Six of Crows* and book one of *Shadow and Bone* in the same show, was the big thing that I was like, "I will back you 100% but you're going to excavate the prequel material here."

Petra: I also want to ask, I'm looking at my list of questions so it's on the wrong screen. I'm technically well set up here. This is something that I wanted to ask earlier and got distracted, stop distracting me. [chuckles] I think you mentioned earlier there were things that the writers had invented that you loved, and I just wanted to dig in there. What was something like General Kirigan's [unintelligible] that you went, "Oh my God, I wish I thought of that."

Leigh: I have actually thought of two things. One, I'll tell you a thing that they did that I loved. I remember, and again, this is a spoiler for the show so if you guys didn't see it.

Petra: Go watch it.

Leigh: Yes, go watch it. They had originally when David was – in order for them to be able to find Alina, David had invented this tracking device. I was like, "This doesn't work. This breaks the world." Like, "How does this function? What powers this?" It was wrong for the world, and it was hard for me to convey why it was wrong and they were like, "But how in the world would they ever find them?" Then it was like, "There could be thread sewn into this, there could be a ring that he gives," then it was, let's move on to other options.

That was an example of something small where I was like, "We have to be very careful where technology gets introduced and what it is." Then something I loved that the writers did, I remember being in the room when Baghra basically gives the order to kill Mal. I was like, "Huh," I was like, "Yes." I was like, "That's a Baghra." I was like, "I love Baghra." She is a monster. She's an absolute monster of a human being but I absolutely love writing her. I thought Zoe's portrayal of her was everything I wanted and more, I could just watch an entire show of Baghra smacking people with her stick.

I just adore her and I loved that she had in this moment this ruthlessness, like, "This is what the stakes are. Yes, I will kill this person who just showed up because he was doing his job." Yes, I loved it. I gasped in the room and I was like, "Yes. Good."

Petra: Speaking of Mal, I like screen Mal better than I like page Mal, I have to say. He seems less threatened. Sorry?

Leigh: Archie is a very good actor and I was also very aware of the discourse on Mal. I don't think, look, I was a young writer, and I think I wrote him as a teenage boy. What I didn't understand was people don't actually want to read which boys are actually like, and the Mal in the show is a much

more idealized Mal. He's somebody who is infinitely loyal and infinitely ferocious. I think that those are both qualities I wanted to portray, but maybe I was not good enough writer to do it.

Petra: Well, I disagree.

Leigh: "You were a good enough writer but you didn't want to." [laughs] Look, again, I feel like if you look back at your first book, and you're like, "That's where I peaked," I just kept – you're doing something wrong. The whole point is to keep challenging yourself and doing different things and trying to get better at your craft. You read more, you put more work out in the world and you learn your job, and learning on the job can be embarrassing. I imagine there are a lot of actors out there who don't want their first cameo and Degrassi to be the thing that people remember when – [laughter] If we don't improve I don't know why one would bother doing this.

Petra: Fair enough. I shouldn't be conflating Leigh of today with Leigh of the original *Shadow and Bone*.

Leigh: Very evolved, Petra, that's what you need to understand.

Petra: [laughs] Well, actually, we've talked about some of the ways that you've evolved and how that affected the way the show differs from the book. Is there something that I've missed? Is this something that's really important to you that you want to be like, "Hey, look, I changed and this is reflected on the screen?"

Leigh: No. Look, the reality is that I can sit here and talk. I'm happy to answer questions. I love talking to people about the show and about the process. I know it can seem incredibly opaque, especially for people who are writers who want to get into this world and who want to be creating their own work and hope to be adapted someday. I try to be as candid as I can within the parameters of what I am allowed and not allowed to say, but at the same time the work is the work at the end of the day, death of the author. I am not nearly as interesting as my characters and they should do the talking for me.

Petra: It's interesting, as you were talking it just popped into my head, what you were saying about like, nobody wants to read a real teenage boy, and I read a lot of YA and a lot of romance for my job and also because I love it, and I get to do it for my job. I think about that, the way that adult literary fiction often shows those people as they are. It's ambiguous. People are crummy. They don't know what they're doing. They don't know how to communicate, but if you look at YA in romance, they're creating characters that model the behavior that we would like to see from the men in our lives. I feel like we've got romance novel Mal.

Leigh: Also for ourselves. Like in YA, nobody says, "Fuck this, I'm going home and taking a nap." They say, "Okay, I'm going to go and I'm going to fight in the revolution," or, "I'm going to depose the evil leader," or, "I'm going to go to prom and do the thing." We are our best selves in young adults and our worst selves too. We're allowed to have those extremes. I think that that is super appealing about YA as a genre or a category.

Petra: Absolutely. My God, it's like 7:55 already.

Leigh: I know.

Petra: The hour has flown. I do want to get to audience questions soon, but I also want to ask, there's going to be a second season. Yes, we can confirm that. The first season was your first time working on a TV adaptation. You're also working on an adaptation of *Ninth House*. Are you writing that?

Leigh: Yes, I am actually co-writing that. I co-wrote the pilot with our showrunner whose name I don't think I can share because we haven't announced it. We'll wait and see if we get a chance to make the show, but that was a pretty wonderful process. Again, I felt like I was learning on the job, but it was very pleasurable and also it helped to keep me engaged with the second book because I had to really be predicting things that were going to happen later.

Petra: Oh, that's so interesting. Like the idea of writing the second book in a series, when you know the first one's going to be on TV.

Leigh: You don't know because anything can happen in Hollywood.

Petra: Sure.

Leigh: I will say with the Grishaverse, there were what, like seven, eight books? I don't know how many books were already out, so I didn't have to – I was like, "I'm going to finish the series. *Rule of Wolves* is going to come out, but it's going to be done." Whereas, *Ninth House*, I am like, "I have to write faster and I haven't. I've been so slow." The prospect of getting the second book out before we would ever air is very appealing to me because I cannot imagine trying to write with so many voices in my head. I would find that incredibly difficult. I have a lot more sympathy for George R. R. Martin than I ever had as a reader. George, solidarity.

Petra: [laughs] I'm thinking of that Paul And Storm song, *Write faster George R. R. Martin*.

Leigh: "We're going to wait." Then be like, "Oh, no. They're talking about me." I don't know why George R.R. Martin speaks this way in my head, but that would be so traumatizing. It's bad enough when readers are like, "When? When?" You're like, "I'm trying, I know I'm the worst."

Petra: The worst part is that song is like five or six years old at this point. [laughs] I had actually a serious question that I was going to end on, which was, now that you're used to the process of working on a TV show, what are you carrying forward into season two of *Shadow and Bone*? What have you learned that's going to help you or be useful as you're working on future projects?

Leigh: I think, I don't know if this is what people are going to want to hear, but I'm learning to let go a little more. There are a lot of crises that happen in the making of the TV show, there are a lot of things that come up, frustrations, difficulties, that you don't anticipate, and they can feel like the

end of the world. I think I was so deep, and it became very hard for me to write, it became very hard for me to think about anything but the show.

The truth is, I do love adaptation, I am honored and delighted that my works are on the screen and that there may be more on the screen, but the job I always wanted was to be a novelist and that's what I want to keep doing. In order to keep doing that, I need to step back a little more and that means letting go.

Petra: That's a perfectly valid answer, if people don't want to hear it, well, I'm not going to say anything rude, we have 1,000 people in the audience. The idea of having to let go and step back because these things are now in other people's hands, it's part of the process. We have 300 questions.

Leigh: We can get through all of them.

Petra: We're going to go to some of those.

Leigh: [laughs] Who would win in a fight, Darlington or the Darkling? Book one Darlington would lose but book two Darlington? I don't know, would at least be able to put up a fight.

Petra: [laughs] I actually, and this is my question too, I know you've called *King of Scars* your farewell in the Grishaverse, does that mean there's not going to be another Crows book?

Leigh: I don't know. When I started *Rule of Wolves*, I had every intention of writing dozens of Crows books but right now, I don't want to. I left the door wide open at the end of *Rule of Wolves*. I also feel I gave a fitting ending. There's a good possibility then, in a year, I will feel very different, but I'm not interested in writing a book just for the payday or just because – I need to feel compelled to tell the story and I think to honor the characters and the world, then, that's the headspace that I have to be in. Right now, I'm not in that headspace. There's other places I want to explore, and again, to be totally honest, things have gotten so loud both in terms of the positive and the negative. It's why I left social media.

I'll come back. I'll talk about things I'm missing. I miss hearing what my friends are doing. I miss communicating with readers so much, but it got real loud and sometimes really ugly. It's very hard to create from that feeling. For right now, it's goodbye for now.

Petra: Wow, there are so many questions. I'm not going to ask you why. No, that's a spoiler. Never mind. Here's the thing. Without being too spoiler-y, what are you most excited to see come to the screen in season two? I already asked you about Storm and you wouldn't tell me. What can you tell me?

Leigh: I cannot talk about it but all I'll say is you all know the new characters, the characters from the books who are coming and that's what I can't wait to see. Look, when you get to see amazing actors play your characters, you get greedy and you're like I want all of them. I want it all. I want to see everything. I really want that very badly because I enjoyed it so much the first time around. I'd

bet money I know what that question was. It was why I killed a certain character in *Crooked Kingdom*, isn't it?

Petra: Yes.

Leigh: Because I can. It should hurt on the way out. That's how you know you were there. This is war. This is what happens and I think that there are deep consequences for choices we make and choices that get made for us. That's all I'll say about that. I get asked that at every single –

Petra: You knew what it was without even me saying.

Leigh: I was at a restaurant and the waiter slipped me a note that said that.

Petra: Oh, no.

Leigh: I love you, but why did you kill [crosstalk] I was like, "Oh God, and you spit in my food."

Petra: To go back to George R. R. Martin, the thing that he always says is, "Yes," when people ask him why he killed off Ned Stark, "This is war, people die." Here's an interesting question. We've been talking about combining the Crows with the events of *Shadow and Bone* and this person Alison Bews is asking, "How do these characters meeting alter their motivations? For example, will the fact that Inej has now met a real-life saint affect her choices and beliefs going forward in the show, and have you talked about that in the writer's room?"

Leigh: Yes. This is one of the challenges in moving into some of the content that you guys will be familiar with from the books. It is something that is absolutely going to shape them. I don't think it would be comfortable to write the characters or make any sense to write the characters if those things did not impact their future choices. Alina is changed by her interactions with the Crows and Inej is absolutely changed and that also changes her dynamic with Kaz, it's invariable. Jesper has been around more Grisha now and has seen the Ravkan Army in action. All of those things have to play out in the show but again I think that we keep to the spirit of the character, even though some of the particulars will change.

Petra: This is a question that we talked about, the Darkling and his name, but a lot of people want to know how you actually feel about the fact that they've revealed the Darkling's name so early. There's somebody saying, Leigh you must talk about this, it is for science.

Leigh: Like I said, to me, it felt like a loss. There's something very beautiful about being the one person who's given access to – this is something that is, I guess, one of my romantic jams. I love burning, pining, yearning. I just want everyone to be in pain for as long as possible and being the one person who gets to see a particular side of someone is so thrilling. It's true in real life too when you realize you're the one they picked to reveal the true self to.

When you can be your true self with someone, it's such a truly magical thing. To me, that was a loss, but I understood why we had to make those sacrifices. I did feel like there were elements of the

character and their interactions that still allowed for us to see both the tender side of him and the deeply manipulative side of him, which are sometimes one of the same.

Petra: This is a fun one. Did you get to keep anything from the set?

Leigh: Oh, yes.

Petra: It's right there. Can we see?

Leigh: Maybe you can see it. I don't want to pick up the laptop and walk around because I'm wearing shorts. It's really warm in here. There's a scene, it's one of my favorite scenes where Jesper opens the door on the coach and David throws a book at him and it's the Ravkan edition of *Shadow and Bone*. I was like, "Please can I have it?" They gave it to me and I treasure it so much. I love it so much. It's so beautiful.

I don't think it's an actual translation but the pages are all in Ravkan script. And I got to keep, like, some cards and chips and just little knickknacks and coins from [unintelligible] and the Crow Club which are very special and my nephew, Ryan is a magician and an amateur magician. I brought back some cards for him.

Petra: Did you get to keep the purple kefta?

Leigh: I did, it's hanging in my closet, but it didn't fit me because I ate too much during COVID but I don't care, I don't care.

Petra: COVID-19 is real. I suffered from that too.

Leigh: Give me all the carbs. It's truly the most beautiful garment I have ever – I need to explain to you guys that Wendy Partridge, our costume designer, I can't explain how detailed all these costumes are and it is lined with fake fur. It is beaded and embroidered and just exquisite. It's so stunning. Don't play the cameo clip. I've seen a little note come up, like stop, I wanted to answer more questions. Let's answer more questions.

Petra: Okay. Well, actually I have a question, it's purple, which is fabricator, right?

Leigh: Yes. I wanted to be [unintelligible], but originally I was going to be in a scene, Alina's wearing the healer's kefta, early on. I was just going to be in a scene where I opened a door to let her into the little palace for the first time. They were like, "We don't want you both in red." I was like, "Okay, purple. I would gladly be a fabricator." That's what ended up happening, even though we ended up shooting me in a different scene.

Petra: Here's a fun question. Are you taking applications to pick up cat and/or goat poop on the set?

Leigh: [laughs] That is very kind of you. I will tell you that I just ordered Freddy, my dog, a goat snood, so he's going to be Milo for Halloween.

Petra: That's adorable. Are there going to be more goats?

Leigh: I don't know that Milo will be making a comeback, but we're all aware that he is the biggest star in the show. There are St. Milo references and if I ever do another *Lives of Saints*, there will be a goat saint.

Petra: I'm excited. We have a lot of questions about the Crows, honestly. Here's one that I'm interested in, which is, as the show goes along, are you going to try to intertwine any of Kaz's backstory? Because boy does he have one.

Leigh: Yes, again, I can't say very much, but you're going to be seeing all of the Crows' backstories one way or another. At least if we get the episodes, if we get the seasons, those are all integral parts of the story. I think that they may come out and if you notice in the book, they come out in bits and pieces and then you can string them all together, but yes, you will.

Petra: This is the most popular question currently, which is, what was your favorite episode of the show? Can you say, or is it like kids? Are you not supposed to have a favorite?

Leigh: No. My favorite episode was seven. I can tell you it was the second to last episode and I remember watching that without any special effects. It had just placeholders because that's the last thing, not the very last thing they do, but it's one of the last things they do. I was just watching placeholder animation and a tennis ball on a stick and all this stuff, but that scene with Alina and the stag got to me. I remember just crying when I watched that episode. I think it was when it really sank in for me that this was happening, that this was real. I have a very clear memory of writing that scene.

I remember reading the last line of that scene, which was, "the woods were silent in their grief." That was the first line that I had written in the whole damn manuscript when I thought, "Oh, maybe this book will be good." [chuckles] My only goal writing that novel was to finish a damn book because I wanted to be a writer so badly, and I had never managed that. The whole time I was telling myself, "It's crap. It's crap. It's crap. Don't worry. It's crap. It's fine. Just get through it."

I remember writing that scene and thinking, "Oh, wait, I actually love this story and I love these characters and I'm going to go back and I'm going to make this better." Seeing that come to life is pretty powerful. I also think it's a great episode. I just love it.

Petra: It's a gorgeous scene. Oh, damn, here's a question that I wish I'd seen earlier because it follows what we were talking about with the changes to the Crows. How do you think changing the ending of the TV show where Alina helps the entire skiff, rather than just leaving it behind with Mal? How's that going to change her arc later on?

Leigh: A lot of people still died because of her. Also, I think that there's still plenty of guilt and trauma to go around. I guess that is what I would say. Also, I think one of the changes the show made that I was really nervous about that I think worked very well was making the amplifiers part of the body. Seeing that collar sink into her neck and her reaction because Jessie's so fucking good. The horror in her, the sense of violation in her, and then her ability to take that power back was so vital.

I think both of those things, what she was forced to do on the Fold, how many people died on the Fold, how many people died in [unintelligible], and what that collar means, and it being a part of her body are all just so deep that I think that it's going to maybe give her a slightly different trajectory, but I think a very powerful one.

Petra: Following on from that, actually, somebody is asking, and I know you've said that the story is going to diverge from the books in future seasons, do you – Let's assume this is a spoiler too but I'm going to ask it anyways, and you can tell me to get lost. Do you want the shows and the books to end in the same place, the same way?

Leigh: Yes I do. [laughs] Yes, I do. Look, I wrote the books the way I wrote them for a reason, and that – I haven't seen any sense that that is going to change at all, but there are certain things that I know if we get to move forward will change because we'll want to see these characters continue in their adventures. Also because there's a finality to some things that happen in the books that then is sort of undone in later books, I'm really being abstruse here, but I guess my point is there are certain things that are essential to me that stay the same and certain things that I don't care.

You learn which things and, fortunately, I've been on the same page with the writers from moment one. There's never been a time where we've been like – when they've been like, "Well what we really want is for Alina to become a beautiful Pegasus at the end." There's never been a – although, amazing twist. There hasn't really been a conflict like that, but I do see the shape of the second season as being somewhat different from the books and, again, I can't say more but it will make sense what they're doing when you all see it.

Petra: I think we're almost at the end, we have time for one more question. Can you see the questions? Is there one you particularly want to answer?

Leigh: No I didn't, I closed the window.

Petra: All right, well, here's a good one to end on. Do you ship Genyalina or Zoyalina more?

Leigh: Everybody together. Wow, I love enemies to lovers, so I would go Zoyalina.

Petra: Yes, I was going to say, I think that's about right.

Leigh: I love enemies to lovers. I mean who doesn't? It's so fun.

Petra: Well, I think that's a great note to end on. [laughs]. Leigh Bardugo, thank you so, so much, this has been a hoot.

Leigh: It was really fun. Thank you to everybody who was here. I'm sorry I didn't get to all your questions, you can always send me a question at my – on my newsletter, lastleigh@gmail, and I answer a lot of questions every month in my newsletter, and hopefully, someday we'll be allowed to tour and do real events again and I'll get to meet some of you in person.

Petra: I would just like to say hang on for just one second because the Executive Director of PEN/Faulkner is going to come on with some closing remarks. I am just going to say thank you to everyone who came and asked such thoughtful questions. Thank you, Leigh, for creating this amazing world and being super fun to talk to. I'm Petra Mayer of NPR Books, thank you all, goodnight and here is the Executive Director of PEN/Faulkner.

Gwydion Suilebhan: Hello everyone. I am Gwydion Suilebhan. It's lovely to have you here tonight. Let me start by offering my really tremendous thanks for Leigh, and Petra, and Shahenda, and also, to all of you for making this another incredible Literary Conversation. I can't believe how many great questions there were. We couldn't do this without you, and so we are so grateful that you are here.

We have our donation info, we're going to drop that in the chat.

[Donate to PEN/Faulkner at this link! bit.ly/penfaulkner]

I wanted to close tonight by mentioning that PEN/Faulkner works really hard to create meaningful encounters with writers, and with writing, and books, just like the one we've had here tonight, for students in grades 3 to 12 who attend underserved Title 1 schools in DC. Literature helps those students stay connected to a larger world, just like it does for all of us, and books help us all bear up under difficult circumstances.

If you can help us, even \$5 from you can help us totally transform one young person's reading life. \$5 a month, if you can manage that, helps us do the same thing over, and over, and over again throughout the year. PEN/Faulkner has continued to stay really strong, and stay really hopeful, and positive throughout the crisis of this pandemic that we're living through. Part of what's giving us hope is the support that you have given us, so thank you so much in advance for anything you can do. Thank you for joining us tonight too. Have a great night.