

## Interview with Leigh Bardugo

[00:00:09] **Kendra** Hello, I'm Kendra Winchester, here with Joce of @squibblesreads. And this is Reading Women, a podcast inviting you to reclaim half the bookshelf by discussing books written by or about women. Today, we're talking to Leigh Bardugo, the author of NINTH HOUSE and—most recently—THE LIVES OF SAINTS and other books in the Grishaverse, which are out now from Flatiron Books.

[00:00:34] **Joce** For full transcript of this episode, check out this episode's show notes on readingwomenpodcast.com. And make sure you're subscribed so you don't miss a single episode.

[00:00:43] **Kendra** So when Flatiron pitched this interview to Reading Women, I was like, Huh. I've read a few books by Leigh Bardugo, but I think Joce has read a lot of them. And I emailed you. And then, like, all the exclamation points arrived in my inbox.

[00:01:04] **Joce** There they were. Yes, I was extremely excited. I was like, how much of my life do I have to give to Kendra in order to get the opportunity to appear on this interview?

[00:01:17] **Kendra** And it really works out because I have not read all of her books. And I believe you have read all—if not, most of them. And so we were able to have a great conversation with Leigh Bardugo about all of the things. And I mean, she has so many books. It's like, where do you even start?

[00:01:36] **Joce** Yeah, I mean, yes. I have definitely read all of her books. And I think the most recent one, THE LIVES OF SAINTS, is extremely exciting because there are these beautiful illustrations. I think the book itself is just like a very beautiful object. And like you'll hear in the interview, Leigh was talking about how it will actually appear as a prop in the Netflix show, which is extremely exciting. And also kind of as we move into fall . . . autumn here, you know, NINTH HOUSE is everyone's favorite trend for fall and autumn dark academia. It takes place at Yale University, which Leigh also attended for her education. And we definitely talk more about how those things intertwine and how, you know, we can't really escape a lot of happenings on the college campus and in the academia world, such as conflicts of race and gender. And a big theme in the book is power. So that is now out on paperback.

[00:02:32] **Kendra** And definitely go pick it up. I read it last fall when it came out in hardback. It's this amazing cover with this black snake on it. And I was just mesmerized. And I love a good ghost story. I love secret societies and magical societies. And so I feel like I'm a rare bird in that the NINTH HOUSE is my favorite book of hers that I've read so far. I have not finished all the books in the Grishaverse to be, you know, clear to hardcore Grisha fans. But I feel like it just goes to show her talent that she can write so many different things so well and kind of suck you into that world.

[00:03:13] **Joce** Yeah, definitely. They are kind of very different in tone. You know, one is kind of set in, I guess in part, in our contemporary society with some tweaks, some fabulist and mystifying elements. The Grishaverse is entirely a beautiful fantasy world. I remember I read SHADOW AND BONE way back when I started BookTube in 2015/2016. And I was just immediately . . . I had to read all of them. And I think over the next couple of years, I read the whole series maybe four or five times. They're just amazing. And me and my friend Hannah, we actually did a lookbook for many of the characters in the SIX OF

CROWS duology. And we filmed it immediately before attending her CROOKED KINGDOM release event, which was in the South Bay here in California. And yeah, I've had a very long and happy relationship with the Grishaverse for sure.

[00:04:09] **Kendra** So obviously, you are definitely the woman to talk to her today, which is pretty great. So before we jump into the interview, a little bit about Leigh Bardugo. She is a #1 New York Times bestselling author of fantasy novels and the creator of the Grishaverse, which is coming soon to Netflix, which we do talk about in the interview. It spans from the SHADOW AND BONE Trilogy to SIX OF CROWS Duology, THE LANGUAGE OF THORNS, and KING OF SCARS—with more to come, which is very exciting. Her short stories can be found in multiple anthologies, including BEST AMERICAN SCIENCE FICTION IN FANTASY. Her other works include WONDER WOMAN: WARBRINGER and NINTH HOUSE, which was the Goodreads Choice Winner for Best Fantasy in 2019, which is being developed for television by Amazon Studios. I didn't know that.

[00:05:04] **Joce** Yeah, that is super, super exciting. That's definitely. . . . One of the things that we talked about in our interview was she kind of discussed how stepping into an executive producer role is very, very different from being a writer. Obviously, in our interview, we talk more about NINTH HOUSE (which is just coming out in paperback), THE LIVES OF SAINTS, we three spoonies also talked about disability advocacy. We also delved into fall fashion and the toddling realm of putting on our patient pants and how to do so in a fashionable manner. She truly, really needs no introduction. But here is our interview with the magnificent Leigh Bardugo.

[00:05:50] **Kendra** Well, welcome, Leigh, to the podcast. We are so excited—over the moon—to have you on this show.

[00:05:57] **Leigh** Thank you for having me.

[00:05:59] **Kendra** Well, I feel like the big question of the time is, how are you doing? How are you holding up with everything going on?

[00:06:09] **Leigh** I've developed something—which you can't see me right now—but I'm doing the COVID shrug, which is maybe the 2020 shrug like, I . . . I am doing better than many people. And so I don't feel comfortable complaining. I have a job, a job that allows me . . . that always had me working from home. I don't have kids. But I won't lie. It has been a tough season or two. And it's definitely gotten to me. It's definitely harder to be creative during this time. There are some health issues in my life and in my family's life, so I can't say that I'm the most chipper I have ever been.

[00:06:49] **Kendra** We were just talking about—before we start recording—that quarantine has kind of inspired you to perhaps have a new fur child in your life.

[00:07:01] **Leigh** I mean, I am. . . . I am. . . . I have dog fever. Like, if somebody wanted to assassinate me, the perfect decoy would be a dog. And I wouldn't care. I'd die happy because I'd be petting a dog. And luckily, my partner is as obsessed with dogs as I am. But our apartment—we moved to this apartment to be closer to my mom, who's coming up on eighty—and they do not allow pets. So we've been looking for a house. But this is absolutely the wrong time to be looking for a house. So we're sort of caught in this no pet zone that I don't care for at all.

[00:07:41] **Kendra** It's one hundred percent understandable.

[00:07:42] **Leigh** I know. And honestly, I kind of feel like we've paid our rent through the whole quarantine. How about you?

[00:07:49] **Joce** Oh my gosh. The whole thing is so hard.

[00:07:52] **Leigh** We haven't seen our landlord in I don't know how long. Like, we don't even know if there's someone there. I could be sending checks into the ether. So I have . . . at this point, I'm like, really? Who's going to know if we have a pet? But, yeah, it's. . . . Look, I think a lot of people are feeling this way, which is that sort of the things we didn't even know were pleasures have become pleasures. And I have felt this shift in me where early on I was following all these social media accounts that were showing me road trips and vacations, and I loved it. I was like, ah, it's like a window into the world. And now I'm just full of spite when I see those things. So there's definitely been a change in my mood over the course of quarantine.

[00:08:39] **Kendra** Yeah, it's definitely been a journey. I actually just moved during quarantine, and that was very exciting.

[00:08:48] **Leigh** Wow.

[00:08:49] **Kendra** Yes. So deeply relate. I'm very excited to talk to you today because you have a lot going on with your books right now. Your first adult novel, NINTH HOUSE, is out now in paperback. Three cheers for that.

[00:09:07] **Leigh** Whoo!

[00:09:07] **Kendra** I listened to this book last year during spooky season. And I loved how it was like a ghost story, campus story. There are secret societies and all sorts of things happening. And ghost stories are like some of my favorite stories. And you just kind of take all of that and make something new and complex out of it. What were some of the challenges that you experienced writing NINTH HOUSE? And what were some of the things that you learned about yourself or your writing during that process?

[00:09:37] **Leigh** Wow, that's a big question. So the surface level, I guess, of this is that I fell in love with New Haven when I was writing this book. New Haven is where Yale is located, but there's much more to it. It's a little city in Connecticut, about two hours from New York. And, you know, I had spent four years there as an undergrad, and I had actually lived there afterwards when I was writing for "The Advocate" and sleeping on my friend's couch and destroying her relationship, which I don't regret because he was a jerk. But the place of New Haven, the history of New Haven, the culture of New Haven, I am embarrassed to admit I really knew nothing about. And so for me, writing this book was really a love story. It was me falling in love with this town and wanting other people to fall in love with it too because so much of the history you read in NINTH HOUSE is real. All of the places—excluding Darlington's home, Black Elm—are real, and you can visit them from your car on the streets or on the internet. And I wanted New Haven to play a very powerful role in the telling of the story.

[00:10:52] **Leigh** I think there was a sort of a more difficult part of the process for me, which was, you know, when I originally set out to write this book, I—and this happens to me a lot with my novels—is I will think that I'm about to write a romp. You know, like a

really fun, adventurous romp. Wouldn't this be cool if the secret societies at Yale were actually repositories of arcane magic? And that sounds fun, but you can't write about a place like Yale without writing about things like privilege and gender and race and class. And it meant sort of turning a different lens on the time that I had spent there as an undergraduate.

[00:11:39] **Joce** Yeah, definitely, I think one of the things that I personally enjoyed is kind of this encompassing of the college campus and also incorporating some of these mysterious or mystifying elements to it. And I'm kind of wondering, like, what was your thought process in terms of combining some of these fabulous and mystifying elements with some of the stuff that occurs on college campuses like sexual assaults and race and gender and power?

[00:12:10] **Leigh** I mean, you know, magic and the mystical are really just. . . . Magic is a commodity, and it is treated as such in the book. It's just another kind of power. And it's sort of a very clear metaphor for other kinds of power. And the idea of the mystical is the idea of access, the access to something other than the world we live in. And that also points to ideas of who gets to access these things, whether it's a great internship or a job opportunity or a fellowship or a grant or the chance to go to an Ivy League institution in the first place. Or it's something like who gets to speak to the dead, who gets to access to the beyond, who gets to go to the borderlands between our world in the next? And so it felt very natural to me. And, you know, these societies. . . . You know, I went to Yale. And I was very much a fish out of water there, particularly early on. These societies, these tombs—or they are clubhouse, but they're called tombs—they are these extraordinary structures that are littered around campus and off campus. And they beg for attention. These are not nondescript buildings. They are built to look like new Egyptian temples and Greek giant mausoleums and a giant Tudor mansion where there should be no mansion. And so they . . . on the one hand, they're secret. On the other hand, they invite speculation, and they invite the fantastical.

[00:13:55] **Kendra** And I learned so much about Yale and the campus there. And I love what you were saying about how these buildings really do exist. There's a little map—I love a good map—in the book where you can look at the different areas and where different buildings are located. But you built on that. You took that, and you made it into this world of magic. And of course, every world of magic has rules and world building. Was it very different building this on something that already existed versus something like you've done previously where you just invented a whole new world?

[00:14:35] **Leigh** I mean, yes. On the one hand, look, the first book in a series, I think, is always the most thrilling because you're throwing open all of these doors. And there are no rules yet. You're you're writing the rules. You're creating the map. This was a little different because the map already existed. And I wanted to be as faithful to that as I could be. And that was occasionally frustrating. You know, I'm used to . . . if I need a convenient waterfall, I can create a convenient waterfall. But I've also been writing . . . my young adult series is widely called the Grishaverse. It's *SHADOW AND BONE* and *SIX OF CROWS* and *KING OF SCARS* and *THE LIVES OF SAINTS*. And that world I've been writing in for so long. But in some ways, I'm bound by the same rules. You know, once you put a map out, you can't say, oh, I changed my mind. I need to move this mountain range. And that is actually a little bit frustrating.

[00:15:29] **Leigh** So I tried my best to let the map inspire me in New Haven. And in some ways, you know, I remember looking at the aerial view of the map for the first time and

seeing the way that the paths bisected the New Haven green, which is built over an old cemetery under which there are still thousands of bodies. And I remember looking at them and thinking, "That really looks like a pentagram." And this is the gift of New Haven. Everything you think is normal is not normal. When I went to to research Rosenthal Hall, I thought, "Okay, this was used as a language lab or blah, blah, blah. It used to be Sam Owens' tomb." Well, turns out that some people speculate there are seven subterranean levels and that one of them is filled with taxidermy zoo animals. So, you know, on the one hand, it's a . . . it is difficult to be grappling with the real world. And on the other hand, some places in our real world just are gifts that keep giving you inspiration.

[00:16:37] **Joce** Oh my gosh. This is amazing. As a person with a toddler who is going to the zoo soon, I feel like this is now ingrained in my mind. And when I go to the zoo, I just will not be able to stop thinking about it.

[00:16:50] **Leigh** Yeah, yeah.

[00:16:51] **Joce** Kind of talking about throwing the doors open in the first book and now approaching the second book, what can you tell us about the second book?

[00:17:04] **Leigh** Very little. I can tell you that sort of the thrust of the second book is abundantly clear from the last chapter of NINTH HOUSE. Even the title is in there. You know, I've only just started digging into it, so I suspect it won't be on shelves until 2022, which I don't feel good about. I like to. . . . I generally have brought out books a year, year and a half apart. But between my other series and the launch of the adaptation of that series, there's been a little less time than I would have liked to devote to this world. But I'm. . . . I can only tell you that you will be seeing more of all the characters we met in the first book and that they have quite a journey ahead of them to parts unknown.

[00:17:51] **Joce** Well, we are very excited for the second book. And, like I say to my toddler, we will put on our patient pants because ladies love to wear pants, nice-looking patient pants. And we will be patient and wait for 2022 for that.

[00:18:05] **Leigh** I think my patient pants have worn thin over the course of 2020, looking a little bit like . . . a little worn down there.

[00:18:13] **Joce** Yes, I feel this a lot.

[00:18:16] **Kendra** Oh my goodness. I just . . . I can't get that image out of my head now.

[00:18:23] **Leigh** First the taxidermied zoo animals and now the worn patient pants.

[00:18:28] **Kendra** So we also want to talk to you about another one of your books. This one is just . . . it's coming out or has already come out, depending on when this drops. But we want to talk to you about LIVES OF SAINTS, which is a short story collection, which is very—it's a very different animal than the other books that you have worked on. What has that been like working on something that has several different pieces, several different stories in it versus working on a more long-form project?

[00:18:56] **Leigh** So I've written short stories before for different anthologies. And we put out a short story collection called THE LANGUAGE OF THORNS, which is dark fairytales, sort of reinterpreted through my particular viewpoint. And they have beautiful illustrations by an artist named Sara Kipin. And it's—I think I can say this without sounding arrogant

because the design of the book is extraordinary—they really made a little beautiful jewel of an object with that book. LIVES OF SAINTS is a little different because it's a book that exists within the books. It's something that's referenced in the first trilogy. It's a gift that is given to my main character, Alina, by a priest known as The Apparat. And it ends up playing a fairly big role in the story as a clue to her future and is supposed to be something that was once held by pretty much every Ravkan child. And so it's a little bit different because it's much more "in world" than anything else I've done before.

[00:20:09] **Leigh** And honestly, when we found out that this was going to make its way into the Netflix show as a prop, you know, oh, should we make a notebook? It'd be merch. And I thought, I really want to do something that has some heft to it. And that will be a kind of gift to people who want to dig a little bit deeper into the world. And so there are twenty eight stories of the different saints in Ravka. And each is illustrated by Dan Zollinger. And it's . . . again, I think they made it a very beautiful object. But it was challenging. I was on deadline for RULE OF WOLVES, which is the next novel that's coming out in the Grishaverse. And I was also on set in Budapest for the adaptation. And so most of these stories were at least drafted sitting in a tiny dark tent, in a parka, with one ear on the production. So a very strange environment to be writing in.

[00:21:11] **Joce** This is strangely reminiscent of the beginning of SHADOW AND BONE, where plenty of people were huddled in a tiny tent, perhaps also wearing parkas with one ear elsewhere.

[00:21:22] **Leigh** I mean, there is probably a metaphor at work there. And I think, you know, with these stories, it is weird. It is a weird little book. But I wanted it to be these kind of. . . . I've had trouble consuming . . . getting lost in books the way I did before quarantine. And so I have been reading more short stories. And this is something that can be consumed in little sips as opposed to one big gulp. And there are funny stories. There are very bloody stories. Some are stories of how saints became saints, their kind of sometimes martyrdoms, sometimes happier endings. And some are stories of works they supposedly performed for the faithful. So it was a fun and strange exercise. But I tried to layer it with enough that people who aren't familiar with the Grishaverse could enjoy them. But people who are will find lots of Easter eggs that refer them back to the rest of the world.

[00:22:22] **Joce** Yeah, I definitely think that was one of my favorite things about the collection, is that even though I've read the entirety of everything that's out in the Grishaverse, I was still able to find fun little snippets as well as just kind of learn more stuff about our friends in the lore.

[00:22:40] **Leigh** Yeah, I'd say that, I think, is the connecting thread between NINTH HOUSE and LIVES OF SAINTS is I love lore. Like, I love found documents. And I love old texts. And I love the idea that now I can create them for both of these worlds.

[00:22:57] **Joce** Yeah, I mean, absolutely. I think that, you know, both of these worlds have kind of like a depth to them. And they feel like they go back in history for thousands and thousands of years. Obviously they do. But, you know, I think they just carry a depth with them that I think a lot of readers appreciate.

[00:23:14] **Leigh** Thank you.

[00:23:16] **Joce** But, yeah, I was basically just going to say, you know, it's kind of a hard balance between seeing yourself as kind of like this brand, you know, and also kind of

seeing yourself as kind of human, you know, a person that writes these stories and creates these things that do deeply resonate with other people. And I guess one of the things that has deeply resonated with us, I guess for me personally, I am a woman who experiences chronic pain at times. It really does knock me down, and it affects kind of how I work and stuff. And I know, Kendra, we do a lot of work on the podcast for disability advocacy and stuff. I don't know if you wanted to speak a little bit more about that.

[00:24:00] **Kendra** Yeah. So I have a disabling chronic illness, and I use a cane. And, you know, being a—well, I just turned thirty—an early thirty-something with a cane gets you a lot of interesting looks. And so I am always interested when I find out that an author also has a chronic illness or disability of some kind because it always influences their storytelling. And you can see that, especially if you have one as well. And so I wanted to ask you, how has your experience with chronic illness and disability influenced your storytelling? And is it something that you've noted over time? Or was it something that you could see looking back on stories that you've written?

[00:24:46] **Leigh** So I have osteonecrosis, which is a degenerative bone disease. And I do use mobility aid, not all the time, but more and more. And, you know, I had sort of a reckoning—and I don't know if you had this experience; I would really love to know—with my own sort of internalized ableism about what it meant to use a cane as a relatively young woman and how I felt about that. And for me, there was. . . . Tour is a gift that very few authors get and getting out to go to do that. But it is exhausting in ways I never could have anticipated and frequently results in. . . . You know, I call airports the "spoon eaters" because—I hate them too—they have. . . . you never really know where you're going. You don't know how long you'll be walking. And in tour, it's just one of those after another. It's convention centers and all the places that sort of devour your energy and your good pain days.

[00:25:55] **Leigh** So I was in London, and I had a day off. And I was in a fairly nice area to go sightseeing. And I thought, oh, I'll go for a walk. And I got out of the hotel, and I went maybe two blocks. And then I realized that I felt okay, but I didn't know how long I was going to feel okay. And I was terrified that I was not going to be able to get back, you know, that I was. . . . And so I went, and I stayed home for the day. I stayed in the hotel and did some work and watched British television. And I felt the loss of that moment profoundly. I was in this city with one day to explore, and I couldn't do it. And that was what led me to say, all right, to hell with this. Get over your bullshit and use your cane. And, at the same time, I was writing SIX OF CROWS. And, you know, it is embarrassing to say that I wasn't really conscious of this until I came out on the other side of the draft. But Kaz Brekker—who is one of the baddest, most dangerous, most full of swagger characters I've ever written—walks with a cane and has chronic pain. And it is an essential part of how he gets through the world. And his cane becomes an emblem of how dangerous he is. And I think, you know, I was in the tradition of fanfiction. I was writing a self-insert character into my own world. And I think it helped me to make peace with who I was and how I felt about this thing that really I've come to love because it allows me to get around.

[00:27:35] **Kendra** Yeah, that's definitely something that I really struggled with was using a cane in public because people literally go up to you and say, "Why do you have a cane?" And they make you answer for your "actions." And that's just really disturbing that people will do that. But yeah, there's that internalized ableism kind of journey. Everyone and their mother's brother gets so excited about Book Expo and talk about how wonderful New York is. But New York is one of the most inaccessible cities. And I have a connective tissue disorder. So my joints pop out at random, like Rasputin on "Anastasia." Like, you know.

And I had that moment where my hip popped out, and I was trying to go around Book Expo with a cane, and people did not care. They hit my knees and all sorts of stuff. And it's like, really? Like, things you just have to come to terms with your feelings on that. And it's definitely a journey. Yeah.

[00:28:41] **Leigh** I mean, it really is because we're used to seeing in media and culture one kind of disabled person. Right? The tragic person in the wheelchair, you know, the the old man with the cane. We're not used to seeing young people with mobility aids. It's just not something you see ever. And so people don't know how to parse it. And I think we have to sort of make peace with how to parse it. And my experience is usually either somebody says, "Well, you don't look like you need a cane" or like they think that it's just for style. You know?

[00:29:15] **Leigh** Or something that has happened to me only a couple of times, but was incredibly uncomfortable. . . . I was in an airport. And a well-meaning woman said, you know, "Do you need a chair?" And I said, "No, I think I'll be all right." She's like, "I think you really need a chair." And I was like, "Lady, like, I'm a grown woman. And I need you to respect my authority here and my autonomy and not try to mother me in this moment and just let me make my choice. And if I regret it, I regret it. You know." So you come into contact with all kinds of strange behavior.

[00:29:50] **Leigh** And I will say this too. You know. The thing that was tough for me was that a lot of times—and this still happens—people will say, "Well, are you okay to do this?" You know. It's, "We could wait for a cart, but are you okay to do this?" Or. . . . I was just on tour. And I'm . . . not to be a jerk, but like, you know, I'm at this point, I've been writing for a long time. Like, I have been using my cane for a long time. We have in my rider, like, hey, this is something to please be sensitive about. And I went to go do an interview. And I had to go down these steep stairs to go to the interview. And you know what I really should have done, and I didn't. . . . I should have said, "No. Do you want the interview? We can do it up here. Or we can just say no to this." You can't keep asking. . . . Like, you do not ask the crippled lady to walk down the stairs. And yet they do. And you're put into a position of not wanting to be the trouble maker, wanting to be accommodating, even though you're standing there with a cane in your hands.

[00:30:59] **Kendra** Yeah.

[00:31:01] **Leigh** Yeah. And I'll tell you something I discovered as well when I was researching NINTH HOUSE. I was in New Haven for the winter. And I will say this. If you ask somebody to hold the door, they don't want to be the person who's like, "do you have access here?" if you're if you're walking with a cane. So I got into places I did not have any right to be in. But they're all . . . like, people don't . . . they don't want to be that guy. You know. So I was like, I will gladly take advantage of this moment. And I got to see some very cool buildings that way.

[00:31:36] **Kendra** It's like a disability perks moment.

[00:31:39] **Leigh** Right? They're few and far between. But I will take them.

[00:31:43] **Kendra** Before we close out the interview, we had to ask you about the upcoming adaption on Netflix. So I believe, Joce, you had some things to ask about that in particular.



[00:31:56] **Joce** Yeah, it was actually very funny talking about Kaz. My daughter and I were watching this horse show on Netflix yesterday. And one of the characters on the horse show looked very familiar. And so I looked him up. I was like, sir, where have I seen you before? And it actually is the actor who is playing Kaz in the adaptation.

[00:32:15] **Leigh** Freddy Carter.

[00:32:17] **Joce** Yes, I just thought that that was an incredible timing.

[00:32:20] **Leigh** I think I've heard of this horse show. An artist who's drawn a lot of beautiful stuff for the series was very thrilled at Freddy's casting because she's obsessed with said show.

[00:32:33] **Joce** Yeah, my daughter is obsessed with horses. So I have a feeling that we will also be soon, soon to be obsessed with this show. But I guess my question for you about the Netflix show is I know that you are on as an executive producer. How is that role similar and different to being a writer?

[00:32:54] **Leigh** Oh my god. It couldn't be more different. It could not be more different. When you write a book, it's you and your editor. You know, maybe your critique partner, your authenticity readers, whoever it is. But you decide who's in the room with you and how many people you want to invite in there to critique. And you are also the final authority on that book. I mean, I guess in very rare circumstances—I have never experienced it—but somebody could say, "This is inappropriate" or "We want to change this" or "This is too long." But really, it is a closed society, and you are the final authority. And I have been spoiled by that.

[00:33:34] **Leigh** Television and film could not be further from that. And being an executive producer sounds very tough and impressive because it says "execute," but it is not a very meaningful role. You're one voice in a room full of voices. And sometimes you're heard, and sometimes you're not. And sometimes you're heard and ignored, and sometimes you're heard and listened to. And I had to very early on make peace with the fact that my job was basically to shout and stand in the middle of the road when I thought we were going the wrong direction and to cheer when I thought we were going the right direction. And I was fairly heavily involved initially. I went to the writers' room. We have a wonderful team of writers from the first season. And I was involved in at least weighing in on many of the casting decisions for our wonderful cast. But as we've gotten deeper into post-production—we were lucky to finish filming right before quarantine really set in—I've had to take a step back. The process of these shows, you expect to sort of watch every iteration with music, with new edits, with special effects. And I simply do not have time, not if I want to continue to write books. And I had to sort of just take my hands off the wheel and say, "All right, I've done all I can. And now I'm going to leave it up to the very good team that we have."

[00:35:07] **Joce** That absolutely sounds completely different. You know, just your visual of you standing in the middle of the road, cheering like like a "Friends" audience member, you know.

[00:35:16] **Leigh** I am a woman of strong opinions. And I think it is the reason that I probably will never work a great deal in Hollywood. But I don't screw around when I have a strong opinion about something. But that doesn't mean that it is. . . . You know, I am not the final authority on the show. It's not mine anymore. And it is very strange to have

created something that doesn't belong to you anymore. That said, I think. . . . And I should say, too, it doesn't belong to Eric Heisserer either. He also is one voice in in the room. Nobody is the emperor in this situation. And so there's collaboration. There's compromise. But there's also very pleasant surprises that come out of that. There have been moments in the show when I thought, "That's really good. I didn't write that. That's not from books." And that's sort of a pleasure. And I think it will also bring pleasure to readers. It is not a page-for-page adaptation. It is very true. Nobody is going to watch this show—I don't think . . . I mean, maybe I'll eat my words—and say, "This is a corruption of all I hold dear in the Grishaverse." I just don't think that's going to happen. I think that the writers had too much respect for the readers and the material to do that. But I also think they're going to be offered something new, which I hope will be pleasurable because it's something different than what they're going to get from the books.

[00:36:45] **Joce** Yeah, I mean, absolutely. As someone who really, really appreciates it and enjoys all of the Grishaverse books, I am just so, so excited to see it come to life on the screen. And one of the things that really kind of made my day over the past couple of days was hearing parts of the score and the soundtrack that had just been released on Twitter.

[00:37:03] **Leigh** So I absolutely love it. I think Joe Trapanese did an incredible job. I mentioned this in the panel I did with Eric, but I felt very strongly about influences I wanted to hear in the music. And so poor Joe had to sit through a coffee with me where I played Prokofiev and then sang, like, a Russian lullaby to him. Nobody wants to hear that. So . . . but I'm so thrilled with the final product that I probably had very little influence on, but I'm just delighted with it.

[00:37:38] **Joce** Oh my gosh. We are going to be delighted to watch it. We're so excited.

[00:37:44] **Leigh** I hope so.

[00:37:45] **Joce** All right. So I have a quick little fun question here for the end of the interview. So okay, I spent so much time crafting this, I'm going to be honest with you. I'm just so excited. But basically, I took kind of ideas from your Grishaverse books as well as NINTH HOUSE and kind of mashed them together. So we all know that, kind of now, dark academia, right? That's the brand. That's the energy that we're moving into. Yes. And NINTH HOUSE very much kind of exudes that energy. And a big part of dark academia is the fashion.

[00:38:19] **Leigh** Mhm.

[00:38:20] **Joce** Yes. And of course, fashion is a huge role for the corporalki, some of whom are tailors, like our friend Genya, who first appears in SHADOW AND BONE. So I guess my question for you is, if Genya were to design and sew a dark academia outfit, what do you think the pieces would look like? And why?

[00:38:41] **Leigh** Well, I should point out that I don't know how good a seamstress Genya actually is. She tailors faces. So I think she would start there with making you look your very best, prepared to shine beautifully, etc. But she does love fashion. And she does design. I mean, look, I'm a . . . I guess a . . . I'm goth adjacent now. You know, I wear a lot of black. I think Genya would probably push me to adopt some tweed, perhaps a nice vest with a sharp collared shirt, and perhaps some excellent trousers and a blazer artfully slung over the shoulder. I mean, I've always wanted to wear menswear. And I've always had

trouble finding it because I am not built lean. You know, I have a big butt and big hips and big boobs. And I would love to have like a really sleek, menswear inspired ensemble for my dark academia debut.

[00:39:54] **Kendra** That sounds amazing. And I deeply, deeply relate to that statement, as well.

[00:40:04] **Leigh** I love that look so much. And it is. . . . And I just have never. . . . I mean, I think maybe when this quarantine is all over, I will invest in some proper tailoring and really live my androgynous dreams to their full. But right now, I'm mostly living in pajama pants. So. The pants of patience.

[00:40:30] **Joce** The pants of patience. Maybe we can get some dark academia pants of patience for the autumn.

[00:40:34] **Leigh** Dark academia! They will have will have pleats! They will be amazing.

[00:40:39] **Kendra** Well, this has been so wonderful. Thank you so much for for chatting with us. And.

[00:40:45] **Leigh** Thank you for having me. I did not realize that you were both fellow spoonies, which makes me really happy. And it was a pleasure to talk books with you.

[00:40:55] **Joce** Yeah. Thank you so much for coming on the podcast. We really appreciate it. And, you know, I appreciate that we are all spoonies here, sharing in our spoonie Skype space.

[00:41:10] **Kendra** We'd like to thank Leigh Bardugo for talking with us about her novel NINTH HOUSE and her short story collection, THE LIVES OF SAINTS, which is out now from Flatiron. You can find Leigh on her Twitter and her Instagram (@lbardugo) and on her website, leighbardugo.com. And of course, all of her information will be linked in our show notes.

[00:41:33] **Joce** We would also like to say a special thank you to our patrons, whose support makes this podcast possible. You can find Reading Women at readingwomenpodcast.com and on Instagram and Twitter (@thereadingwomen). You can find Kendra (@kdwinchester) and me, Joce, (@squibblesreads). Thank you so much for listening to Reading Women.