

## The Library Coven {fka JK, It's Magic}

### Episode 4: *An Ember in the Ashes* by Sabaa Tahir

**transition** [00:00:12] [upbeat flute and string music plays].

**kelly** [00:00:12] Hello! And welcome to J.K. It's Magic. A bi weekly podcast in which two bookish besties read YA fantasy through a critical lens. Why? Because critique is our fangirl love language. And because talking about books is pretty magical. I'm Kelly.

**jessie** [00:00:25] And I'm Jessie.

**jessie** [00:00:26] And today we'll be discussing *An Ember in the Ashes* by Sabaa Tahir. The story of Laia, who unexpectedly becomes a spy for the resistance in order to save her brother and Elias, a member of the Empire's training school who's fighting to become the next emperor without becoming his mother.

**transition** [00:00:41] [jaunty string music plays]

**jessie** [00:00:46] Initial reactions.

**kelly** [00:00:48] I couldn't put this book down. I took a few, maybe a chapter two or two for me to get interested in it, but then I finished this book and started the second book *A Torch Against the Night*, and I finished that one pretty quick to, like, ignored my partner all day one weekend. [laughs] And I have *A Reaper at the Gates*, so I'm probably going to finish that. Also, in addition to the other books that we're reading for this podcast.

**jessie** [00:01:14] So you won't remember any of the books. But I'm going to get there [laughs].

**kelly** [00:01:18] I need to take notes. Yeah.

**jessie** [00:01:19] Yeah. Um

**kelly** [00:01:21] Can't stop. Won't stop.

**jessie** [00:01:22] Yeah. Despite how violent this was, it started out a little slow for me, even though we start the book with a child being beaten to death. Um, but I had trouble putting it down once it got started. Uh, there was a lot happening. I really fell in love with the characters. I cannot wait to read the next one. And I stayed up way too late finishing the book because I had to know what was happening [laughs].

**kelly** [00:01:48] Just like old times.

**jessie** [00:01:49] Just like old times. Like staying up all night to finish *Harry Potter*.

**kelly** [00:01:53] Exactly.

**transition** [00:01:53] [jaunty string music plays]

**jessie** [00:01:59] Let's start by discussing world building in *Through the wardrobe*. So I thought that it was a little weird that they used the empire in the resistance. I thought it was

very Star Wars esque or Star Wars-y. um And at first it was kind of off-putting. But once I got into the book, it was fine. But that plus Laia's name was really like what?

**kelly** [00:02:24] It's not Leia.

**jessie** [00:02:26] It's not Leia, but it looks like "Leia" every time I read it and when I read it, I read it as Leia [both laugh].

**kelly** [00:02:32] I think it's interesting that the author took these loaded terms and employed them in the novel and clearly on purpose, like why it definitely was on purpose. And I think it's sort of an intellectual shorthand for the readers, too, because they can think of stories like Star Wars and then bring that background knowledge to the book. But then. But they think of the way those specifically Star Wars is a lot less complicated and that the empire is purely evil, the resistance is good, that sort of dynamic Tahir complicates that in the story, because we see that the resistance also uses people and that there are people affiliated with the empire who aren't entirely evil.

**jessie** [00:03:13] Yeah. Or they're really trying to change that like they don't want to be that thing. Um, and I really liked it wasn't it didn't feel like Star Wars when I was reading it, but those terms brought that to my mind like immediately. It's what I first thought of, even though I don't really like Star Wars. [laughs].

**kelly** [00:03:31] I fell asleep every time.

**jessie** [00:03:33] Yeah. Especially the Empire resistance ones. I've never I don't remember.

**kelly** [00:03:37] We don't know anything about Star Wars, listeners.

**jessie** [00:03:40] No, except for Kylo Ren [laughs]. [both laugh]

**transition** [00:03:47] [spellcasting sound].

**kelly** [00:03:47] The worldbuilding came across as very connected to the Roman Empire for me, and not just in the sense of this need to constantly expand and conquer and dominate. I also saw some connections in the more detailed aspects of the world building, like the names of the different groups and how they interact with each other. And bear with me because I'm going to do a little listicle. So we have the marshals who are the ruling group, ethnic group, questionmark. We'll talk about that in, um, one does not. Simply put, the marshals are divided into royal families, which are called the Austrians, and then the plebeians, which I think the name speaks for itself. The the lower classes.

**jessie** [00:04:21] Yeah.

**kelly** [00:04:21] And the familiar names and snippets of culturally significant words that we hear are Latin or Latin derived like Gens Aquilla. I think that's how you pronounce that.

**jessie** [00:04:31] It's what I assumed.

**kelly** [00:04:32] Pater and Mater for each family figurehead Antioch is the capital city. The last name sounded like Latin derived. And then we have the scholars who are supposedly obsessed with knowledge. Their land is located to the south. They seem to be darker

skinned. And that reminded me of the sort of Northern Africa Library of Alexandria sort of society. And the barbarians are to the north, which is also depicted as cold, and this is what the Germanic tribes were called for, the Roman Empire. And then even the Wildman further north and east, which could be like maybe the Celtic people from the British Isles because the Roman Empire also expanded that far. And I'm not saying this to like simply graft on empirical history onto the story, but I just thought it was— it made me nerd out. I thought it was fun to see the different connections.

**jessie** [00:05:23] I didn't know any of that stuff to you till you wrote it in the show notes. And I was like, oh, wow. Kelly really did. She did lots of research. And she knows I guess you already probably knew all these things a little bit because I didn't think of any of those things. [laughs]

**kelly** [00:05:37] I thought of it immediately when when I was like all the Mater and Pater the I Gens like, oh, maybe it comes from all the romance languages I speak, which are that's Latin derived.

**jessie** [00:05:47] Right. Because I was like gens. I don't know what that means.

**kelly** [00:05:50] Like gente is the word for people in Spanish.

**jessie** [00:05:53] Oooh.

**kelly** [00:05:53] So it's like a lot of different Latin roots. And I was like, oh, I see it

**jessie** [00:05:58] [laughs] Your study of language has come in handy.

**kelly** [00:06:00] It has.

**jessie** [00:06:01] Um. I thought this world did a lot of nature versus nurture, um, with Elias and Laia. As they deal with the legacy of their parents, Elias is trying to figure out like, is he going to be a, I'm going to say bad person, but is he going to become his mother because he's born from her or does having grown up with the tribesmen— and does that change like who he'll become as an adult? And then we see it with Laia with her parents. For some reason, she identifies more with her mother than her father, and she thinks it's important to be brave, like her mother, um,.

**kelly** [00:06:40] Who is called the lioness.

**jessie** [00:06:42] Yeah. And she wasn't raised by her mother for most of her life. So she she's also kind of struggling with, um, like who she'll be as a person, as a descendent of her mother. So I thought this book dealt a lot with the question of are we destined to become our parents? And what shame, if any, should we have for their actions? Because we see both of them dealing with the good and the bad things that their parents did and whether or not they bear any responsibility for that.

**kelly** [00:07:10] Yeah. And whose responsibility it is then moving forward, like as far as healing, I don't know if anyone's thing about healing. They're probably just thinking about overthrowing the empire at this point. But yeah. Who has. I guess like looking forward, who's going to be the main force turning the wheel, like who's actually going to be in charge,.

**jessie** [00:07:28] Which is interesting because it's so opposite of Children of Blood and Bone [by Tomi Adeyemi] where they're trying to deal with, like, are the children the ones responsible for the healing that their parents caused? This book seems to deal with it a little differently in that the children are directly taking on that healing process a little bit.

**kelly** [00:07:49] So I think there's more of it in children. But in Bone, I think there is an identification, at least with Zolie and identification with the like her mom who died and wanting to be like her. And same with Laia.

**jessie** [00:08:00] Right.

**kelly** [00:08:00] She also identifies with her mother who died and wants to be like her mom. Versus Inan is trying like thinks he wants to be like his father and then things he doesn't want to be like his father. And then ends up going back to the dark side, to continue the Star Wars metaphors. [jessie laughs].

**jessie** [00:08:14] Yeah.

**kelly** [00:08:14] And then Elias is trying super hard not to be like his mother. So we do have a similar tension about like who who are the aspirational figures in our lives and how are we going to determine how is that going to determine how we act?

**jessie** [00:08:25] Right. Yeah, your parents don't have to be who you want to become. And I guess we see that with Elias. He does not like that is his goal in life is not to become his mother, which is also kind of sad that he has such a bad mom.

**kelly** [00:08:40] She hates him a lot

**jessie** [00:08:41] She does hate him. She's awful. We'll talk about her in villains. [laughs].

**transition** [00:08:44] [spellcasting sound]

**jessie** [00:08:47] Speaking of his mother being awful, this book was so, so violent.

**kelly** [00:08:55] There are three exclamation points,.

**jessie** [00:08:58] [laughs] Yeah, it could really give Game of Thrones a run for its money, I think, which is saying a lot. And as a YA book, I am more and more surprised as time goes on how much more violent and sexual they become. I'm not sure it's a bad thing. It's just mature for an audience that ranges from like 13 to, I guess we'll say 19. but the end of your teenage years

**kelly** [00:09:25] Yeah, I would say that I have seen that kind of recently. It's sort of. This tendency towards more overt sexual content and more overt graphic depictions of violence, and I think that that's actually it might be a result or partially a result of more diverse authors now publishing Y.A., because those sorts of things are happening to people. It's just like, oh, no, because you like people who have more like white people have more privilege and that people who are traditionally the make up of white authors aren't dealing as much with those things on a systemic level as people from other communities. So as far as like. Young women experiencing violence, that happens all the time.

**jessie** [00:10:06] Right.

**kelly** [00:10:07] And also young people having sex happens all the time. [laughs]

**jessie** [00:10:13] Yeah, I think it maybe started for me reading Sarah J Maas. Um, and I was surprised, like A Court of Mist and Fury. I won't give anything away. Well, I guess the A Court of Thorns and Roses, too— just how much sex was in them and their violent throwing of glass is violent. There's a lot of sex in that. Do it later on in the story. Yeah, that's true. I don't remember that one as well. But, um, I think it's just surprising to me a little bit because this is a very, very violent world.

**kelly** [00:10:43] I didn't— the violence and strike me as gratuitous in the same way that Game of Thrones is. I don't know what you thought about that.

**jessie** [00:10:51] No, I don't think so the problem— so I only read the first Game of Thrones book and then I have watched the TV show and the show is very violent, but often for no reason. And in this book, none of the violence, there was never not a reason for it, like.

**kelly** [00:11:11] I mean, we are in a school for assassins. So...

**jessie** [00:11:14] Yeah.

**kelly** [00:11:15] number one.

**jessie** [00:11:15] Yeah. So I don't really expect much less.

**kelly** [00:11:20] And it didn't strike me. It seemed like it made sense with the world building, I guess, in An Ember in the Ashes. So what I was thinking and then it certainly plays out this human tendency to equate violence with power and vice versa. To use violence for power.

**jessie** [00:11:33] Yeah, I think maybe Game of Thrones doesn't do as well with this because. I don't I don't know, there's something about it that the violence just seems or even sometimes like there's a lot there's a lot of rape in Game of Thrones seems unnecessary, like it doesn't move your plot forward. So why did you need to do that? You know?

**kelly** [00:11:57] Maybe part of it is the visual medium too of the show, because I had a similar, like, experience watching Outlander.

**jessie** [00:12:03] MmHm.

**kelly** [00:12:04] This is a lot of— apparently the only interesting thing, the conflict that can happen to a woman is like, sexual assault.

**jessie** [00:12:10] Yeah, and I think I think I think sometimes those shows and books get away with that because they set them in one fantasy world or two in worlds that are so long ago that people have the excuse of like, "oh, well, that's what I was like." It's like, well, was it? One. And two, how does this matter to your plot? How does this move the story forward? And if it doesn't, then it's probably not necessary.

**kelly** [00:12:35] Yeah, and I didn't have that as much of that impression with An Ember in the Ashes, it seemed quite justified,.

**jessie** [00:12:40] I think, especially maybe because Elias is dealing a lot with, um, trying not to be as violent. Like he's really trying to rein in his anger and fury about, I mean, everything really, um, so we see someone grappling with how violent the world is. And I think maybe that makes a lot of a difference.

**kelly** [00:13:00] Yeah for sure.

**transition** [00:13:00] [jaunty string music plays]

**jessie and kelly** [00:13:06] Wands out!

**kelly** [00:13:07] This is a segment where we discuss all things magic.

**jessie** [00:13:11] I think the magic in this book was more subtle than what we've read in previous books, um, we get some mythical and magical creatures like the Wraiths and the efrits and the djinn. And Helene's singing slash healing power. Um, maybe we'll see more magic in future books, but I kind of thought it was cool. I was I think I was looking for there to be more magic. I think I expected more as a fantasy novel, but I liked it.

**kelly** [00:13:42] I really liked how the magic in An Ember in the Ashes isn't centered around humans. I like that it's something that humans don't possess necessarily or something they can, but only with the influence of these other magical beings. The magic is much more otherworldly. It gives you like this beyond the veil. Sounds like it's both of this world and not of this world. I think it created a sort of like, ethereal vibe.

**jessie** [00:14:03] Right. How do you think Helene got her healing power then?

**kelly** [00:14:07] Did they not say that in the first book?

**jessie** [00:14:09] No I have no idea.

**kelly** [00:14:11] I think I know how, but I think I know because of the second book.

**jessie** [00:14:15] oh, ok.

**transition** [00:14:15] [spellcasting sound]

**kelly** [00:14:17] Uh, the Augurs might be an exception to what I just said, what we just said about the magic not being human or not directly connected to humans, because they can see futures plural being important. And they basically have legillimency— because they can read people's minds. They say it's not reading, but it basically is.

**jessie** [00:14:35] I mean, isn't that what Snape says and Harry Potter to it's not mind reading, but I mean, that's what you're doing.

**kelly** [00:14:41] But you're in there and you know what people are thinking,.

**jessie** [00:14:44] you're Looking around in there, you're basically reading it, um, which is I thought was it really interesting, the story of the Augurs and how they stole their powers.

So they're immortal because they stole knowledge from the djinn. Um, but I guess you know more than me.

**kelly** [00:15:01] is that how they got their powers?

**jessie** [00:15:02] I think that's what they said. There's like a whole story where, um. I think,.

**kelly** [00:15:08] Oh, no, this is the scholars.

**jessie** [00:15:12] Oh, yeah.

**kelly** [00:15:13] and They're in their thing against the djinn.

**jessie** [00:15:15] Yeah, you're right, maybe now I don't know.

**kelly** [00:15:18] That's what I thought. The Augurs are interesting is because I didn't get the sense that they got their powers from other worldly beings. They like are all of a sudden just immortal.

**jessie** [00:15:28] Yeah.

**kelly** [00:15:28] And they just are omnipotent. And so it struck me as like a little bit of an outlier, at least in the magical system as far as we see it in the first book. Um, and the Augur's language nerd note again, language nerd note, *Agruio* is the Spanish word for omen. So the acronym being derived from the same root makes total sense. Also, thanks to the Internet, I learned that Augurs are priest-like figures who actually existed during Roman times and they practiced augury, which is interpreting the future based on birds' flight, flight patterns like what kind of bird is flying, how many birds are flying, what direction are they flying? Are they making noises while they're flying? This is called reading the auspices. So if something's auspicious, that's where the term comes from. And then the augury in *fantastic beasts*. by J.K. Rowling is a bird that sings when it's going to rain.

**jessie and kelly** [00:16:23] wands away!

**transition** [00:16:23] [jaunty string music plays]

**jessie** [00:16:28] Now we're going to talk about conflict, villains and good and evil in our segment called *Get Me Kylo Ren*. Um, so the commandant.

**kelly** [00:16:38] Dot, dot, dot.

**jessie** [00:16:40] She is just all around evil, bad person, bad mother, like.

**kelly** [00:16:48] So dark and twisty.

**jessie** [00:16:49] Yeah, I mean, I do have like the smallest amount of empathy for her because she didn't want to have she didn't want to have Elias and she did everything she could to try and get rid of him. But. I don't know how he was like, can you imagine just like leaving a baby? I mean, I guess the story he knows wasn't true, like she didn't leave him to die. All that that one that was like hard,.

**kelly** [00:17:17] Very conflicted about motherhood in general.

**jessie** [00:17:20] Right.

**kelly** [00:17:20] And then, I mean, I guess it's. Tough to think about, but why access to safe legal abortion is important.

**jessie** [00:17:29] Right. Well, and that's the crazy thing for like that's the strange thing for this book, is that she did all the things that were possible for her to try and abort the baby. And none of it worked. I guess it's because I'm guessing Elias is the one who was foretold or whatever, so maybe, maybe fate intervened and she can't.

**kelly** [00:17:51] Yeah, that could be. I don't know if she is the epitome of a villain, though.

**jessie** [00:17:58] Yeah, like like I said, my my empathy for her is like the tiniest amount because really she's awful. she's an awful person.

**kelly** [00:18:06] Yeah. Yeah. I mean, she certainly acts that way. I find myself wanting to know more about her back story, I'm a sucker for a villain back story. I love them.

**jessie** [00:18:16] I also want to know who Elias's father is.

**kelly** [00:18:18] Yeah, that would be interesting.

**jessie** [00:18:20] Do you think he's a tribesperson?

**kelly** [00:18:23] I'm not sure.

**jessie** [00:18:25] OK.

**kelly** [00:18:26] There's a thing that happens at the end of the second book that you'll have to wait for.

**jessie** [00:18:29] [laughs] OK. This is why you don't read ahead.

**kelly** [00:18:33] I'm Sorry, I couldn't stop.

**jessie** [00:18:35] I get it. I get it. Um. OK, well, he seems to fit in well with the tribespeople, so my guess is that his father was a tribesperson.

**transition** [00:18:46] [spellcasting sound]

**kelly** [00:18:49] I'm not sure if I have any hope for Keris Venturia as far as, like falling in love and like, I don't know. I think it was just a tryst,.

**jessie** [00:19:00] Yeah, when once I start to hate a villain, I really hate them and I'm like, OK, I'm ready for her to die now. And I hope Elias does it.

**kelly** [00:19:09] I mean, or it could be Helene. I would be surprised. I don't know. Helene and Keris seem like not exactly foils for one another, but they do seem—.

**jessie** [00:19:21] –Foil adjacent.

**kelly** [00:19:22] Exactly. Yeah, they are connected. I don't know. I see like Helene could be could turn into Keris. But I'm not sure that she will.

**jessie** [00:19:33] I think that's what we're supposed to see, like she between her and Laia, she is the person who is most likely to turn into. Keris, and she's going to have to make a choice about that, but it's hard because from where I'm standing, she has to follow all of Marcus's commands or Elias will die.

**jessie** [00:19:54] Yeah, she's in a tough spot.

**transition** [00:19:55] [spellcasting sound]

**kelly** [00:19:58] You have to talk about black cliff and how it's a boarding school that kills half of its students.

**jessie** [00:20:06] It's funny because I feel like we get a lot of books in why that are assassin schools or they're like training people to be soldiers. Um, we'll see this a little bit once we read when we read The Mortal Instruments, which Kelly has not read yet. [laughs]

**kelly** [00:20:23] Nope, it's coming up, listeners.

**jessie** [00:20:27] But when you think about it more literally, like they're teaching people how to murder people.

**kelly** [00:20:33] Like children, how to murder people, they're murdering children and then teaching children how to murder other people.

**jessie** [00:20:40] Yeah.

**kelly** [00:20:41] This is this is quite problematic.

**jessie** [00:20:43] It's a real harsh environment too. Laia thinks that Elias's room is a cell like a jail cell, which is that's really bad and really it's just a sad place to be.

**kelly** [00:20:57] Well, for him, it basically is. That's why he, like, digs the tunnel behind it.

**jessie** [00:21:01] Yeah, that's true. But I imagine, like, everyone's room looks similar and she's in like. In a small like a cubbord, basically, and she still thinks like his room is a cell, which is it's just. Just telling of how bleak it must be there. It makes me feel so bad for allies, I'm not sure I'm supposed to feel bad for him as I do, but I'm just like like I can't imagine being, like, taken from the only home, you know, and you love to be forced to become the person you hate.

**kelly** [00:21:35] And also, these children are six when they're taken.

**jessie** [00:21:39] And like, rounded up into a pen of other children and they said, like half of them die.

**kelly** [00:21:44] And if they survive, then they get to go to Black Cliff and then potentially, like, then face death basically every single day,.

**jessie** [00:21:51] Right.

**kelly** [00:21:52] Until graduation.

**jessie** [00:21:53] In what world is this OK? You know?

**kelly** [00:21:57] It's like that sort of preserving the empire at all costs sort of logic.

**jessie** [00:22:01] Yeah, I guess I don't know how someone's government becomes so important to them that they think, let's just start killing kids. You know?

**kelly** [00:22:10] I don't know. That's just that's a lot. It's really far down a very dark path.

**transition** [00:22:15] [spellcasting sound]

**kelly** [00:22:17] Speaking of the empire.

**jessie** [00:22:19] Yeah, the empire, um, chooses to oppress the scholars by taking away their ability to read so they're not allowed to teach next generations how to read. And obviously, they're doing it in secret because Laia knows how to read. Her grandparents taught her how. I mean, her parents. Um,.

**kelly** [00:22:37] I'm curious. I didn't get a sense for how long that had been going on, but because it seemed to be very common knowledge among the marshals that the scholars couldn't read, they just assume that none of the scholars can read. So I get the sense that it's been going on for generations at least.

**jessie** [00:22:52] Yeah, because Laia's parents are in the resistance, I assume they are not supposed to read either. Um. But it's kind of a little confusing because Laia's grandfather is a doctor, so you would assume like he would have to know how to read. So maybe her parents' generation, I don't know.

**kelly** [00:23:14] I'm not sure either.

**jessie** [00:23:14] But I thought it was an interesting. Way to oppress a group of people, because what you're essentially doing is taking away their ability to, um, gain knowledge and, um, their ability to move up in the world.

**kelly** [00:23:30] Mm hmm. I think that's why a lot of more oppressive regimes specifically crack down on universities, um, because when you gain more knowledge, then you're more likely to see other ways of other, you know, possibilities for living in the world. And then that leads to revolt and revolution.

**jessie** [00:23:50] Because I think learning leads to you questioning authority figures, which means questioning your government. Um, so it makes sense that they would take that away. But also, obviously, it's not working at all.

**kelly** [00:24:04] And what's interesting then is that the empire also took the knowledge of their, um, steelmaking because the superior weapons are the key to the empire's dominance. And it's Sarin Steel. That's what we keep hearing. Right. Um. And so this is stolen knowledge that they're using Scholar created. And I don't know, I just thought that that was an interesting point about how they took the knowledge from them and then

imposed ignorance on those people in order to stay dominant, probably because they're severely threatened.

**jessie** [00:24:40] Right. Especially, um, if the scholars could figure out a way to make Seric Steel, they can probably figure out a way to make something better.

**kelly** [00:24:49] Which is a whole reason that Derren is— Laia's brother Darren is and has been captured.

**jessie** [00:24:55] Right. Oh, right, yeah

**kelly** [00:24:57] It's because of his connection to the to Seric Steel, to the Telemann Telemann. Um, blacksmith,.

**transition** [00:25:06] [Spellcasting sound].

**kelly** [00:25:06] I another thing I want to talk about in the villains and get me kylo ren is the resistance not being purely good. So supposedly we learn from so we learned from Laia that they the resistance supposedly lives by this cold cut code of honor called Izzat, which again, thanks to the Internet, is a real thing from northern India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. That translates across Hindu, Muslim and Sikh religions. But the cook's perspective shows Laia and the readers that the resistance is far from perfect. They use people just like the Empire does. And that sent me down memory lane thinking about grad school and reading Emmanuel Kant's writings on morality [jessie laughs] and which is capsulized. It encapsulated in this thing called the categorical imperative, where he says that, you know, it's immoral to use people as means they should only be ends. And that's basically two competing ideologies, but I'm just not sure how. I think if you're really trying for revolution, it's inevitable that people get used as means.

**jessie** [00:26:11] Right. The problem is for a resistance is that I think it's hard to create a revolution without anyone getting hurt and without using people. We see this with Mason. He the hard part is I'm not sure that mesons, not the one who is the traitor, um, of. Laia's parents, your smile tells me that you know who it is.

**kelly** [00:26:35] [lguhs] I'm sorry.

**jessie** [00:26:36] Don't tell me. Anyways. I'll just pretend that you don't know because he everything he does with liar is is a lie like he. I don't know what he really wants from her. And obviously, you can't say, because you probably know,.

**kelly** [00:26:55] I think I read the second book too fast to really remember the details. [both laugh] True confessions,.

**jessie** [00:27:02] True confession.[laugh] Um, yeah, the resistance. There's a lot of bad people out there. And I think Mason is the one because I think Laia thinks that maybe the cook is the traitor for a little bit, um, because she says he or she's the only one that remembers her parents. But I think she forgets about Mason in that equation and how when her parents were gone he took over and maybe that's what he wanted all along.

**kelly** [00:27:32] Yeah, the struggle for power within the resistance could certainly turn out to be a storyline that we see going forward.

**jessie** [00:27:40] Yeah.

**kelly** [00:27:40] I don't— we don't know that much about its makeup and its and what they were— I mean, we know what they were striving for, but we don't really know how it operated. We just get tiny glimpses here and there.

**jessie** [00:27:51] Right, and I'm not 100 percent convinced that is not working with Keris, the commandant. And, um,.

**kelly** [00:27:57] I think Keris is so smart. She's probably just using everyone.

**jessie** [00:28:01] She probably is. But if he was the trader and if he's the reason she knows when they have a spy, I wouldn't be surprised. He seems like a bad dude.

**kelly** [00:28:11] Shady.

**jessie** [00:28:12] Yeah, super shady.

**transition** [00:28:13] [spellcasting sound]

**kelly** [00:28:16] I have a question for you.

**jessie** [00:28:17] OK.

**kelly** [00:28:17] Are the Augurs villains?

**jessie** [00:28:21] I struggled with them for a bit because because they know the future, but they're not willing to change it. I don't know if they're bad or if they are like for some reason not allowed to change the series of events. I think that everything they do has led to bad things for the most part, and I think— I think they're straddling that line between villain and not hero, but just villain and not villain. And if you know these things are going to happen, why not just tell Laia that she can she she's going to have to save Elias like it was frustrating.

**kelly** [00:29:04] Yeah, I found them super frustrating. And I think that's the point. Right. I think as readers are supposed to find them frustrating,.

**jessie** [00:29:10] Our characters find that frustrating!

**kelly** [00:29:12] Yeah, that too. But I was also struggling with it. And then I just had this light bulb go off one time and I'm like, wait, they are one hundred million percent invested in furthering the project of this like genocidal colonial power. So villains by—

**jessie** [00:29:32] Yeah, they're complicit. They're not doing anything to stop it, even though they know what's going on, because they're so concerned with making sure that the future that they see is the one that happens in the end. But they don't care about the people who get hurt in the process because—

**kelly** [00:29:48] No, they're actively manipulating. So that happens.

**jessie** [00:29:50] And they can't die. So I think the consequences are too low for them to care what happens to anyone else.

**kelly** [00:29:59] They're definitely using people as means. Kant would not approve.

**transition** [00:30:08] [jaunty string music plays].

**kelly** [00:30:08] Jessie, did you know that one does not simply read fantasy without talking about representations of race, class and gender? This is our segment on power bodies and how they relate. There is such an obvious rape culture in this world, it was honestly hard for me to read. Sometimes it's in the language they say son of a whore a lot. They it's incredibly prevalent, prevalent in the everyday social interactions, like the students at Black Cliff raping slaves. And that's just common knowledge. It was— there's a lot of rape or the suggestion that it could happen.

**jessie** [00:30:44] I wonder, um, about the author's choice to have so much of this in there. And maybe maybe she's making a statement about how prevalent rape is in our culture, even though it doesn't seem like it on a day to day basis. Um, because I also don't think we normally get YA books with so much rape in them.

**kelly** [00:31:07] Yeah, that's a good I hadn't thought about that. I think there's definitely a statement here, but I'm just not quite 100 percent sure what it is.

**jessie** [00:31:13] Yeah, but I guess I guess it kind of makes sense because when we think about our culture, there's a lot of slut shaming in our culture. We say son of a bitch, which is also not a—.

**kelly** [00:31:25] It's the same thing [laughs].

**jessie** [00:31:26] basically the same thing. I wonder if she's just making it more obvious by making the words sound worse because they're not the ones we normally use.

**kelly** [00:31:37] Totally. Yeah, they're not the normalized terms that they're going to be more impactful for us as contemporary readers.

**jessie** [00:31:42] Right. Um.

**kelly** [00:31:44] I think that's a really good point.

**jessie** [00:31:45] Yeah. And I think we see less, um, at least in the United States because one. We don't have slaves in the traditional sense of the word, so we don't really see as many people being used in the same way as we do in this book.

**kelly** [00:32:04] It's not state sanctioned, besides the prison system.

**jessie** [00:32:07] Yeah, that's not in the traditional sense of the word.

**kelly** [00:32:12] But this is like the slaves don't even have names. I don't know.

**jessie** [00:32:16] I wonder if that's all slaves or just the ones who work for Keris.

**kelly** [00:32:20] That's a good question. I don't really.

**jessie** [00:32:22] I don't know the answer. We don't really interact with any other slaves. And the commandment slash Keris, is that a position she holds?

**kelly** [00:32:31] Yeah, it's the head of the army.

**jessie** [00:32:33] OK, um, she is seen as being particularly like the slave or even talks about how often she kills her slave. So I do wonder if she makes her slaves kill themselves or she like took the eye of a five year old with Izzy. So I wonder if some of those things are made worse because she's in charge.

**transition** [00:32:50] [spellcasting sound]

**kelly** [00:32:53] Speaking of the command, there's only one woman allowed at Black Cliff in each generation. This really struck me.

**jessie** [00:32:58] I was really surprised. And I wonder why. I wonder if the Augurs know something about a woman who's going to be at black cliff. And that's why there's only one a lot of the time.

**kelly** [00:33:12] I'm not sure I think it's pretty easy for people to just fall into the way things have always been and then just not change things.

**jessie** [00:33:19] Yeah.

**kelly** [00:33:20] But it's frustrating because, I mean, not that I want them to train more small girls [Jessie laughs] in the art of murder.

**jessie** [00:33:29] Yeah.

**kelly** [00:33:30] But I don't think it was why, one? I just wasn't understanding the logic, I guess.

**jessie** [00:33:36] Yeah, I don't know why it's only one. It's a weird thing to do. And then the one woman from obviously the generation before she becomes she's in charge of Black Cliff. So that's also surprising in a society that seems so misogynistic that they would let her be in charge of the school.

**kelly** [00:33:54] Yeah, I guess your point about it being misogynistic and it's a patriarchal system that's not invested in over in like changing the status quo at all, because that would mean relinquishing power and privilege.

**jessie** [00:34:04] Right.

**kelly** [00:34:04] So they put one in there, one woman. They probably are. Don't want fraternizing to happen, but it's OK if they go down to the docks to have sex with the people who are enslaved.

**jessie** [00:34:18] Or just rape them.

**kelly** [00:34:19] Or rape the slaves at blacklist.

**jessie** [00:34:21] The interesting thing about Keris is that they call her sir. And I want to say they don't see gender because they obviously do. But I wonder if they don't want those distinctions to be made, even with the one woman who's in the school.

**kelly** [00:34:34] –Not allowed to actually be feminine.

**jessie** [00:34:37] Woman. Yeah, maybe that's why we see some of the things with Helene that we do.

**kelly** [00:34:42] Well, I'm not sure, though, like in our military, are people called, sir, if they're, you know, identified as women and their officers, superior officers? I don't know how it works.

**jessie** [00:34:52] I think they're ma'am. But I'm not I'm not 100 percent sure.

**kelly** [00:34:55] Listeners, if you know.

**jessie** [00:34:56] Yeah.

**kelly** [00:34:57] Let us know.

**jessie** [00:34:57] Yeah, I have no idea. That's a good question. I bet it's ma'am, we're so obsessed with gender binaries in our society. [laughs]

**kelly** [00:35:05] Could very well be. [laughs].

**transition** [00:35:06] [spellcasting sound]

**jessie** [00:35:09] I really like how Keris and Laia are seen as like very opposite depictions of women, even though Keris is an abomination as a person, I thought it was amazing to show a wide range of who women are and can be. Um, because Laia is like very maternal. She wants to take care of Izzy, she's trying to take care of her brother and Keris is like, I don't care who you have to kill. Like, whatever I want is what's going to happen.

**kelly** [00:35:37] Yeah. We don't really know what her motivations are at this point, Keris. I mean, but Laia's are very clear. She's got this protective instinct, and I totally agree with you. There are a lot of strong female characters, not necessarily good ones. But in addition to Laia and the commandant we also have, Helene is Izzy and Cook that we see pretty prominent. And then we have the echoes of Laia's mother. Right. Also,.

**jessie** [00:36:01] I kind of like that they made Keris the villain because we also don't often get blood thirsty women villains. So I thought that was also an interesting choice to make since we don't see it very often.

**kelly** [00:36:14] Yeah, I liked how I flip the script.

**jessie** [00:36:16] Yeah, for sure. We also see I think I think some of this is Helene, maybe because she has been around from the time she was six, like all men. But she has a real hatred of people who are sex workers. Now, I'm not 100 percent sure that the prostitutes who work in the docks are slaves or if they're well, they mentioned brothels. Um, so I'm guessing it's a choice they've made.

**kelly** [00:36:42] I don't know. But then they said that I remember when Laia is getting in with the slaver and he's talking about like, oh, I could buy you and you'd like what, you don't want to go work in a brothel. I got the feeling that because slavery is so prevalent that the majority of them would be are sex slaves.

**jessie** [00:37:01] Yeah that's true. But it's surprising that Helene would draw the line between like a sex slave and a regular slave, a working slave, not a working slave. You know what I mean? She has like this severe hatred for the prostitutes. And she it's it's mentioned in passing, but she has no feelings about slaves who do work,.

**kelly** [00:37:26] Who do other kinds of work that's not sex work. She she doesn't have a problem with slavery. Clearly, she talks to Laia and it's like she's a slave. When talking about Laia, it's like she's a slave, like, are you serious?

**jessie** [00:37:36] Yeah.

**kelly** [00:37:36] But she just hates other women for having sex with men and has no critical thinking whatsoever about whether those women are enslaved or whether like they're actually if they're doing it consensually.

**jessie** [00:37:48] Right. Right.

**kelly** [00:37:49] She doesn't even care. She just hates that transaction, I guess.

**jessie** [00:37:53] Yeah. And part of it I guess might be because she likes Elias. So she doesn't want him like having sex with other people. I also thought it was interesting because Helene wants to be equal to the other masks, but she is unconcerned with the rights of anyone else, a.k.a. white feminism. So she doesn't care about anyone if it's not part of her group.

**kelly** [00:38:14] That's such a.. A prescient observation that I didn't even put that connection together. But I think you're so right.

**jessie** [00:38:21] Like, she doesn't care about women in general.

**kelly** [00:38:25] No.

**jessie** [00:38:25] She just cares about herself and the women, I'm guessing, who might come to Black Cliff like she wants them to be treated well, but like Laia is being beaten and she's like, "just leave her. It's fine."

**kelly** [00:38:38] She cares about her own family.

**jessie** [00:38:39] Right.

**kelly** [00:38:40] And possibly other women at Black Cliff, but also kind of more men.

**jessie** [00:38:46] Yeah.

**kelly** [00:38:47] The men at Black Cliff who are her friends.

**jessie** [00:38:48] Yeah. And even when she sees that and it's interesting because it's really obvious when we look at, um, her relationship with Marcus, because Marcus is like holding things that Marcus is going to rape Laia and she does not care,.

**kelly** [00:39:05] Even though Helene herself is scared that Marcus rape her like that was her first trial as having to watch.

**jessie** [00:39:12] Exactly!

**kelly** [00:39:12] Like, how fucked up is that?

**jessie** [00:39:13] Those trials are— that's the part where I'm like the authors are villains.

**kelly** [00:39:16] Totally, um, but that she had to, like, experience that in, like a semi dream state.

**jessie** [00:39:23] Right.

**kelly** [00:39:23] And then Marcus is like attacks her, iis like super aggressive. And it's that that was really disturbing. So it's I think she's a really complex character and kudos to the author for that because she's dealing with all this thing, the trauma and this worry and paranoia herself. But at the same time, you can't say she's not an advocate for other people who aren't like her.

**jessie** [00:39:50] And it's frustrating, too, because the author did such a good job making her that a super bad ass like character, like she is very strong, like she's taking down these men, like, no problem. But at the same time, she's like an awful person.

**transition** [00:40:05] [spellcasting sound].

**kelly** [00:40:06] Elias's grandfather.

**jessie** [00:40:07] Yeah, he's super badass, like strong elderly man, which I don't think we get depictions of very often. Um, like the other like the younger men are scared of him, which was surprising to me. Um. Even though he's he's pretty bad,.

**kelly** [00:40:24] He's a fucking misogynist,.

**jessie** [00:40:25] yeah he is.

**kelly** [00:40:26] the things he says to Elias about Helene, like around the graduation ceremony time,.

**jessie** [00:40:30] Right.

**kelly** [00:40:30] He's like, why you've been messing around with her? Women shouldn't be in the army in the first place. And Elias doesn't even try that hard to push back, and that particularly bothered me, I think, because I like Elias's character so much and he he's even I think he said something wishy washy, like it's not like that, but he's not actually standing up for it. And I just am like, fuck that rolling over bullshit. You didn't say something. You're complicit. Like with how much privilege and power you have you're not afraid of what your grandfather is going to do to you. You're like the best assassin that's ever lived.

**jessie** [00:41:02] Yeah, I think he's like it's hard because I feel bad for Elias because I think, like, it's it's only like a loving parental figure he has. So he doesn't want to push him away. But that I mean, challenge your parents even if you love them, you know?

**kelly** [00:41:19] Exactly.

**transition** [00:41:20] [spellcasting sound]

**kelly** [00:41:21] And Cook is really a badass.

**jessie** [00:41:27] I wanna know more... Well, no, don't tell me I really want to know more about her—

**kelly** [00:41:31] So do I.

**jessie** [00:41:32] —backstory.

**kelly** [00:41:32] Well, we hear about, like, her torture, her experience being tortured and. Oh, my gosh, that was that was difficult to read.

**jessie** [00:41:39] Do you think Izzy is her daughter?

**kelly** [00:41:42] No. Cook was older when Izzy came.

**jessie** [00:41:44] oh OK.

**kelly** [00:41:45] They said that there— Izzy says that she got taken from somewhere or something. I can remember when she mentions that when she's talking about her back story.

**jessie** [00:41:51] Laia mentioned a couple of times how similar they look. And I wonder it makes them like, but why?

**kelly** [00:41:59] Well, they've certainly developed this super close relationship. So they might she might as cook, might as well be— is definitely like a parental figure to Izzy.

**jessie** [00:42:07] Maybe more nature versus nurture. Kind of. Yeah, because Izzy turns out to be pretty strong as well. Like she is not afraid, which is surprising because she's so afraid of Keris, rightfully so. But she's like, yeah, let's just like scale this side of a mountain to get to this moon festival [laughs]

**kelly** [00:42:24] yeah and Elias was like yeah I tried that one time and almost died.

**jessie** [00:42:29] Yeah. And she's just like, no, it's not that bad.

**kelly** [00:42:31] And these two girls with no equipment and no training, whatever, we'll do it.

**jessie** [00:42:35] Yeah. So Izzy's a pretty impressive character and I was glad to see her come out of her shell and I'm glad she got saved. Fingers crossed that all works out. Don't tell me [chuckles].

**transition** [00:42:46] [spellcasting sound].

**jessie** [00:42:46] moving on to race. Um, I didn't think that we got a lot of descriptions of race in this book was pretty limited, um. Similar to other YA novels, we got descriptions of body types, color of hair and eye color. But the two people we kind of get descriptions of, like skin color are Keris who is very pale. Um, and then Elias is described as having, um, golden skin. And I think they do that to set him apart from characters. But I'm also like, what does this mean in all capital letters? Like, can you just tell us what people look like? Is Elias supposed to be mixed race? Like I, I was frustrated.

**kelly** [00:43:37] I think that's what the novel's implying.

**jessie** [00:43:38] Yeah.

**kelly** [00:43:39] Um, because it says it, it focuses on his character description from what I if I remember correctly focuses on juxtaposing his eyes which are supposedly Keris's eyes. But then when Laia actually when you actually look at him, they're not like they're like a different tone and they're not.

**jessie** [00:43:55] And she has little blond hair and he has black hair. She's pale. He has golden skin. Just don't know.

**kelly** [00:44:02] I don't know what Golden skin means. [laughs]

**jessie** [00:44:04] I don't either. [laughs]

**kelly** [00:44:05] And I think you make a really good point because there I couldn't quite tell. It seems like the even within the marshals themselves, it seems like you could differentiate on like. With phenotypes like phenotypic traits, the difference between Illustrians and plebeians, that's what it sounded like also at different points in the novel, the like, the Illustrians can tell them it's not just like doesn't seem to just be class markers. They can tell race-wise.

**jessie** [00:44:36] Yeah.

**kelly** [00:44:37] Or at least ethnic group wise, I don't know. So I was confused about that. And then also the scholars seem to be pretty distinct. It seems like you can distinguish people based on their phenotypes in this book, but I'm just not clear what the people look like. And I think the only reason I have a picture of Laia in my head as a more as like super like darker as a person of color, like no questions asked is because of the cover of my book. I think it's um. I think that's definitely influenced how I imagined her while I was reading.

**jessie** [00:45:08] and my cover doesn't have a person on it. I had no idea what she was supposed to look like and like she has dark hair, brown eyes like that could be a lot of different kinds of people. And as I've mentioned lots of times before, I find that really frustrating when they don't just say what people look like.

**transition** [00:45:27] [spellcasting sound]

**kelly** [00:45:29] You mentioned we mentioned Elias before. And I think it's particularly interesting this like golden skin ambiguity because he grew up with the tribespeople and which are an itinerant people that live in caravans and they're known for storytelling. So was getting some like Bedouin... Maybe possibly like Roma.

**jessie** [00:45:46] Right.

**kelly** [00:45:47] Um, Vibe's or like possible influences. And Elias isn't even his real name. His real name is Ilyas.

**jessie** [00:45:54] Yeah.

**kelly** [00:45:55] And they make his name whiter.

**jessie** [00:45:58] right.

**kelly** [00:45:58] When they take him to Black. Cliff, did you look up the name Ilyas?

**kelly** [00:46:01] I did not.

**jessie** [00:46:01] Oh OK. [laughs]

**jessie** [00:46:04] Um, yeah. I thought that was really interesting too. And like the tribes people are kind of looked down on because they're the ones who believe there's like this distinction between the scholars who believe in like, you know, books and things that are written down and then the tribes people who have the story of the wraiths, the ifrits and the djinn and they're like, it's kind of like this distinction between knowledge and the supernatural, which I thought was really interesting, because we do see that kind of even in our society with like, well, this is science and like science and religion,.

**kelly** [00:46:38] The tribes people. That makes me think that the tribespeople parallel more indigenous groups and traditions like representations of indigenous groups because they're more connected to spirituality.

**jessie** [00:46:47] They have an oral tradition.

**kelly** [00:46:49] Exactly. And they're not like they're nomadic, like some of the, um, tribes from the U.S. or not from the US from before it was the United States.

**jessie** [00:46:59] Yeah,.

**kelly** [00:46:59] Because colonialism.

**jessie** [00:47:01] Yeah.

**kelly** [00:47:02] The Native American tribes and or, you know, elsewhere, indigenous tribes elsewhere. But also they are. Yeah. The oral tradition this. I guess the fact that they're called tribes, yeah, that's obviously very connected to and that's how the make up of indigenous peoples is articulated oftentimes.

**jessie** [00:47:25] You know, tribes like, does that mean that they travel inherently like that word?

**kelly** [00:47:30] No, I think they can be like in one place, too.

**jessie** [00:47:34] I think I've also like the tribes of Israel because they were traveling from Egypt.

**kelly** [00:47:38] Mm hmm. I don't know. But that's interesting about the tribes people. I didn't think about it that way, even though it's kind of super obvious with the name to make that just to make that connection.

**jessie** [00:47:49] Because Keris left Elias with the tribes people was the other reason I thought, well, maybe his dad was a tribes person.

**kelly** [00:47:55] You could even take this to the forcible removal of indigenous children and putting them in white schools.

**jessie** [00:48:01] That's so true. Yeah, I didn't even think about that. It also makes me a little concerned, um, because there's also like this, the story of indigenous people raping white women. And I worry about how that will move forward with Keris's story. I really hope it doesn't go down that road. I hope it doesn't either. But now I'm like kind of worried it will.

**kelly** [00:48:23] I don't know. I don't think so.

**jessie** [00:48:24] Or you already know.

**kelly** [00:48:26] I might know. [laughs] I don't think I do, though.

**transition** [00:48:29] [spellcasting sound]

**kelly** [00:48:31] Class distinctions.

**jessie** [00:48:31] Yeah, so there's a pretty obvious class distinction in this book or multiple class distinctions, but it seems to be based on the group's role in society. So like the scholars, the Illustrians, the tribespeople, like, they all seem to have like their place within the society that the empire has created post like.

**kelly** [00:48:55] with the colonial expansion, I guess.

**jessie** [00:48:57] Yeah, yeah, exactly.

**kelly** [00:48:58] What you say about the hierarchy. I think really highlights the fact that race and class are so, so intricately tied in this particular system.

**jessie** [00:49:08] I think when I was reading it at first, I didn't realize that each group of people looked different as well as had different roles in their society. But it turns out like. Each group of people looks a certain way and they have that role in society, which is pretty interesting, but also goes back.

**kelly** [00:49:25] Yeah, and they're also culturally distinct. And we have this collapse almost or we are collapsing race and ethnicity also.

**transition** [00:49:36] [spellcasting sound].

**jessie** [00:49:36] Question time, Kelly. [laughs] Do you think any of the groups can be sold into slavery?

**kelly** [00:49:42] I think any non Illustrian People, yes. So basically, if you don't have class privilege with and you're not the equivalent of white, essentially you're not a marshal, then I would say yes, because we see a lot of scholar slaves. And that's the group that Laia and Izzy I get the sense belong to. I don't really know.

**jessie** [00:50:07] That's why I wasn't sure, because we see a lot of scholar slaves, but I wasn't sure what Cook and Izzy were are all of the resistance scholars?

**kelly** [00:50:16] I think it's the scholar resistance because they're the people being oppressed right in that particular region in Serra, which is where Black Cliff is. But then I also I think as he mentions, that she's from Antium, which is the capital and that's further north. So she might just be she might be a marshal, but might be part of the plebian lower class and sold into slavery.

**jessie** [00:50:36] Yeah. I wonder if there are different. Different levels of class, even within each group, like even within the scholars of the marshals,.

**kelly** [00:50:43] Probably. Well within the marshals, Yes, because it's the Illustrians and the Plebians.

**jessie** [00:50:48] Oh, right. Yeah, exactly.

**kelly** [00:50:50] But within the scholars, I mean, probably, you know, it seems like the tribe people are kind of the only group that we don't get a sense that they're as stratified, I guess.

**transition** [00:50:59] [spellcasting sound].

**jessie** [00:51:01] I think I remember at one point them mentioning that Elias looks different than the other, um, masks. I wonder if he had like difficulties in in black cliff because he looked different.

**kelly** [00:51:16] I got the sense that he looked different because his mask wasn't molded into his face.

**jessie** [00:51:20] Right.

**kelly** [00:51:20] And that's because he hates it and he takes it off. Whereas everyone else lets that become their identity. They, like, get themselves erased.

**jessie** [00:51:26] Right. But doesn't like if he if Keris is pale and he's like golden skinned, whatever that means. Do the does the rest of the masks look more like keris?

**kelly** [00:51:38] I would say probably.

**jessie** [00:51:40] So. I wonder if he stands out in that group.

**kelly** [00:51:43] You know, that's a good point. I didn't think about that.

**jessie** [00:51:45] It's hard to say he's like the best of the masks. So, like, what are they going to do? It's going to be like fight me and they'll be like, no, thanks. [laughs].

**transition** [00:51:50] [jaunty string music plays]

**kelly** [00:51:56] Finally, it's time for Shipwrecked, a segment about asexuality, sexuality, sex, romance and relationships, and sometimes we take liberties and do some shipping of our own.

**jessie** [00:52:05] I like to say that this story has a love square instead of a love triangle, um, because we see Keenan and Laia up here together, but then also Laia and Elias and so Elias and Helene and I kind of like that. We didn't get a typical love triangle.

**kelly** [00:52:27] I like that, too, and I like all the history Elias and Helene had made, their relationship makes a lot of sense,.

**jessie** [00:52:34] Right.

**kelly** [00:52:35] But I think he's choosing to be a different person.

**jessie** [00:52:39] I was a little it was like really hard reading that one part where he's like, I don't love you. I can't love you that way to. And I was like, ooh That had to hurt real bad.

**kelly** [00:52:50] Yeah.

**jessie** [00:52:51] Can you imagine?

**kelly** [00:52:52] It's kind of one of those moments where he could have chosen to be with her, but he didn't. I think that's kind of a symptom of what his larger transformation that he's going through as a character.

**jessie** [00:53:03] He's always making a choice not to be with her, but he's obviously sexually attracted to her because he mentions like feelings. But—

**kelly** [00:53:12] Whatever that means [laughs].

**jessie** [00:53:14] Whatever whatever you want it to mean.

**transition** [00:53:16] [spellcasting sound]

**kelly** [00:53:19] I think Keenan is a red herring.

**jessie** [00:53:24] Do you say that with knowledge? [laughs] No. Don't tell me!

**kelly** [00:53:28] No, that was my impression reading the book,.

**jessie** [00:53:31] OK.

**kelly** [00:53:32] I mean, I gotta like it was super like Sparky, like they had that moment at the Moon Festival. And there's just like she talks about how they smell. Sarah J Maas does this talk about, like how that's.

**jessie** [00:53:44] Because boys smell nice.

**kelly** [00:53:46] When they were people, people in general and they have like they're different Cologne's that they wear apparently. I just like the citrus and the I don't know, it was like, do they?

**jessie** [00:53:57] Sometimes I wonder where authors come up with these like smell descriptions. I'm like citrus. Like who smells like citrus?

**kelly** [00:54:03] Spicy. I guess.

**jessie** [00:54:04] Yeah. I think is like spicy. [laughing] That's how men smell. Spicy, I think.

**kelly** [00:54:11] I just shipped Laia and Keenan from the very beginning. Not them. Freudian slip, I shipped Laia and Elias from the very beginning that just like the connection, the look and my God, the look. The first look.

**jessie** [00:54:24] Yeah! Like that. There's like so much sexual tension between the two of them. And I hope they get sexy times in the next book. Like I want that for them. Um, but I really liked them getting to know each other, like in the scene where, uh, Laia I think she's like, I don't know what she thinks is going to happen. She's going to be tortured or whatever,.

**kelly** [00:54:42] Or raped.

**jessie** [00:54:42] Well, yeah, probably that. But she's just with Elias and I like talking. I was like, that's real sweet.

**kelly** [00:54:47] They're just talking.

**jessie** [00:54:50] Like this is such like a high school romance.

**kelly** [00:54:52] This is sweet.

**jessie** [00:54:53] It was sweet.

**kelly** [00:54:54] In the context of, like,.

**jessie** [00:54:57] She's being forced, like she couldn't leave if she wanted to.

**kelly** [00:54:59] and Elias's trial to the death. Basically, they're both sealed together in the room. Yeah, but it was they made the most. They made the most out of a shitty situation. Yeah.

**jessie** [00:55:09] I ship them and hard. Yeah. I feel bad for Keenan though, because I really do like him because he really has like a good character arc throughout the story where he comes back around and realizes the resistance might not be doing the best things. Maybe they'll pair him with like Izzy or something.

**kelly** [00:55:26] Oh yeah. Because they're going to end up like Laia sends Izzy to take her spot to freedom, basically,

**jessie** [00:55:33] Yeah.

**kelly** [00:55:34] There are no sexy times.

**jessie** [00:55:36] No there's not. Just lots of sexual tension,.

**kelly** [00:55:38] So much tension. One kiss.

**jessie** [00:55:40] I'm so tense.

**kelly** [00:55:44] I'm so tense [laughs].

**jessie** [00:55:45] Just Yeah. It'll be OK maybe next time? I guess you know. Are there sexy times in the next book?

**kelly** [00:55:50] You don't want to know.

**jessie** [00:55:52] You're right. I don't want to know.

**transition** [00:55:54] [jaunty string music plays]

**kelly** [00:55:58] Now is a segment that is not show us your fics. Instead. We're doing drum roll, please.

**jessie** [00:56:07] Segment we have no name for. [kelly laughs] I don't know what you call.

**kelly** [00:56:11] A segment has no name. [laughs]

**jessie** [00:56:15] That's a good segment name!

**kelly** [00:56:17] And it's sorting the love square in Hogwarts houses.

**jessie** [00:56:21] All right. Let's start with Laia. What house do you think she would be in?

**kelly** [00:56:25] Hufflepuff

**jessie** [00:56:26] Oh, really.

**kelly** [00:56:27] Super loyal to Darren. She literally sells herself into slavery, put herself through torture. All on the hopes of maybe possibly one day. Potentially maybe seeing her brother again.

**jessie** [00:56:46] OK, that's a good point. I wanted to put her in Gryffindor because I feel like she's like a Neville, like Gryffindor, where we think she's, like, frail and weak, but really she's like, very brave.

**kelly** [00:56:56] And I think that's more Izzy.

**jessie** [00:56:59] But she, like, runs away, you know? I guess and, like it stands up to people, I don't know.

**kelly** [00:57:06] Laia is a hufflepuff for me.

**jessie** [00:57:07] Well, she's a Gryffindor for me.

**kelly** [00:57:09] She can choose. [laughs]

**jessie** [00:57:12] All right, Elias.

**kelly** [00:57:14] What do you think?

**jessie** [00:57:16] Elias is a hard one, I would put him. I would I think, Elias, because I would say that all the bad people, most of the bad people end up in Slytherin. I know he turns out to be good, but I think he would be in Slytherin by default because everyone he knows is in Slytherin around and he would just join that house. Like he would be like Snape if Snape were a good person.

**kelly** [00:57:42] I'm not sure anyone in Black Cliff would like— that there's the potential that they even open up the potential for it being developed into anything besides a villain. Like they try and stamp it out of you and they try and stamp any goodness out of you.

**jessie** [00:57:55] And that's why I think all of Black Cliff, like everyone there would be a Slytherin and Elias would be there, but he should probably be.

**kelly** [00:58:02] But I don't like that collapsing Slytherin and into just villains.

**jessie** [00:58:06] Oh, no, it's awful. Who's a good Slytherin?

**kelly** [00:58:10] Regulus Black?

**jessie** [00:58:13] no but he joins the dark side first. He's like Elias.

**kelly** [00:58:16] True. Snape's just...

**jessie** [00:58:20] I don't care what people say, he's a bad person.

**kelly** [00:58:22] Yeah, I'm with Witch, Please [the podcast].

**jessie** [00:58:24] Yeah, he's shitty. And he tortures his students and.

**kelly** [00:58:29] I don't know. I don't know where he would be. I just don't think that he's ambitious.

**jessie** [00:58:35] No But he's cunning.

**kelly** [00:58:37] Probably to survive, I don't know if that's more how I think Helene sees the world, I think she's more like a me going to bring back white feminism again, like just trying to make it through the institutions that exist. And has high aspirations.

**jessie** [00:58:53] So where do you see where do you sort Elias?

**kelly** [00:58:56] Gryffindor, questionmark?

**jessie** [00:58:58] He probably I mean, that's the problem, I think he is a Slytherin and he should have been a Gryffindor. Like Dumbledore thinks that Snape should've— like we sort too soon. Snape should've have been a Gryffindor, even though I think Dumbledore. You're wrong. He belonged in Slytherin.

**kelly** [00:59:14] I think I would say that, yes, but not also to trash people I don't know, I don't like that. I don't like how I don't like how it's always collapsed into slytherin = bad people.

**jessie** [00:59:24] Yeah.

**kelly** [00:59:24] Like, come on. Come on. Not you. Like just J.K. Rowling, basically.

**jessie** [00:59:30] Right. She needs some good slytherins.

**kelly** [00:59:33] Yeah.

**jessie** [00:59:34] maybe We'll get some in the fantastic beasts [movie] maybe.

**kelly** [00:59:37] Oh yeah. Newt Scamander's person is a Slytherin I think.

**jessie** [00:59:42] But isn't she related to the Lestranger's?

**kelly** [00:59:45] Yeah. Yes, she is.

**jessie** [00:59:48] Which is surprising, I don't know,.

**kelly** [00:59:50] I like how it complicates the makes it less black and white or green and blue, yellow, red. Where do you think Keenan fits?

**jessie** [01:00:03] Hmm. Keenan's a hard one. I think. Oh, I don't know. What do you think?

**kelly** [01:00:09] That's not fair. I asked you first. [laughs].

**jessie** [01:00:12] I know. Um, I just want all the good people to be in Gryffindor, so I want to put them in.

**kelly** [01:00:17] You are so biased.[laughs].

**jessie** [01:00:19] I like you! You're a Ravenclaw.

**kelly** [01:00:21] You like one Ravenclaw. the one You know,.

**jessie** [01:00:24] The one that I know.

**kelly** [01:00:25] I think Keenan. He strikes me as literally any just because he's trying to work his way up the ranks of the resistance.

**jessie** [01:00:32] Oh, do you think that's what he's trying to do?

**kelly** [01:00:35] I don't know. He positioned that we got that. I kind of got that vibe at the very beginning when Laia was first picked up by the resistance after she's wandering around in the catacombs.

**jessie** [01:00:43] Yeah. I guess I didn't think that. I think I think of his end like character arc a little more and some like. He decided to yeah, I guess he probably is a Slytherin. [laughs].

**transition** [01:00:56] [jaunty string music plays]

**kelly** [01:01:01] Now we're going to talk about writing style, narration, characterization, plot structure, and basically whatever else comes to mind in the segment called Kill Your Darlings,.

**jessie** [01:01:09] I really like the multiple point of views. Each point of view sounded very different. Um, they tell us at the beginning of the chapter who it is, but we definitely didn't need that. Um. And every time a chapter ended because some some books with multiple POV, they'll do a couple of chapters with a character. And every time we ended a chapter with one character and went to the other, I was like, oh, can we just stay with them for a little longer? I want to know what's going to happen!

**kelly** [01:01:36] Sabaa Tahir with her cliffhangers. It was basically every chapter was a cliffhanger.

**jessie** [01:01:39] Which is why I stayed up till like 2:00 in the morning reading because, like, the Elias is literally on a chopping block about to die. And I was like, I gotta find out what happens. I know it's 2:00 in the morning, but like, I got to know!!

**kelly** [01:01:51] It doesn't matter.

**jessie** [01:01:51] It didn't matter. I just. Well, it was so good. So good.

**kelly** [01:01:56] So fast paced. I wanted to keep reading for sure.

**jessie** [01:01:59] Those chapter cliffhangers.

**kelly** [01:02:01] Yeah.

**jessie** [01:02:02] That's what it was.

**kelly** [01:02:03] I see what you're doing. OK, I see you.

**jessie** [01:02:04] Keep me reading. She did good. I thought, I thought it was great.

**kelly** [01:02:09] I appreciated the character development even for villains like Keris.

**jessie** [01:02:14] Yeah.

**kelly** [01:02:15] I think you got to see the the depths of the darkness rather than just telling you she's bad.

**jessie** [01:02:20] Right.

**kelly** [01:02:21] she shows you how bad she is.

**jessie** [01:02:23] writers, show, Don't tell.

**kelly** [01:02:25] Exactly.

**jessie** [01:02:26] The golden rule in writing.

**kelly** [01:02:27] And Helene, who you could easily just see as a villain because you're so rooting for Elias and Laia.

**jessie** [01:02:32] Right. But the characters were really well developed in this story and I think. I think we get good character arcs with the even like the smaller characters like Izzy or Keenan like. They're important to the story, but their roles are much smaller. I don't think we always see side characters get story arcs, and I really, really like that.

**kelly** [01:02:52] Yeah, I appreciate that, though. It's not just focused on like you're one chosen one.

**jessie** [01:02:55] Yeah, exactly. Two chosen ones.

**kelly** [01:02:58] To two chosen ones [laughs].

**jessie** [01:03:00] two chosen ones.

**kelly** [01:03:01] I think having multiple protagonists is fun. I really enjoy the multiple POV, YA multiple POV.

**jessie** [01:03:06] I do too. It's like one of my favorites unless it's poorly written and then I'm like,.

**kelly** [01:03:11] I'm excited for you to read Six of Crows then.

**transition** [01:03:12] [jaunty string music plays]

**jessie** [01:03:16] Recommend, if you like, I think if you like this book, you like Throne of Glass, probably Game of Thrones,.

**kelly** [01:03:25] Any assassin school book.

**jessie** [01:03:27] Yeah, I can't think of a good assassin school book at the moment.

**kelly** [01:03:31] I mean, Throne of Glass is kind of that.

**jessie** [01:03:33] Yeah, it is kind of that. Although I haven't read Assassin's Blade still.

**kelly** [01:03:36] Neither have I.

**jessie** [01:03:37] Oh OK. Good.

**kelly** [01:03:38] It's on the list.

**jessie** [01:03:39] Yeah I have it. It's in a pile of books over there. Um yeah. And strong female characters.

**kelly** [01:03:46] So many of them.

**jessie** [01:03:47] Yeah. Even the ones who start off as seem like more meek or mild like Laia they become so strong in the end and I really, really like that.

**kelly** [01:03:56] I appreciate a good good character arc.

**jessie** [01:03:59] You'll get a strong female character the whole way through Throne of Glass, though. Just a warning.

**kelly** [01:04:04] Mm hmm. Love it.

**transition** [01:04:05] [jaunty string music plays]

**kelly** [01:04:09] Thanks for listening to JK, it's magic. We'll be back in two weeks for discussion of Siege and Storm by Leigh Bardugo, the second book in the Grishaverse series. And watch out for more, mini-sodes about a range of fantasy adjacent topics.

**jessie** [01:04:21] You can find us on Instagram and Twitter at JK Magic Pod Post or tweet about the show using the hashtag critically reading. Do you have an idea for a book we should add to our TBR? Email us at Jk Magic Pod at Gmail dot com. We'd love to hear your suggestions.

**kelly** [01:04:37] Know A friend who would enjoy the podcast? Please spread the word. You can subscribe to Jk, its magic on Apple podcasts, Google Play and podcasts and Stitcher. We'd really appreciate if you would write and review the show. JK It's Magic is recorded on lands traditionally belonging to the Ute, Cheyenne and Arapaho Native Peoples. See you in a fortnight!

**transition** [01:04:55] [upbeat harpsichord and flute music plays]