

Shadow and Bone Study Guide

Shadow and Bone by Leigh Bardugo

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Plot Summary

"Shadow and Bone" is a young adult novel by Leigh Bardugo, and is about the journey of Alina Starkov as a Sun Summoner, and her encounters with the evil Darkling.

When the novel begins, Alina is a soldier in a surveying unit, having grown up as an orphan with her best friend, Mal, who works as a military tracker. Alina is on a voyage to West Ravka from Ravka, across the Shadow Fold or a mass of darkness hovering over the land. Monstrous beasts called volcra attack Alina and her fleet. During the fight, Alina is wounded, and she emits blinding white light, scaring away the volcra. She is taken to the Darkling, the second most powerful man in the kingdom, second only to the king, who realizes that she is a Sun Summoner. He has her trained, hoping she will be the one to do away with the Shadow Fold. He then has Mal set out to track down a herd of powerful deer in order to retrieve stag antlers. The Darkling plans on making a necklace from the stag's antlers to amplify Alina's power.

But not all is as it seems. The Darkling actually plans to use Alina's powers to control the Fold and not destroy it, and use it against all enemies - both foreign and domestic. Alina and Mal then attempt to find the herd on their own, so that Alina can have enough power to stand up to the Darkling, but at the last minute, she cannot kill the stag. The Darkling does instead, and is able to control her powers. Just as he assumes full control of the darkness, Alina regains control over her powers, because she realizes she can exercise the power of mercy to save Mal from being thrown overboard into the Fold. She and Mal then escape the Fold, leaving the Darkling to an uncertain fate.



Before - Chapter 8

Before - Chapter 8 Summary

In the chapter titled "Before," a young girl and a young boy, refugee orphans of the border wars, come to live at the estate of the Duke Keramsov, overseen by the housekeeper, Ana Kuya. The children, Alina Starkov and Malyen (Mal) Oretsev, are to learn to read, write, and learn a trade. They spend their days doing lessons and exploring the countryside. In the winter, the Duke leaves for his city house in Os Alta. The Grisha Examiners come. They are practitioners of the Small Science of the Second Army, and keep the country safe along with the First Army, the king's army. The children are to be tested on their abilities, to see if they are worthy of being Grisha.

In Chapter 1, the Shadow Fold, or the Unsea, separates the country of Ravka from the coast, from the True Sea. When it was formed, it left the country landlocked. Alina and Mal have both entered into military service. They are best friends, and many girls like to befriend Alina to get closer to Mal, including a girl named Ruby. They are preparing to cross the Fold, and Alina is nervous about it. The Fold is full of monstrous beasts called volcra, that feed on human flesh. A black carriage with charcoal gray-clad soldiers races past, along with several carriages of Grisha. The black coach is that of the Darkling. Dubrov and Mikhael, two friends and comrades in Mal's unit, meet up with Mal and Alina.

Alina is in a surveying unit, and is delivering documents to the Senior Cartographer in the port city of Kribirsk. When she arrives, she begins to sketch, along with Alexei, a friend and fellow junior cartographer in the surveyor's unit. At dinner, everyone talks about the Darkling, and past Darklings. Some believe the Darklings are all mad and evil. Alina will be traveling to West Ravka, through the Shadow Fold, to finish her training and make maps, while Mal and his tracker unit would hunt down red wolves and sea foxes. That night, she and Mal meet up. She secretly has a crush on him, but will not reveal it to Mal.

In Chapter 2, the fleet of sandskiffs prepares to move through the Shadow Fold, a hanging mass of darkness. The skiffs are full of armed men prepared to fight. As they move along, the volcra attack, and soldiers fire their bows and rifles at them. Mal is injured, and Alina goes to his side at once. She shields Mal's body, but a volcra latches onto her, and she passes out in bright, white, blinding pain.

In Chapter 3, when Alina awakens, she is under guard by a Grisha Heartrender and others. They are back at dock in Kribirsk, and Alina has no idea how she has survived the attack. A senior officer, Colonel Raevsky, escorts Alina to the Grisha tent, guarded by Corporalki Heartrenders and oprichniki, the elite guards of the Darkling. She is brought before the Darkling himself, who looks young and handsome. Survivors from the skiff, including Mal, are herded before the Darkling as well. The survivors recount how bright, white, blinding light had driven away the volcra. The senior cartographer



says the light came from Alina herself. Some believe Alina is a Sun Summoner. The Darkling moves forward to see what Alina can do, and he spreads darkness over the audience of people who have gathered. He cuts Alina's arm, and light seeps out and shatters the darkness. The Darkling then orders Alina to his estate, under armed guard, and tended to by a physician. One of the Darkling's men, Ivan, grabs Alina, and the Darkling cautions him that she is Grisha now.

In Chapter 4, under the protection of a heavily armed escort, Alina is taken away from the port city. In the coach, a Corporalnik Healer tends to her wounds. Ivan orders the Healer to give Alina her kefta coat, which is made of Materialki corecloth, which can withstand rifle fire. There are two Grisha across from Alina, and they keep looking at her, which makes Alina uncomfortable. Ivan, and the other Grisha, Fedyor, believe that Alina could potentially destroy the Shadow Fold. They want to know how Alina has hidden her power, but Alina insists she never knew it was there. The armed escort races back to the capital city of Os Alta, before news of Alina's powers reaches the country's enemies.

But they come upon a fallen tree, which stops the coach. They are attacked by Fjerdans, and Ivan orders the guards to defend Alina at all costs. The coach is opened, and wild, bearded men attempt to grab Alina, but she stabs one and runs. Behind her, the battle rages. Alina is chased by another Fjerdan. In the nick of time, the Darkling arrives with his cavalry escort, and uses his powers to wrap up the Fjerdans in darkness, allowing Alina's guards to cut them down. The Darkling saves Alina's life from her pursuer as well. He then helps Alina back to the carriage, sends out a decoy, and personally vows to guard Alina back to the city. Alina is trembling, and as she rides with the Darkling, he calms her and puts her to sleep by placing his hand on the back of her neck.

In Chapter 5, the Darkling and his column move at breakneck speed toward the capital city and the Little Palace. Alina wonders what will become of her there. She wonders as well how Mal is doing. They stop at an abandoned farm on the fifth night. The Darkling explains to her that he is one hundred-twenty years old. He is also a rare Darkling, because his is a living amplifier. Using his power makes him stronger. He explains his great-great-great grandfather was the Black Heretic, responsible for the Shadow Fold, a mistake of greed and lust for power. The current Darkling wants to make things right, especially because time is running out. New weapons are being developed, but Ravkan lives are spilled to get them through the Shadow Fold. The Darkling wants to destroy the Shadow Fold, make the country whole once more, and secure peace.

The Darkling's column arrives in Os Alta. The Darkling is the second most powerful man in the country, second only to the King. The Darkling and Alina head past the Grand Palace to the Little Palace, the Darkling's estate. There, she is given a room and an older, female servant is assigned to her.

In Chapter 6, Alina has nightmares, and wakes with a start. A beautiful redheaded girl named Genya arrives to get Alina presentable for the King. Alina admits to herself that she is much improved, maybe almost even pretty. When she arrives at the palace, the



Grisha argue over whom Alina will walk with, but then the Darkling appears, saying that Alina will walk with him.

In Chapter 7, the Darkling and Alina go before the King, where her powers are displayed. Alina is instantly surrounded by members of the Court, including other Grisha, who want to meet her and touch her robes. Even the Queen wishes to meet Alina. The meeting goes well enough, and the Queen finds it marvelous that Alina is an orphan. She then meets with the Darkling, and the Darkling says that Alina can have black robes, which are forbidden to all other Grisha, but Alina chooses dark blue instead.

In Chapter 8, Alina's dark blue kefta is ready the next morning. She goes to eat breakfast with the other Grisha, and two Grisha named Marie and Nadia are happy to dine with her. They dine to the right of the Darkling's table. After breakfast, Genya gives Alina a tour of the Little Palace, from the library to the doors of the Darkling's quarters. As they walk outside, Alina can see the gifted children playing by the lake who will become full-fledged Grisha. Alina is then brought to meet Baghra.

Before - Chapter 8 Analysis

Even the most ordinary people can do the most extraordinary things, or become the most extraordinary people. This is certainly true of Alina, the young woman and the heroine of Leigh Bardugo's novel "Shadow and Bone". Alina, as the novel begins, is an unassuming girl, a mapmaker in a cartographer's unit in the military of the country of Ravka. An orphan, she has grown up with her best friend and fellow orphan, Mal, and the two are inseparable, even after they join the military. It is clear from early on, though not to one another, that both Alina and Mal have feelings for each other. The link between the two of them -from similar childhoods to their mutual affection for one another- will have far reaching consequences, though these are not to be known until later.

Just as Mal's presence is comforting and warming, the presence of the Darkling is strange, foreboding, but somehow undeniably calming to Alina. The Darkling, upon realizing that Alina is a Sun Summoner, sends her back under guard to the capital, ultimately defending her life himself. Despite the public perception of the Darkling as a figure to be feared and applauded for his efforts to defend Ravka, Alina grows close to him relatively quickly, seeing him as somehow very human. The Darkling is kind and encouraging to her, and tells her frequently that he has faith in her that she will be the one to be able to have power over the Shadow Fold.

Here, the plot seems relatively straightforward: there is an evil presence which must be undone, wars which must be won along the borders, and Alina must come into her own as a Sun Summoner. Indeed, the Darkling guides her through every step of her arrival and introduction to the King, and everything he says seems to point to the fact that he wants to destroy the Shadow Fold, and save the kingdom. What is fascinating is that

Alina is a reluctant hero: she thinks nothing special of herself, but the Darkling appears to think the world of her.



Chapter 9 - Chapter 16

Chapter 9 - Chapter 16 Summary

In Chapter 9, Baghra is an ancient woman who looks young, and who will be working with Alina on controlling her powers. Alina is also given a tremendous amount of history and theory to learn. As Alina heads to combat training with Marie and Nadia, she notices the Apparatus, a fanatic attached to the king, staring at her. Her lessons go horribly, and the Darkling requests to see her in his war chambers. He asks about how her day went, and Alina is not happy. He tells her things will get better. He notices her rubbing her palm with her thumb, which she says is an old habit. He also asks Alina about Mal, and then turns in for the night.

In Chapter 10, Alina thinks of the Darkling and his hopes for her to break up the Shadow Fold. Her lessons continue, but no better than before. She still fails miserably. The Darkling becomes distant, and Alina thinks it is because she has disappointed him. The Apparatus comes to her one night in the library, and says that if she ever has any spiritual problems, that she should come to him. He gives her a small, red leather-bound book called "The Lives of the Saints". He talks to her about suffering, and how the Saints suffered.

In Chapter 11, one day, Zoya, a strikingly beautiful Grisha arrives at the Little Palace. A year older than Marie and Nadia, she is very powerful. Zoya has an amplifier bracelet, which enhances her powers. In dueling class, Zoya agrees to challenge Alina, but Alina gets the better of her, which compels Zoya to injure Alina with power. Marie and Nadia later explain that Zoya is jealous of Alina, because Alina is the Darkling's favorite. The Apparatus later reveals to Alina that she is now revered among many villages, and that she is being celebrated as a Saint. He tells her the most powerful thing in the world is faith. Alina is horrified to realize that people are now expecting her to save them.

Alina asks Genya about the Apparatus, whom she dismisses as an odd but harmless priest. Alina also asks Genya to see if Mal is alright, and why he hasn't been responding to her letters.

In Chapter 12, Alina walks in on an apparent argument between Baghra and the Darkling over Alina's talents. The Darkling has decided that Alina needs an amplifier. The Darkling is slightly ruffled by Baghra, for Baghra was his teacher, too. He intends to find an antler from a stag in the fabled herd of Morozova, and isn't worried that Alina will do everything she must when the time comes. He asks her to trust him, and she says she will. She also finds that her heart is racing a little faster around him.

Alina's lessons still are miserable failures as the winter comes on. She writes again to Mal, desperately hoping he will write back to her. She realizes that all along, she has held back her own power without realizing it, to remain by Mal's side. Baghra pushes



Alina, wondering why she is holding back, and she begins crying, believing her friendship with Mal is over, and then the sunlight pours forth from her.

In Chapter 13, allowing her power to flow freely, Alina is healthier and happier, and impresses the other Grisha. Alina makes slow but steady progress with Baghra, but still hates her lessons. Alina also makes progress with Botkin, her fighting instructor, who gives her a steel Grisha knife for her improvements. As the winter ends, a ball approaches. Genya and Alina try on dresses, and Alina discovers she has become beautiful. She continues at her lessons, but she knows she needs to be stronger, and the Darkling believes he can help her with a stag's antler. The Darkling offers to walk Alina back to the Little Palace from her lessons with Baghra at the lake, and Alina agrees. They kiss, which surprises both of them. He then has to leave to see the Apparat.

In Chapter 14, the winter fete approaches, and Genya explains the Darkling thinks it is a waste of Grisha time, who show their talents off to the king. Alina is now smitten with the Darkling, but the Darkling has disappeared up north. On the day of the fete, even though classes are canceled, Alina still attends fighting lessons with Botkin. Genya also helps Alina prepare for the fete. Genya talks about how all the girls feel a pull toward the Darkling, Alina's robes arrive for the evening, and they are from the Darkling himself. They are black and bear his symbol. Genya warns Alina to be careful around powerful men, for she herself has been used by the King.

Alina's black robes cause a stir among the other Grisha. Alisha walks to the fete with Genya, happy to have a friend by her side. She is required to make rounds, and runs into Duke Kermsov, who is now much older and does not remember her among countless other orphans. The first chance Alina gets, she goes off by herself. Genya comes to collect her when it is time for the demonstration of talents. Alina and the Darkling make their way onto the stage. Alina shows off her talents, and the crowd breaks out into a wild ovation. Afterwards, the Darkling tells her that she is still his hope, his answer. Out by themselves, the Darkling kisses Alina again. He tells her they have found the fabled herd. They embrace and just as they are about to have sex, a raucous group of people passes by, which ruins the moment. The Darkling must then go meet Ivan and his officers, but he asks if he can come to Alina that night. Before she can answer, he leaves.

As Alina heads back into the ball, the Apparat tries to speak with her, but she goes back into the ballroom. She returns to the Little Palace a short time later, to see a group of soldiers leave the Darkling's quarters -including Mal. He explains his unit has been tracking the herd. He tells her he never received any letters. Mal is older and more distant, and he has been very worried about what has become of Alina. He was also present to see her powers in the ball. Mal is also fiercely jealous of the Darkling, and the way he looks at Alina. Mal says he owns her, and Alina says he owns them all -but Mal says the Darkling doesn't own him.

In Chapter 15, back in her rooms, Alina cries in pain from the distance between her and Mal. But Baghra shows up, and makes Alina come with her. She takes Alina to a dark



chamber and gives her new clothing, and tells her to flee. She says that now that the Darkling has the herd and Alina, he can use the Shadow Fold as a weapon with the power he will wield. Baghra says that the Darkling is the Black Heretic. Baghra is the Darkling's mother. She explains the Fold was once fertile, green farmland, and the Shadow transformed the inhabitants into beasts. If the volcra are subdued by Alina's sunlight, the Darkling can do whatever he wants with the Fold. By placing the stag's antlers around Alina as an amplifier, he will control her, too. Alina realizes it is the truth, and asks Baghra what she must do.

In Chapter 16, Baghra tells Alina to travel to West Ravka, because she is strong enough to do so. Alina is given the identity of a serf woodworker. Baghra loves her son, but wants him to find redemption, not further agony. Alina leaves with the entertainers. She travels for days, and attends Mass at a small whitewashed church, where the congregation says a prayer for her to vanquish the Fold. She travels through the city of Ryevoost, knowing that soldiers are after her. One night, she is accosted by a drunken man, whom she blinds, and is discovered by one of the Darkling's guards. She flees, and is determined that no one will take her. She comes across Mal, who silently leads her along. She asks if the Darkling's men have found the stag yet, and Mal says they have not, though they are close.

Chapter 9 - Chapter 16 Analysis

Alina begins her Grisha training, but no matter what she does, she seems to be failing miserably. She desires to please the Darkling, because the Darkling has taken such a broad interest in her. He believes in her, and she doesn't want to let him down. Indeed, the Darkling is convinced that an amplifier will help Alina to master her skills and her talents, and become a full-fledged and powerful Sun Summoner. When Alina is finally able to wield her power on her own, she is happier and healthier for it, and her beauty improves dramatically. The Darkling also seems to have fallen for Alina, and Alina for the Darkling. Their budding romance is dark and swift, and Alina is wholly caught up in it.

Just as everything appears to be perfect, the sudden reappearance of Mal in Alina's life ruffles everything she has been confident of. If that wasn't enough of a blow to her now fractured emotions, Baghra reveals that she is the Darkling's mother, and that the Darkling has been deceiving her. He doesn't intend to use Alina's power to destroy the Shadow Fold, but to control it, and use it as the most powerful weapon imaginable. This in turn causes Alina to flee, for deception is all around her.

As the reader suspects, the bond between Alina and Mal is tremendously powerful, as it is Mal whom Alina seeks shelter with when he finds her after she has fled the Darkling. Though Mal has been put off, he immediately accedes to helping Alina, even though he suspects she still harbors some sort of feelings for the Darkling.



Chapter 17 - After

Chapter 17 - After Summary

In Chapter 17, the next morning, Alina tells Mal all about the Darkling's plans. They head up into the mountains, and Mal decides they will go after the stag in Tsibeya themselves to give Alina a chance. They descend from the mountains and realize it is Butter Week, when nobles have cakes and sweets paraded around and handed out to the poor and the peasants. But they are taken by robbers, who realize that Mal is a deserter. Alina uses her training to fight the robbers, and to free herself and Mal.

In Chapter 18, the spring is dawning as Alina and Mal head into Tsibeya. Alina wonders if claiming her amplifier will free her and everyone else from the Darkling. Alina tells Mal that he must kill her if it comes down to it, to prevent her from being used by the Darkling. Mal, at length, reluctantly promises Alina to kill her if it becomes necessary. They hunt around Chernast for the herd. Alina uses her sunlight to warm them both as the threat of snow approaches, and the weather turns cold. Mal explains that while he was hunting the herd, Mikhael and Dubrov were killed impersonated Fjerdans as the herd strayed into Fjerda. Alina and Mal reflect on saving one another's lives in the Shadow Fold.

In Chapter 19, Alina and Mal continue looking for the herd. As they do, they talk about how much they have missed one another, and they kiss. They discover, then, the herd of white deer, and Mal brings down the stag. Alina must then kill it, but she cannot bring herself to do it. The Darkling and his minions then appear around them. The Darkling attempts to use darkness to kill the stag, but Alina uses her sunlight to stop him, and they come to a standoff. She tells Mal to kill her, but he refuses to do so- and the Darkling's men seize the initiative, and capture both Mal and Alina. The Darkling then kills the stag. David, a Grisha fabrikator whom Genya loves, comes forward to fashion a necklace on Alina from the antlers. With the amplifier on Alina, the Darkling commands her to shine, and she is powerless to stop her brightness. Satisfied, the Darkling orders Mal chained up and commands that they will leave for the Fold in the morning.

In Chapter 20, Ivan ties Alina up in a tent, and explains his whole family has died fighting for the king, and everyone is sorry for his losses, but only the Darkling will do something about it. Alina attempts to plead with him, but Ivan appears unmoved. The next morning, they all make for the Fold. The Darkling commands Ivan to ride with Alina in the coach, to make sure she doesn't do anything stupid. The Darkling reveals that no one was informed of her absence, but that she has been in seclusion, fasting for the event. No one knows that she has tried to flee. They return to the port of Kribirsk, where the people cheer for Alina's presence. A few days pass, and Genya appears one day in Alina's tent. She asks after Baghra, who has been missing since Alina's absence. The King is ill, and the Apparat is ruling in his stead. David feels horrible for his part in everything. Genya has also recognized the Darkling's true intentions.



In Chapter 21, Alina is brought before the Darkling. He says that Ravka's fate hangs in the balance, but Alina confronts him that it is a lie. The Darkling insists he is doing this for the people, not greed. He tells her he has betrayed her. Alina begs for Mal's life, but the Darkling says he will be fed to the volcra in the morning. Alina is then taken to the dungeons by Ivan to say her goodbyes. They are given the night. Mal confesses his love to her. They spend the night talking about their past, and then the morning comes.

In Chapter 22, Genya helps Alina dress, and then she is brought to the Darkling's side. Also gathered are emissaries from Fjerda, Shu Han, Kerch tradesmen, and an envoy from the King to see what is about to occur. They move out into the Fold, and the Darkling orders torches lit to reveal their position to the volcra, who find them immediately. The Darkling then tells Alina to shine, and she is compelled to do so. The light breaks up the darkness and they speed along. West Ravka appears ahead of them, and the docks are full of curious people. The Darkling then commands the darkness to engulf the port of Novokribirsk, which is destroyed. The Darkling then commands the darkness back into itself. He tells the envoy and the ambassadors to bow to his will, or he will destroy them. The Grisha are happy and ecstatic, for their days are no longer numbered.

The Darkling then orders Mal thrown off the skiff. He then orders the light to withdraw, and Alina is powerless to stop him. But then she realizes she has something the Darkling does not have: mercy. She took mercy on the stag, and she can take mercy on Mal. She feels her power returning to her with the realization, and she sends the light out into the darkness, driving away the volcra that have taken hold of Mal. The Darkling attempts to use the darkness against Alina, to no avail. Alina then dives over the skiff to Mal, letting the lights go out, and the volcra descend on the Darkling and his minions.

Alina and Mal emerge from the Fold in West Ravka. They see the True Sea for the first time. Alina knows she will never be at peace until she knows the Darkling is dead. They burn their old clothes.

In After, Alina and Mal book passage on a ship on the True Sea. They hear of Ravka on the brink of civil war, of the Sun Summoner's death, of external war as well. They do not hear that the Darkling is dead. They are orphans once more, and determine to make a new life on the other side of the sea.

Chapter 17 - After Analysis

Alina continues fleeing the Darkling, and Mal and Alina decide to track down the mythical herd, so that Alina can obtain the amplifier for herself, and therefore pose a direct challenge to the Darkling. As they journey to find the herd, Alina and Mal grow close once more and they discover that they have mutual feelings for one another, and they kiss. Indeed, the bonds between them are immeasurably powerful and have not yet run their course.



The felling of the stag by Mal, and the refusal of Alina to kill the stag, has profoundly important consequences. The first is that Alina's act of mercy gives the Darkling the chance to kill the stag, and to exercise control over Alina's powers. It appears as if there is no way to stop the Darkling, but Alina's ability to grant mercy, to feel that sort of emotion, is something that distinguishes her from the Darkling, who does not know what mercy is (though, ironically, he is the recipient of such mercy at the hands of his mother without even realizing it). It is a combination of Alina's love for Mal, and her desire to give him mercy, that allows her to reclaim her own powers, and use them to allow both her and Mal to escape.

The conclusion of the novel is not exactly a conclusion, because there are clearly more adventures in store for Alina and Mal. The Darkling is not dead, people are missing, and war looms over the country. Yet Mal and Alina have decided to set out on the True Sea for distant shores. They are both aware, however, that their escape is probably only temporary.



Characters

Alina Starkov

Alina Starkov is the main character, principle protagonist, and narrator of the novel "Shadow and Bone" by Leigh Bardugo. Alina is a young woman, orphaned as a child, who volunteers to serve in the military of Ravka. She has powerful convictions, and is best friends with her childhood friend, Mal, also an orphan. She is a plain girl, who is comfortable with her life as a junior cartographer in the army, and she secretly harbors feelings for Mal, and becomes intensely jealous whenever any other girls take an interest in him.

When on a journey across the Shadow Fold, Alina and her comrades are attacked by volcra. When she is attacked, she emits a radiant light that drives away the volcra. She is then taken to see the Darkling who realizes she is a Sun Summoner, and has the power to destroy the Shadow Fold. He instructs that she will become a learned Grisha, and together, they will find the power to subdue the Shadow Fold. Indeed, as time passes, Alina and the Darkling grow closer, kiss, and almost have sex. But Alina learns from the Darkling's mother that the Darkling plans to use her to control the Shadow Fold to achieve his own ends, and she flees the Darkling's palace.

She meets up with Mal, who watches out for her, and the two decide to hunt down the mythical herd from which a necklace fashioned from the antler of a stag will amplify Alina's powers. Alina and Mal grow closer, and recognize their feelings for one another. When they find the herd, Alina cannot bring herself to kill the stag, and the Darkling, who has caught up with her, does it for her, and is able to control her power, for he has killed the stag. When the Darkling enters the Fold to use her powers, she discovers that she can use her powers on her own once more, when she wishes for mercy for Mal at the Darkling's hands. She and Mal then escape the Fold, leaving the Darkling to an unknown fate.

Malyen Mal Oretsev

Malyen "Mal" Oretsev is the best friend and closest ally of Alina. Like Alina, he is an orphan, and is intensely sure of his own capabilities. He has grown up with her, and is secretly in love with her. He works as a tracker in the military, and still spends as much of his free time as he can with Alina. He is very handsome, and catches the attention of scores of females. Mal saves Alina's life during a crossing of the Shadow Fold, and she uses her body to shield him, thus saving his life as well. When she is whisked away to hone her skills as a Sun Summoner, Mal is lost and unhappy, and is horrified to discover she appears to be in a relationship with the Darkling. He is hired to track down the herd from which the Darkling and Alina can find an amplifier, but later comes upon Alina, who has fled the Darkling. He agrees to help her find the stag to challenge the Darkling, but



both are captured during the attempt. When Mal is thrown to the volcra by the Darkling, Alina saves his life, and the two flee the Fold.

The Darkling

The Darkling is a centuries-old Grisha, incredibly powerful, feared, and respected. He has the ability to control darkness and shadow, is stunningly handsome, and is fawned after by other female Grisha. He uses and manipulates Alina in attempting to control the Shadow Fold, but is defeated by his inability to grant mercy and clemency to those who ask for it, which frees Alina of his control. His fate at the end of the novel is unknown.

Genya

Genya is a beautiful, red-haired Grisha who serves the Queen, has slept with the King, and attends to Alina. She is kind and caring, and proves to be a good friend to Alina.

Ivan

Ivan is the handsome but immoral right hand man of the Darkling. He does the Darkling's bidding, and throws Mal over the side of the skiff into the darkness of the Shadow Fold.

The King

The King is the leader and ruler of Ravka. He is ineffectual, and is more interested in court life than governing his country. He appears as well to leave major military decisions to the Darkling whereas he is more interested in the talents of his Grisha. At the end of the novel, the King is taken ill.

Bagha

Bagha is an instructor at the Little Palace, and is the mother of the Darkling. It is Bagha who encourages Alina to flee after she reveals to Alina the Darkling's true intent with the Shadow Fold.

Botkin

Botkin is a dueling instructor at the Little Palace. He instructs the Grisha and Alina in combat.



Duke Keramsov

Duke Keramsov is a kindly old war hero who funds an orphanage at his estate, through which Alina and Mal pass. When Alina meets up with the Duke years later, he doesn't remember her, and it hurts her.

Ana Kuya

Ana Kuya is the kindly caretaker of the Duke Keramsov's estate, and instructs and cares for the orphans.



Objects/Places

Ravka

Ravka is the main setting of the novel "Shadow and Bone" by Leigh Bardugo. It is a beautiful land, though it is divided in half by the Shadow Fold, or the Unsea, thus separating its coast and West Ravka from the main part of the country and the capital.

West Ravka

West Ravka is the sliver of Ravka along the coast of the True Sea, separated from Ravka and the capital by the Shadow Fold. Major imports come through West Ravka, and must pass through the Shadow Fold to reach the main part of the nation. It is into West Ravka that Alina and Mal flee the Darkling.

The Unsea, the Shadow Fold

The Shadow Fold, or the Unsea, is a mass of great darkness that was created by the Darkling in the attempt to wield unbridled power. The Shadow Fold cut in half the nation of Ravka, and the people who lived there turned into monstrous beasts called volcra.

The True Sea

The True Sea is the ocean that borders West Ravka. It is across the True Sea that Alina and Mal escape.

The Little Palace

The Little Palace is the home of the Darkling, and the Grisha. It is where Alina is taken to stay and study the history, theory, and exercise of Grisha.

Os Alta

Os Alta is the capital of Ravka. It is the city where the King resides, and is the location of the Little Palace. It is where the Darkling lives and brings Alina to study.

Tsibeya

Tsibeya is a northern region where Alina and Mal journey to find the mythical herd. It is where they share their first kiss, and are captured.



Novokribirsk

Novokribirsk is a port city of West Ravka on the Shadow Fold, and is destroyed by the Darkling in the illustration of his power.

Stag Antler Necklace

A stag antler necklace is fashioned by David from a stag of the Morozova herd at the behest of the Darkling. The necklace is placed around the neck of Alina to control her.

Kefta

Kefta are robes worn by the Grisha, made of Materialki corecloth, which are resistant to rifle fire.

Sandskiff

Sandskiffs are used by the military and merchants to traverse the Shadow Fold. It is from a sandskiff that Alina and Mal escape.



Themes

War

War is a major and dominant theme in the novel "Shadow and Bone" by Leigh Bardugo. War appears in the novel in the forms of both external and internal threats, and drives the actions of various characters.

In terms of external threats, the nation of Ravka is poised for war with the nations of the Shu Han and the Fjerdans. Indeed, the Border Wars have been raging for over a hundred years with these nations, and Ravka is slowly being worn away. Modern weapons make the powers of the Grisha irrelevant, and it is from both the threat of war and modern weapons that in part drives the Darkling to seek to control the Shadow Fold, which he himself originally created, but failed to control.

Indeed, it is the Shadow Fold and the Darkling's determination to control it that also beckons internal war, when the Darkling threatens to use the Fold against the King himself if the King gets in the Darkling's way. It is this further threat of internal war that in part spurs Alina on with Mal to find the stag to fashion an amplifier to stand up to the Darkling. This ensures war of one kind or another regardless.

Deception

Deception is a major, underlying theme in Leigh Bardugo's novel "Shadow and Bone". Deception is one of the core components of the novel, and is wrought through the duplicity of the Darkling.

Deception surrounds the Darkling in the novel. He is consummately greedy and power hungry, and wishes to be able to control his Frankensteinian creation, the Shadow Fold, to cement his power, and to protect the nation of Ravka at the same time. Yet, he sells his plan as motivation solely to protect the nation of Ravka, and thus succeeds in bringing Alina into line with him.

Beyond his deception about his motives, the Darkling also uses emotional deception to seduce Alina, further bringing her into line with him. Falsified romantic intentions are unveiled to Alina, which the Darkling viciously uses to his advantage by playing with her emotions, therefore making her dependent upon him for instruction, amplified power, and the desire to please him.

Deception is utilized as well by the Darkling when Alina escapes, and he uses her absence to tell others that she is preparing to take down the Shadow Fold. In this way, and through her supposed alliance with the Darkling, the Darkling is further able to secure his position in the eyes of the King, and in the eyes of the people. Yet it is also through Alina that the Darkling's deceptions are all revealed; indeed, everything the Darkling has orchestrated has been a deception, and Alina proves to be his undoing.

Love

Love is a major and overarching theme in the novel "Shadow and Bone" by Leigh Bardugo. It appears in both the romantic and the familial senses, and spurs on the characters to their actions in the plot.

In the romantic sense, love exists between the characters of Alina and Mal, and superficially and deceptively between Alina and the Darkling. The love that is shared between Alina and Mal is especially powerful, as each saves the other's life at the beginning of the novel. It is Mal's love for Alina that compels him to shelter her and seek out the mythical herd with her; and it is Alina's love for Mal that helps to free her from the grasp of the Darkling. Superficially, the supposed love the Darkling has for Alina early on helps bring her into his fold.

Love, in the familial sense, exists at least in a one-way fashion between Baghra, and her son, the Darkling. Rather than kill her son, Baghra hopes that her son will fail miserably in his tasks, so that he can eventually recognize what he has done, and seek redemption. Baghra admits that despite the evil her son has committed, she does in fact love him, and wants to see him reformed.



Style

Point of View

Leigh Bardugo tells her novel "Shadow and Bone" in the first-person narrative, from the perspective of her main character and principle protagonist, Alina Starkov. This is done because the story deals with Alina's ascent to power, and her downfall in flight from the Darkling. It allows the reader to gain a grounded and emotional relationship with Alina, despite the setting of a fantasy world, and it allows the reader to experience things firsthand. Alina's struggles and feelings become the reader's struggles and emotions as well. This also allows the reader to learn and discover as Alina learns and discovers, and helps to add to the suspense and intrigue of the plot by denying the omniscience consistent with third-person narration.

Setting

Leigh Bardugo places the setting of her novel "Shadow and Bone" in the fantasy world of Ravka, and the lands and places around that country. The fantasy setting allows Bardugo the freedom to advance her plot which revolves around the undiscovered special power of Alina as a Sun Summoner, as well as to create the class of Grisha, the Shadow Fold, and the horrendous creatures contained within it. This also allows Bardugo to intensify the darkness and dangers inherent in the landscape the people, such as the Darkling, who populate her novel.

Language and Meaning

Because Leigh Bardugo's novel "Shadow and Bone" is told in the first-person narrative from the perception of the uneducated, main character, a young woman named Alina, the language employed is both simple and poetic. The language is simple and straightforward because Alina is uneducated, and because there is nothing (initially) extraordinary about her, and even after she discovers she is a Sun Summoner, doesn't believe there is anything special about her. This lends credibility to her humility. The poetic aspect of the prose employs reflects on the fact that Alina is a beautiful, kindhearted person, who feels and sees things in ways that many around her do not. These poetic touches to the prose further evince the emotional relation between character and reader, and further humanizes a fantasy character in a fantasy world.

Structure

Leigh Bardugo divides her novel into twenty-four consecutive chapters, with the first and last chapters being titled "Before" and "After", revealing events before and after the bulk of the novel. Bardugo uses the Before and After chapters to provide an opening and a closing to the novel, completing a circular arc with the characters of Alina and Mal,

where they begin the novel as orphans, and end the novel as orphans -and all they have is each other. The other chapters are chronological and consecutive, so as to focus the reader's attention on the plot itself, and not distract the reader with the structure of the novel.



Quotes

"I wanted to believe that Mal and I would always be friends, but I had to face the fact that we were on different paths" (Chapter 1, p. 26).

"After a moment, I realized I was just gawking at myself in the mirror and had to smile. For a girl who hated looking at herself, I was at risk of becoming vain" (Chapter 7, p. 116).

"There is something more powerful than any army. Something strong enough to topple kings, and even Darklings. Do you know what that thing is?'.... 'Faith,' he breathed, his black eyes wild. "Faith"" (Chapter 11, p. 161).

"Zoya was awful, but she was also right. I didn't belong in this beautiful world, and if I didn't find a way to use my power, I never would" (Chapter 11, p. 165).

"Of course not. And there's nothing wrong with being a lizard either. Unless you were born to be a hawk" (Chapter 13, p. 178).

"No, Alina. I told you that you were my answer. And you are" (Chapter 14, p. 218).

'He owns you too, Mal,' I lashed back. 'He owns us all" (Chapter 14, p. 231).

"Only the volcra have kept the Darkling from using the Fold against his enemies. They are his punishment, a living testimony to his arrogance. But you will change all that. The monsters cannot abide sunlight" (Chapter 15, p. 238).

"I'd brought us this. If I'd taken the stag's life, his power would have been mine. I'd known what mercy might cost us. My freedom. Mal's life. The lives of countless others. And still I'd been too weak to do what needed to be done" (Chapter 20, p. 311).

"We did need the collar. It was insurance against the Darkling's strength and a promise that someday we'd return to Ravka and find a way to set things right. But what I couldn't tell Mal was that the collar belonged to me, that the stag's power felt like a part of me now, and I wasn't sure I wanted to let it go" (Chapter 22, p. 352).



Topics for Discussion

The Darkling, as a character in the novel "Shadow and Bones" by Leigh Bardugo is a dark and complex creation. At various times, the Darkling appears to be a hero, an antihero, and a villain. Which description best fits the Darkling and why? Provide evidence to support your claim.

Discuss the theme of war in the novel "Shadow and Bone" by Leigh Bardugo." How does war affect the novel's tone and the characters in the novel? What are the sources of war in the novel? Which source is most dangerous to Ravka, or are all sources of war as equally dangerous to Ravka?

Alina is reluctant throughout most of the novel to accept her identity as a Sun Summoner. Why is this? Why does the Darkling work so hard to get her to believe in herself, even if he has nefarious purposes?

Discuss the theme of love in the novel "Shadow and Bone" by Leigh Bardugo. Where does love exist in the novel, and what forms does it take? Why is love so important to the characters of Alina, Mal, and Bagha?

Discuss the theme of deception in the novel "Shadow and Bone" by Leigh Bardugo. What character uses deception to his advantage, and how? Why does this character wield deception as a tool? What is the ultimate outcome of this deception?