

Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

Mini-Episode 13: Leah's Favorite Authors

(Brief intro music)

Leah: Hello, and welcome to Not Your Mother's Library, a readers' advisory podcast from the Oak Creek Public Library. It's Leah again, straight from my living room. Listeners, this week for my mini-episode I wanted to introduce you guys to one of my favorite authors: Shelly Laurenston. She writes in sort of the fantasy romance genre and does just a great job of world building. Shelly has kind of two main storylines that she follows that are set in one world that she's built, and also another storyline in a totally different world under the pen name of G.A. Aiken. What they all have in common, though, are really strong female characters—and male characters—who are just as tough as the guys—if not more so sometimes—writing that makes me laugh out loud because it's so funny, and lots of action and adventures. And yeah, they're romances, so each book in the series does feature a new couple that end up happily ever after. Fair warning: these books are a bit...steamy? Spicy? Very romance-y. I'll add to the warning that the author does not shy away from the use of profane language, either. Picture a book that features snarky, sometimes swears, people who, um, kick butt, and are pretty loyal to each other. I really debated on whether to start with my favorite of the series or the ones that I was introduced to first...but life is short, and I'm going to start with my favorite series! My favorites of hers are from the series "Call of Crows" and a preceding book set in the same world under the title "The Gathering." These books feature a group of heroines called the Crows, and the world is built roughly around Nordic mythology. There are nine clans who fight amongst themselves but mostly are there to represent their respective Norse deities and to prevent Ragnarök from occurring. Ragnarök would be the end of times. What's cool about this world is that you don't just have these Norse clans running around, you also see Christian nuns, men of God, and the four horsemen. The author implies that every god whom someone believes in also has representatives running around on earth all basically serving as the representatives of their gods here. I hope that sort of makes sense. So, the Crows serve their Norse deity Skuld, acting on her behalf around the world. I want to note that the author does obviously take liberties with actual Norse mythology in order to, you know, write a super-cool fiction novel in the universe that she created. There are three books in the "Call of Crows" series so far with one more novel preceding these set in the same world but not technically part of the series. It's more of a standalone book that she wrote much earlier than these latest three. In this world, most Norse deities select human agents by picking from the same Scandinavian Viking bloodlines that have always served them. Depending on the deity, the agents also have sort of different special abilities which help them to do their job. Also, some clans are just men, some are just women, and some are co-ed. In the case of the Crows, they're selected a bit differently than the other clans. Each member of the Crows—who are all women—well, they...they were all killed in some way that was just massively unfair or in a way that left the woman absolutely enraged. Just before each woman dies, Skuld visits them and offers them a second life fighting in her service. If they accept, they're given some super-cool crow wings that allow them to fly around, which, yes please, that sounds awesome. Along with that each Crow is granted some other special ability. For example, the first book is set around a character named Kera Watson who is a former Marine who was killed by someone in an alley while she was trying to intervene and help someone who he was also attacking. Her thoughts as she was dying were, "If only I were stronger. Just a little stronger." So, her extra ability?

She's crazy, super strong. Skuld also selects her human agents from just about any woman who dies that way but specifically tries to target the descendants of the slaves that Vikings took back in the day. She abhorred the practice then and delights in selecting women that can now be equals to those Vikings and, indeed, kick their butts when needed. Now, we have two more worlds to talk about that Shelly Laurenston has created, and I don't want to make this episode super-duper long, so I'm going to move on to the other series she writes. Technically, there are multiple series within this other storyline: the "Magnus Pack," "Pride" series, "Long Island Coven," and "Honey Badger Chronicles," but for the sake of brevity these are her shifter stories. This is the same world that she created in "Call of Crows," and, in fact, you do run into some shifters in "Call of Crows." But so far, she has not introduced any Crows in the shifter books. Yet. Who knows what might come? Basically, this is a world where people can shift into different animals, and most regular ol' humans have no idea about it. These animals are mostly predators. I can't think of any prey species that have been included off the top of my head. They tend to live in groups just like their wild counterparts would and have a blend of behaviors that are human and like their animals. Now, I could be wrong, but I think the first in this series were some of her first books written. The major types of shifters that exist in this world are wolves, bears, big cats, wild dogs, hyenas, and honey badgers. There's also good and bad shifters just like there are good and bad humans, although shifters tend to take it personally when another shifter sells out their kind to humans. Other than shifters, this is basically a 'just like our current world but with a twist' kind of book. There are about 20 books in this series, although some of them are short stories contained within anthologies, and some are full length novels. Because there are so many books, there are tons of characters that you get to see develop and change and revisit during later books. It's really pretty neat. The final series that she writes—currently, anyways—is actually under the pen name G.A. Aiken. This series is set in a totally different world, so it's more of a fantasy-based fantasy rather than our twist on our natural world. This world is filled with magic and war and people who can turn into dragons. Or rather, dragons that can turn into people. This world is probably even a bit more violent than her other books because they are at war in this fantasy world. Lots of power struggles: think "Game of Thrones" but less...um, interesting family dynamics than that world? And, of course, the dragons are protagonists, mostly, rather than tools that someone else uses. There are lots of different tribes, and kingdoms, and there is a pretty large geographical area that's covered. Everywhere from deserts to a frozen north to more temperate climates. Early in the series you also get an idea that there is more to the world over some mountains, but you hadn't necessarily seen it...yet. But recently she published another book starting a new series that is set 'over the mountains', so to speak, in that world. It's yet again another power struggle for the throne, but it's just such an entertaining read. That book in particular is called the "Blacksmith Queen," and I adored everything about that story. There was enough of the other world she had created where I understood the setting right away, and she really infused her trademark humor in the book. I absolutely can't wait to see this series—named the "Scarred Earth Saga"—continue in the "Blacksmith Knight" later this year. It's been really interesting to see the new characters and the additions to the fantasy world that she's created. I'd also like to add about the author in general that she's so funny. As a big fan, I do subscribe to her author newsletter where she lets us take a peek into what she's working on and what's going on in her life. I love the sneak peeks, but most of all I adore how she gives us updates on her adorable, one-eyed pitty, Gaius. And that does bring us to an end for this mini-episode. I hope you guys enjoyed hearing about one of my favorite authors, Shelly Laurenston. I'll link her website in the show notes just in case you guys want to check out some more info on her books. I'll also include the titles of the books I specifically mentioned during this episode, but I will not list all of them because there are a

lot. And just one more time, these are pretty steamy romances set in various fantasy worlds, and the author doesn't shy away from strong language. She writes crazy-fun stories with strong characters and basically, I am here for it. Thanks so much for listening and, until next time, happy reading. Bye!

(Brief outro music)