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"One Book, Never Just One Story"

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I firmly believe that the books we cherish cannot be reduced to just the words they contain. The copies we own, read and reread, dogear and toss into school backpacks are never just the paper of the binding or the gloss of the cover.

A collection that often requires explaining, but still holds pride of place on my bedroom's white IKEA bookshelves, is my stack of editions of *Six of Crows* by Leigh Bardugo. On the shelf (second from the top, second from the right) rest eight different copies of the 2015 young adult novel. The first in a fantasy duology, the book tells the story of an elaborate heist carried out in a fantasy Amsterdam by a team of six teenagers, who alternate chapter perspectives as the plot progresses. Friends would tell you that I am displaying remarkable restraint by keeping my description to one sentence. Essays can and should be written detailing the author's portrayals of trauma and its effects on relationships, as well as the complex world building and magic system.

Ask any reader what their favorite book is and you will find most cannot choose just one. *Six of Crows* has been challenged for primacy in recent years by other books with characters and words that make me question my world view, but the fantasy novel still remains my go-to answer to that pressing question. It is not that I think the book has the best plot or characters of all time, though I would argue they are in the running, it is because of the place the book has had in my life since I first read it as a high school freshman. Eight different copies stand side by side on my shelf. Beyond containing a story I love, each copy contains a host of memories tucked in with the blocks of black text.

Copy no. 1: Henry Holt and Co. first edition hardback, red sprayed edges

This edition, purchased online from a second hand store, is where I first encountered the world of Ketterdam and the suspense of the Ice Court mission. Squeezed into the five minute passing periods freshman year of high school, I devoured Bardugo's tale. During long waits in

the pick-up line, resting in the shade of a yet unfamiliar place filled with people I didn't know, this book was my retreat. Everytime I see the black and gray dust jacket illustration, I am taken back to fourth period Spanish class. The red edged pages stand out while replaying the beginning of my friendship with Renee, the first friend I made in high school. Bonding over NBC sitcoms, challenging AP World History homework, and pretzel goldfish, our conversations were the first thing strong enough to tear me from the pages of *Six of Crows*. Opening this copy teleports me not just to Ketterdam, but to the hours spent breaking out my self imposed isolation of anxiety.

Copy no. 2: Special edition hardback, red stamped foil cover, no dust jacket, black sprayed edges

If the ultimate purpose of any printed volume is to be broken open and read, then this edition has done a very poor job. Standing face out on the edge of my white shelf, I am too scared to read this copy. Although also purchased off a second hand book site, the intricate pages and special character art of this edition are just too precious to risk with the everyday dangers of reading. It visually represents the work of art I believe the plot to be.

Copy no. 3: Henry Holt and Co. original American cover, paperback

Separated from its companions, this edition is one of the lucky few that made it into my college moving boxes. Too scared of marking up a first edition, this floppy paperback is my annotated copy. Beaten up from numerous trips in my tote bag and backpack, this *Six of Crows* is crisscrossed with purple and orange highlights and underlines, margins stuffed with black ink notes and reactions. A rainbow of tabs stick out from the sides, with an elaborate color coding system available behind the front cover.

Though I am always quick to shove my recommendations into the hands of friends and acquaintances, this copy is one I consider too personal to share. Documented in messy pen strokes are a record of my life from every time I return to read it. Every flip through evokes

something unique, a new reaction or connection to my life, each new thought added alongside old notes. At this point, the copy is more an autobiography than a fantasy novel.

Copy no. 4: French Poche Jeunesse paperback, translated by Anath Riveline, 2017

I can blame my sister for this edition. For my sixteenth birthday she tracked down this edition as a novelty gift, knowing full well my knowledge of French can be reduced to *bonjour*. It is small, almost square in its dimensions, with leaf-thin pages and a unique white and gray illustrated cover. I find the upside down spine lettering fascinating, if a bit off putting. The perfectionist in me is willing to override the discrepancy for the sake of the collection.

Copy no. 5: *Shadow and Bone* TV show tie in cover, paperback, 2021

Another gift from my sister, the brown-green photographic cover of this book reminds me of my friend Persephone. An art class table mate turned best friend, our mutual love of Bardugo's "Grishaverse" world was an early source of conversation. From the announcement of the television adaptation, to casting news of our favorite characters and animated promotional videos, this book is a memento of my relationship with her. The pages contain two years of shared anticipation. All caps text rants over leaked behind-the-scenes footage, screams let out with every trailer rewatch, and pizza shared during an all-night release day binge watch, this paperback reminds me of a bond that even a writer like Leigh Bardugo can't describe.

Copy no. 6: Czech translated paperback

The one that solidified my obsession. While on a school trip to Europe I dragged my friend and traveling partner Paige to the city square bookstore during our two hours of free time. Differences in publishers means that many books have different cover designs depending on the country they are printed in, and the nerd in me had that fact at the forefront of her brain while making a Prague itinerary. Browsing the fantasy shelves I found this copy sealed in plastic and

knew I just couldn't leave it behind. While the rest of our tour group reconvened with t-shirts and magnets, I considered my book a superior treasure.

Copy no. 7: Slovenian translated paperback

Once I decided that *Six of Crows* was to be my souvenir of choice, I was on a mission. A family trip to the Adriatic Coast the week after graduation provided the perfect opportunity for expansion. The second of my travel additions, this one was found in the back shelf of a second floor bookstore a stone's throw from Ljubljana's famous Dragon Bridge square.

Copy no. 8: Italian translated hardcover

I think the sweat I shed to get this book might still be smudged on the cover. Another copy I owe to my sister Jane, a 95-degree afternoon was braved to complete perhaps the most in depth tour of Pula, Croatia's bookstores that has ever been undertaken. Several air conditioning and gelato pit stops into the day, this volume was acquired. Unwrapped from its plastic in the shade of the largest Roman amphitheater outside of Italy, the Italian hardback was worth the testing of airplane weight limits on the plane ride back.

Books never contain just one story. The emotions that I have tied to *Six of Crows* are not just the ones I felt when encountering the characters, plot, or cover. Rather, my relationship with the book is ever heightened by the accumulation of memories and relationships that Leigh Bardugo's novel evokes. Those pages hold 2 a.m. text conversations with my best friend over casting and hours spent navigating high school for the first time. Contained in the binding is every small bookstore I have visited in my hunt for different editions, tucked down cobbled roads in European neighborhoods older than any American city. My collection of *Six of Crows* editions tells the story of my youth, written in echoes of laughter and frustration between every line of typed text.

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