



Q: What does being a fan mean to you?

A: For me, fandom is falling in love with something, and then making that love a part of your life. So it's not just watching *Doctor Who* and loving it. It's going online and talking about it, and making art about it, and writing your own stories—or appreciating everyone else's art and stories. It's being a part of a community. It's exulting in the things that you love.

Q: When you started *Fangirl*, did you already have a plan to write *Carry On*? If not, what inspired you to continue on with Simon and Baz's story?

A: No, no plan at all. But I really loved writing those parts of the book. I especially loved writing Baz. After it was done, I thought I might write a short romantic story about Simon and Baz—maybe as “*Magicath*”—to coincide with the *Fangirl* release. But once I started,

I realized I didn't want to write as Cath; I wanted to write as me. And I didn't want to just write something short and fluffy; I wanted to dig into this world, and think about what life is really like for Simon.

Q: Is Kanye West still your go-to "emergency dance party" artist, or do you have others?

A: Ha! He is. Especially his first three albums. And especially when I'm feeling creatively frustrated or thwarted—or when I feel like I have to push myself out of a corner.

Q: How has fanfiction, in your opinion, changed the landscape of young adult literature?

A: It might be too soon to say. But I think that Internet fandom and fanfiction communities have activated young writers. It's a place for them to write, to practice, to have an audience. Creative, bookish kids—writers and artists—are posting their stuff online and finding their people. It's a part of their creative development. Tomorrow's young adult authors and editors are writing fanfiction.

Another cool thing about fandom is that people continue to write and read fic, and make art, even if they aren't professional writers and artists. It's still a rich, creative part of their lives. And even professionals still find inspiration in fandom. It's not something you have to grow out of or leave behind.

Q: Can you tell us about the fan art selected for this special edition? Who are the artists and what drew you to these pieces?

A: Sure! The first piece—*Emergency Dance Party*—is by Simini Blocker, one of my favorite illustrators. Simini and I met in New York City after she posted some fan art on Tumblr for my previous

book, *Eleanor & Park*. One thing I love about her work is that the characters look almost exactly as I imagined them. She reads so carefully and brings the subtlest details into her art—like Cath's messy bun and Levi's marionette dancing.

The second piece is by Valeria Bogado, a Chilean artist. Isn't it breathtaking!? It reminds me of a movie poster. It just tells so much about the book and about Cath—the way Simon and Baz live and breathe inside of her. Cath looks so fulfilled and in command here.

Inside the back cover is a portrait of Simon and Baz by Boston artist Leela Wagner. This piece makes me swoon. I love Simon and Baz partly because they're so wretched. They're just doomed, and you want them to heal and find hope together. Leela really makes you feel that desperation.

The last piece is by Lily Williams, who works in animation in Oakland, California. I loved that Lily included Wren—and that she showed how Cath's fanfiction is part of her bond with both Wren and Levi. Also, Lily does such a cool thing here, showing us two young women who are identical, but still appear so different.

All of these artists treated Cath and her fandom with such respect—and I feel like that came out of their own passionate relationships with fiction and fandom.

Q: Why do you think Cath and Wren decide to write fanfiction about Simon Snow?

A: Because they love him. Because they love his world. And because they can see possibilities there. Something I love about fanfiction is the way it can expand on canon. The original Simon Snow books aren't very romantic. So, by writing Simon in love, Cath and Wren are exploring a whole different side of his character.

Q: How does Wren's relationship with Gemma T. Leslie's Simon Snow series differ from Cath's?

A: Cath seems to get more creative and social fulfillment from writing fanfiction than Wren does. Cath thinks of her readers as her audience. She's invested in the story she's telling. Simon Snow fandom was very important to Wren when she needed it most, but it doesn't sustain and excite her the way it does Cath.

Q: You write both honestly and beautifully about mental illness in *Fangirl*. Cath has anxiety, their father, Arthur, suffers from depression, and Wren struggles with alcohol. Why was it important to you to write about this?

A: Oh—thank you. I don't think it was important to me write about that. But it was important to me that Cath feel like a real, breathing person. And mental illness was a part of her story from the moment I conceived her. Anxiety, bipolar disorder, alcohol abuse—these are things that touch my life, that affect me and people I care about. So I guess it's not surprising that they surfaced in these characters.

Q: Wren decides to rekindle her relationship with their mother, while Cath wants nothing to do with her. When you wrote those scenes, did you take one sister's side over the other? Do you believe in second chances?

A: Yes. I believe in second chances. But I don't think that they always pan out. I believe in trying to forgive people. And hoping for forgiveness.

I definitely took Cath's side in this story. I feel like parents have to meet their children more than halfway, and that Cath's mom wasn't willing to do any hard work to repair this relationship. (But I can also see why Wren would decide to get what she could from this relationship, even if it would never be a strong, supportive one.)

Q: Tell us about your relationship with the Harry Potter books. How have they influenced your life and your work?

A: The Harry Potter series revolutionized fandom. It coincided with the early Internet years. It was so widely read and loved. . . . For a lot of people who grew up while the books came out, it defines their generation.

It was a little different for me because I read the books as an adult. But I was still extremely caught up in them. And Harry Potter was eventually the reason I started reading fanfiction.

In *Fangirl*, Simon Snow takes up a very Harry Potter-like place in Cath's world. So there's a lot of resonance with Harry Potter fans who read *Fangirl*—the midnight release parties, the sprawling online fandom. Gemma T. Leslie is a very J. K. Rowling-like figure.

I tried to make the Simon Snow characters and plot different from the start, so that I could invest in them as if they were my own—even as I was playing with fandom tricks and tropes.

Q: Tell us about *Carry On*, the novel. What are you exploring?

A: I really fell in love with Simon and Baz when I was writing *Fangirl*. I kept thinking of other things I wanted to do with them. I wanted to watch them argue. I wanted to see their first kiss. I wanted to fill in their worlds, to see how Baz became a vampire, and how Simon ended up at Watford. I wanted to hang out with Penny.

And I also fell in love with writing fantasy. I've always read a lot of science fiction and fantasy, but I never thought I could write it. I got to experiment with that style in *Fangirl*, and it was addictive.

So that's how *Carry On* started. But once I got going, I realized how much I've been affected by all the fantasy stories I've read—and how much had been building up inside me.

I have such specific and strong reactions to certain fantasy characters: the young chosen one, the wise old mage, the flaxen-haired maiden, the beautiful dark thing. Once I started writing, that all rose to the surface.

