

I'm back, baby. My name is Lyndsay Ely (that's eel-ee, like an eel), here for my fourth year as a Pitch Wars mentor. Many years ago, in a galaxy far, far away known as 2015, I entered Pitch Wars with a funky little YA Western Sci-Fi Dystopian that eventually became my debut novel, GUNSLINGER GIRL (Jimmy Patterson/Little, Brown). I liked Pitch Wars so much I jumped in as a mentor as soon as I could, and look forward every year to what I'll find in my inbox. I've been lucky enough to have three amazing mentees, two of which currently have agent representation, and ALL of which I know will have books out someday. This year I am accepting YA and NA (with the caveat that there's a possibility I might request the NA become YA).

A little more about me: I am represented by Laura Zats, founding agent of Headwater Literary Management and co-host of the Print Run podcast. In addition to being a PW mentor, I also spent ten years at a Boston-area publisher working as a marketing designer (including on a few Pitch Wars books!) and have spent even longer organizing a local Boston speculative fiction writing and critique group.

When I'm not writing or working, I'm social distancing.

When I'm not social distancing (which I hope to stop doing someday), I love antiquing and digging through thrift stores/flea markets, hanging out in craft cocktail bars or craft breweries, and going to a wide variety of geeky cons. (Oh gawd, I miss cons SO MUCH.) I also play a lot of Pokemon GO!

GIF

Okay, so why should I submit my manuscript to you?

Because four years into this, I have one main goal when it comes to Pitch Wars: to make sure my mentee has a positive experience.

While this may mean different things to different people, for me that begins with getting you the materials you need in a timely manner. This will include an edit letter, feedback on revisions, help on your query, synopsis, and pitch, as well as assistance in finding sensitivity readers, if applicable. I also strive to be available at all times (well, most times) for questions, advice, Pokemon GO raids, or if you just need to talk through a plot problem.

GIF

Answer the important question—what kinds of manuscripts are you looking for?

Y'know, my life might be easier if I was a one genre kind of gal. But I'm not. I never know what kind of story I'm going to fall in love! So send me your fantasy, your sci-fi, your horror, historical fiction (especially if its speculative), and genre-bent fiction that defies easy categorization.

I crave complex, complicated characters, worlds saturated with baroque levels of detail, and twisty plots that keep me on the edge of my seat with excitement and then stab me in the kidney while I'm not looking. I want to laugh, cry, scream, maybe bleed a little from my eyes—the whole nine yards.

This year, I'd really love a YA or NA book as dark and unapologetically f*cked up as HARROW THE NINTH. Or even GIDEON THE NINTH. (Look, I'm 100% Team Harrow, but Gideon was amazing too.) Or maybe you've got a weird, bleak story reminiscent of THE WILDER GIRLS. Perhaps a historical pastry of a novel with a speculative filling, like GRAVE MERCY or AN AFFAIR OF POISONS? And I have a hard time saying no to a high-stakes, edge of your seat heist story like SIX OF CROWS. Oh, and fantasy; give me those fantasies set in non-Western worlds. I've been hoping to find a great Arabic-inspired fantasy for years, maybe 2020 will finally deliver? (Look, it's got to deliver something good eventually, right?)

Wait, why should I send you, a writer of Westerns, my fantasy/scifi/horror/misc novel?

Fun story: I've always written fantasy. I just haven't sold one yet. But I like to write as widely as I read, and I've spent around 15 years in critique groups reading all sorts of pieces, short form to long form, in all genres. I think it's as important to learn to critique genres outside of your immediate comfort zone as it is to read them. That being said, please don't think this means I might consider your YA contemporary romance (unless there's an above average number of stabbings or explosions in it).

GIF

More about what I'm looking for:

- **Diverse casts, relationships, and settings of all kinds (Including, but not limited to, LGBTIQ+, neurodiversity, indigenous authors, and #ownvoices stories. Note: You do not have to disclose any personal identity information in your query unless you are comfortable doing so!)**
- Feminism, and the most badass of ladies and femmes
- FANTASY—high fantasy, low fantasy, historical fantasy, diet fantasy, extra spicy fantasy, pumpkin spice fantasy—all of them!
- SCIFI—hard, ultra-science-y science fiction isn't my thing (frankly, I'm not smart enough for it), but an adventure story that utilizes science (a la A WRINKLE IN TIME, for example) might catch my eye
- HISTORICAL—Got something like a young adult HARLOTS or GODS OF GOTHAM? I have a weakness for period pieces, speculative or not
- Periods, period. Not enough periods in YA. Give me a book that's bloody in ALL the ways!
- GENRE-BENDERS—This is always my dream, to find that absolute peak weird book that I can't put down, and is going to confuse the hell out of the people who have to shelve it.
- Unlikeable or anti-heroes, vigilantes, and redeemable villains
- Unusual magic systems (though this doesn't mean I don't like the usual ones too)
- Adventures! Heists! Treasure hunts!
- Dark! Gritty! Twisted! Grim dark!
- Positive fat representation
- Departures from traditional gender roles (for all genders)
- Retellings aren't my favorite, but if you have an unfamiliar or rarely traveled one, especially with lavish prose like in UPROOTED, I'd definitely be interested
- Graphic novels? YES, PLEASE. I was a big comics geek growing up, and a good graphic novel is sooooo satisfying.

Gotcha...so what do you NOT want?

This is the hardest question to answer, because there's always that book that takes something you think you're not into, and smacks you right in the face with a depiction that you fall head over heels in love with.

But, in general, I'm not looking for:

- Mermaids, werewolves, or angels vs. demons (Note: If these exist as elements in your story or world, that's 100% fine; If they are the main focus of your story, it's less likely to entice me. That being said, I'm here for really unique takes on anything.)
- Love interests whose biggest selling point is smoldering hottiness, or Insta-love™
- Contemporary stories (unless you have a reallllly dark Gillian Flynn-esque practically-a-murder-ballad YA contemporary)
- Epistolary novels, novels told in text message, verse etc. (Just not my thing.)
- Narratives about discrimination that center the experiences of the privileged class (aka a "white savior" story)
- I'll also note here that no trigger warnings are necessary in my case, but please be aware of any noted on other mentors' wish lists.

[Detective Pikachu gif]

I NEED SPECIFICS!!! Do you have a list of favorites that can better help me understand what you like?

Heck yeah!!! (Though this is also where I panic and forget every piece of media I've ever loved.)

Favorite books/comics: The Count of Monte Cristo, the Young Wizards series, Six of Crows/Crooked Kingdom, Gideon the Ninth and Harrow the Ninth, The Cruel Prince, Gods of Gotham, A Darker Shade of Magic series, The End of Mr. Y, The Stand, Strangers in Paradise, Monstress, Saga, Preacher, Fables.

Favorite authors: Leigh Bardugo, V.E. Schwab, Diane Duane, Arturo Pérez-Reverte, Scarlett Thomas, Tamsyn Muir, Lyndsay Faye, Terry Moore, N.K. Jemisin.

Favorite TV/movies: Battlestar Galactica, Avatar: The Last Airbender, Archer, Rick and Morty, Steven Universe, Venture Bros, Harlots, Dangerous Liaisons, Titus, Deadpool, Heathers, Muppet Treasure Island, Star Wars: The Last Jedi.

Favorite characters: Harrow and Gideon (from The Locked Tomb trilogy), Holland (from A Darker Shade of Magic series), Starbuck (from BATTLESTAR GALACTICA), Henchman 21 (from Venture Bros), Leia (from STAR WARS, RIP Carrie Fisher), Katchoo (from STRANGERS IN PARADISE), Cersei Lannister and Arya Stark (from GAME OF THRONES), Tulip O'Hare (PREACHER), literally every character in AVATAR: THE LAST AIRBENDER.

Favorite Pokémon: Sandshrew

[Sandshrew gif]

Now, for all the marbles: what are you looking for in a mentee?

It's been said a million times before, but I'm going to say it again here: Pitch Wars is hard work. Every single one of my mentees has made extensive revisions and additions to their manuscripts. And I know how hard that is, because I've done it myself.

So, the number one thing I'm looking for in a mentee is the person who is willing to commit. Someone passionate about their work, and who is willing to really put some elbow grease into it to make it shine. Someone who can take criticism, and search for the kernel of truth within it even when it doesn't entirely make sense to them. Someone who won't just kill their darlings, but look them dead in the eye as they stab them, and whisper "The Lannisters send their regards."

Like I said, I know how hard revising can be, especially on a deadline. But, barring those unforeseen pitfalls in life, it's also a totally achievable goal. Pitch Wars can be intense, but if you're willing to put in the effort, so am I!

Finally, some of my favorite words of wisdom, from one of the wisest mentors out there: "There's no different angle, no clever solution, no trickity-trick that's going to move that rock. You've got to face it head on."

And in case that doesn't make sense, the rock is your manuscript. Let's make it move!

[Toph gif]