

## SheaCon 2022

### Kitty and Kimberly's Analysis of The Big Lie

**Kimberly:** Hello, everyone. I am Dr. Kimberly PH Book. All credit goes to Vin for this nickname. I am here with K. M. Shea, also known as Kitty. Some of you might remember me from last year's Sheacon, when I was on one of the author panels. This year, we are all about Kitty's characters and their growth arcs. I'm so excited for this. We are talking about the big lies, and I think we'll jump right into what is the big lie. The big lie is something inherently untrue about the character's worldview or belief system as a part of their growth arc through a book or series.

It's rooted in psychology and it breaks down into two basic camps. You have the self-inflicted big lie, which means it is internally rooted, and you have the external big lie, which means the lie has been impressed upon the character by someone else or the world at large. Other authors who write how to write books will refer to it as the belief that will be overturned by the end or just the lie. The big lie is my personal interpretation of a lie that significantly impacts a character's arc. It's going to be a huge part of their journey throughout their book or series.

**Kitty:** A lot of times too, specifically for the romance books, you'll see the big lie will directly affect the romantic tension. I guess you could say between two main characters, that's specifically for contemporary romance for fantasy like what I write and what Kimberly writes, we have the tendency to go a little larger in scope because, for us, the romantic tension isn't the only end game.

**Kimberly:** We like to do the worldview conflict, in addition to this is why they can't be together as a couple. Big lies can be either simple or complex. I think we should start with jumping into the simpler big lie. That's one that is self-inflicted. My personal favorite example of this in your work, Kitty, is Pip. Pip's big lie is my favorite internal big lie.

**Kitty:** She certainly is a fun character and yes, designing her with that big lie was a core part of her personality. Would you like to explain to everybody what that is? Real quick before we dig into everything, I do want to say a big thanks to Kimberly for coming on here, and basically, putting all of this together because my brain is a little bit fried and she's amazing at this kind of thing. Thank you so much.

**Kimberly:** You're welcome. I'm so happy to be able to talk about this because this is how I got here because I was rambling about it in Discord. It was Pip that started this. Pip's big lie is that she isn't really part of the pack. She has this subconscious big lie where she's keeping to that arm's length to keep herself from being hurt and abandoned again. What I really love with Pip is that we see this progression and it's coming clear that she suffered three big traumatic losses for her family and her sense of belonging because we have the deaths of her parents, but then we also have the subsequent rejection by the hunter families. That was such a big thing because in Magiford, you

have set up-- the supernatural world is very siloed, and it's very much, if you are not with your people, you don't have place.

**Kitty:** Correct.

**Kimberly:** With Pip, her big lie is very much grounded in that environmental factor with the whole hunters are not werewolves, and yet, the same hunters wouldn't take her in, but they have no issues telling her, "It's weird and wrong that you're living with the werewolves." They've essentially taken away her place in the supernatural world.

**Kitty:** I'm taking a look at the in-channel path and it-- During panel chat, there we go. Love seeing your guys' reaction. Pip is definitely fundamentally changed because of how things go down with her family and just with hunters. You are correct too, in that a theme that we will see throughout all the magic word books are these like it's us versus them kind of thing. It can harm people in a multitude of ways, as Kimberly's talking about specifically with Pip, we see it where-- because they have so defined it's well, it's werewolves hunters versus werewolves thing that it has really alienated her to people who really care for her.

**Kimberly:** Then she also has that extra alienation within the pack itself because you have the humans who don't want to accept her because she's not human, but she's not truly a werewolf so you have that reinforcement of the big lie.

**Kitty:** I think that's also called the fish out of water trope if I'm remembering correctly.

**Kimberly:** Yes. She has the fish out of the water, the no man's land going on. Basically, her big lie is the subconscious reaction to this whole pattern of displacement and loss. She's always not one of them, both because of the environmental factors, but also because her lie is functioning as her shield or even a security blanket. If you think about it, it's to stop her from being hurt again.

**Kitty:** I will say this does reflect real life. Oftentimes, we tell ourselves lies in order to decide not to do particular behavior or in order to like-- Whether that means well, I don't want to make friends because all they're going to do is hurt me kind of thing. This is a thing that we use in books, but it's based in real life as well.

**Kimberly:** I really appreciate that. It's very realistic to what real people are going to react to this sort of stressors in our lives. When you think about her lie is a shield, it's the comfort zone. That's part of the reason Pip struggles throughout the trilogy to fully drop that shield because your natural reaction is not to make yourself vulnerable or leave your comfort zone. That's why we call it the comfort zone. I love that little gift.

Pip's struggle to see that the pack does accept her as she is, is completely in line with that realistic reaction, and I love this. I love that it's realistic and it really pinpoints how the human psyche reacts to these things. Then because her driving force is that loss and displacement, we're going to see either self-inflicted distancing or clinginess as the manifestation of I don't belong. Pip is not clingy. She is doing the distancing.

**Kitty:** She's way too self-reliant to do the clinginess thing.

**Kimberly:** Right. I know in book three, we have Pip backtracking a bit from, "Okay, I'm part of the pack," and it's not because she's being wishy-washy, she's truly facing this struggle of leaving that comfort zone and years' worth of habitually explaining the pack's actions away. It also doesn't take as long for her to resolve this lie compared to other characters because it is a shield, and we're going to talk about one of those other characters. Once she starts addressing the root cause, and I love that in book three, you have her admit to Grayson that she hasn't dealt with the root cause which started with the loss of her parents. She just bundled it away and she didn't want to touch it.

**Kitty:** I just realized I've been nodding this whole time. That doesn't work for voice, so yes.

[silence]

**Kimberly:** Sorry, I'm distracted by the chat.

**Kitty:** Oh, it's okay, they've got great comments in there.

**Kimberly:** I do love Pip's character arc, it's actually fairly straightforward compared to who we're going to talk about next, but it remains realistic, and that's one of the things I love about your books is the character's reactions are realistic on all aspects.

**Kitty:** Thank you. I will say too, this kind of lie, you don't fit in is something that you also will see in male protagonist characters but they almost always do what Pip does too, where their initial gut reaction is to pull back.

**Kimberly:** They're very standoffish.

**Kitty:** Yes, and to the point where sometimes, that's where you'll create tension with the male character, if he's like that because then he believes like, "Oh, well, no one could ever love me," kind of thing. Which Pip, she doesn't go that far as much as she just feels like she doesn't belong anywhere.

**Kimberly:** Right. She's very much the ship adrift as opposed to, "I'm beached on the island all by myself. I'm Robinson Crusoe and I don't have my guy Friday."

**Kitty:** Yes, I think too, one of the things I had fun with Pip was that the pack is aware of the big lie. Eric and Wyatt, very specifically, know that she feels like she doesn't belong and they approach her in a very specific way because they don't want to freak her out because they know that she would bolt if they really came at her with all the regular werewolf affection, and Grayson knows that too. That's why he's very careful.

**Kimberly:** I love the fact that Grayson is that careful with the whole make bond thing, he's aware of the lie. He's trying to handle things the correct way, which is why he keeps it to himself. That's the best reason I've seen a hero keep the secret ever, because normally, it's just, "Oh, I'm just keeping secrets to be keeping secrets."

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**Kitty:** It's hard to-- just author confession time, guys. It is hard to not have like, "Oh, they have, a misunderstanding," that that's a common thing used and just because it's easier. It is very hard-

**Kimberly:** It is.

**Kitty:** -to come up with a good way to actually keep the characters apart that makes sense and is grounded in reality, and not like, "Oh, well, because I like not the whole Romeo and Juliet thing where it's like, 'Oh, no, I missed the message that says that Juliet isn't actually dead. She's just unconscious and I'm going to kill myself.'" It's hard not to do the dramatics like that.

**Kimberly:** Yes. It a tough line to walk, but Grayson and Pip did it perfect.

**Kitty:** Which was a concern for me because Grayson is an alpha character and from the get-go, alphas can be really toxic in shifter romances and just in urban fantasies in general. I knew I really had to handle this matter with kid-gloves because, otherwise, he could end up just as manipulative and bossy and just toxic as a typical.

**Kimberly:** The healthy alpha.

**Kitty:** Yes.

**Kimberly:** The healthy alpha, I've been arguing about this for years, like, "No, no alphas are supposed to be healthy, not this toxic mess."

**Kitty:** Yes, well, we're bring the very quick side thing off of this, but, yes, because when I had done the research in the pack, and I found out that the alphas technically don't really exist, but that they're more of the parents in the pack. I was like, "They wouldn't do this. They wouldn't act like this." It was very nice to find that rooted in reality. That's not true either that the toxic thing is not true.

**Kimberly:** Yes, and I love it. Thank you. All right, because we do have a time limit.

**Kitty:** Oh, yes.

**Kimberly:** We should move on to Angelique's big lie. I'm going to say right now Angelique is one of the most complex big lies I've encountered in-- I don't even know how long, because it's not simply an external lie. It's a external lie that has been fully internalized which adds so many layers to her arc. Guys, I'm going to give you a quick example of a character whose big lie is straightforward, external, and that is Raquel from the *Snow Queen* duology because the big lie is the world believes all majors are evil, but she is already questioning it because her magic doesn't feel evil to her. You've established in the frog prints that Angelique is a mirror to Raquel but her external eye is very different in how it manifests.

That's one of the reasons her arc is taking longer because it is a lie that's being used as a weapon and continually reinforced by gas lighting and manipulation.

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**Kitty:** They are very much the two sides on a coin where Raquel, as you said, she questions that mages are evil versus Angelique is wholly convinced that she has dangerous, scary, bad magic.

**Kimberly:** Yes, and unlike Pip who's life was very much subconscious, Angelique is painfully aware of her big lie. It's sunken to her thoughts and is constantly eating away at her confidence and is so much more deeply rooted. I'm going to go ahead and admit that when we first learned about Angelique's core power in *12 Dancing Princesses*, I was a little underwhelmed because her reactions to the thought of using it had given me this impression it was going to be something inherently dark, and then, and it was like, "Oh, that's it?" but when *Apprentice* came out, it was like, "Oh, I see it. I completely understand why she had this huge reaction in *12 Dancing Princesses*." It all made sense because in *Apprentice*, her big lie was revealed.

**Kitty:** I think Angelique is interesting as well because she can show too how people will purposely try to harm you and push a big lie on you, and basically see if they can manipulate you. Sorry, that was little interjection.

**Kimberly:** No, you're completely correct. It's not just that the chosen targeted her on the service. They targeted the core of who she was as a person and I found it so poignant in *Apprentice* when she was talking about how her main comfort after losing her parents was now she could be a hero like her father, the soldier, but then that was torn away from her and she lost the freedom to carry on his legacy because-- I'm going to quote this here. "She wasn't a budding hero, but a monster." Then we see that term being driven home over and over again, "She's a monster. Her magic is unnatural. She is evil, and so is her magic," and oh, my gosh, that is so hard to read.

**Kitty:** Sorry, go ahead.

**Kimberly:** This is very similar to like children being put off their art, like drawing or writing stories due to one bad teacher. They may never try again or not until decades have passed. I've met writers who not written anything until they were in their 40s and 50s because of a bad experience in school. Angelique's case is actually far more damaging because it was all of her teachers and then her peers because she was too powerful in the wrong magic. She's being constantly gaslighted and having this big lie driven back in.

**Kitty:** I think you can see this in what you just mentioned, in artists, or in writers who get that unnecessarily mean-- just somebody hurts them in a way that truly just makes them want to stop doing it. For Angelique, it's the same thing, except they were doing it purposefully, because they recognized, "Oh, this is something that we have to blot out basically." "If we don't do this, she's going to become the biggest threat to all of our plans. We have to take her out." That's also where I think people can accidentally, in some way, blot out the lights of other people just by criticizing them for something that is close to their heart and that means a lot to them. People will just thoughtlessly hurt one another in that way.

**Kimberly:** Right. I think that's what makes Angelique's story just so poignant. It's really rough to read in *Apprentice*, especially, because she has so internalized this specific lie that she is the wrong one. It's not most other magic users. It's not even other war mages. It is specifically, Angelique, and her unique strand of magic that is wrong, and that's just so painful to read. Then she ends up with Evariste, which is both good, but it's also difficult because she's this wonder child golden boy whose magic is nothing like hers, and it can't even work around dark magic, and he's a Paragon.

Therefore, in Angel's mind, unable to realize what she sees as the truth of her magic being wrong and dangerous. She's creating these mass of, "Oh, look, I'm totally harmless, I don't have a temper, I don't have anything," because this is who should be apprentice to a paragon like Evariste. Just when she starts to question the lie, we have the troll incident, and oh, my gosh, the troll incident.

**Kitty:** [laughs].

**Kimberly:** [laughs] So frustrated with Evariste for doing this. Although I did love that Evariste calls him out of these fundamental flaws in his decision making.

**Kitty:** [laughs].

**Kimberly:** Like, "Well, first of all, you pushed her too hard too fast," but then for Angel, it's even more devastating because it is the fulfillment of her worst fear. Her worst fear is, very clearly, that her magic will harm people. Then this boy gets himself pinned by her magic. You turned yourself into a pin cushion, and now, we're going to pay for it.

**Kitty:** [laughs] Yes. Part of Evariste's problem is that he's also young, so he doesn't necessarily have-- Angelique's right, he doesn't have the same understanding of exactly where she is and what she's going through. His exuberance is, in many ways, detrimental for both of them because it makes him do stuff that wouldn't really be wise, that if Clovicus had been her teacher, he never would've done stuff like that.

**Kimberly:** Oh, yes. I appreciate the fact that he gets called out on this in the book, and that he does realize, "Oh, I've made a horrible mistake, and this is going to take years for her to get past this new damage." I do appreciate that because the way you've developed the wounds to her psyche, they're extremely realistic, and the way they're handled, it's painful to read, but her reactions remain realistic. This is all part of the reason she can't have that swift easy resolution to her growth arc that we would really want to see.

As readers, we want our main characters to feel better, and grow immediately, but it was already going to be super difficult for her to conquer this type of big lie. Then it's reinforced with that added dose of worst fear fulfilled. It's pretty much sealed that it's going to take more than a conversation or two to overcome this big lie.

**Kitty:** Well, especially, because she hurt the one person who believed in her at that point too, so you were absolutely right. It is her, absolutely. There is no worst nightmare

for her than hurting Evariste because he was the only one who really believed in her at that point. Yes, it's extremely detrimental.

**Kimberly:** Even though she was hesitant at that point, she was starting to maybe think maybe her magic wasn't evil, but then we have the true incident, and oh, this is the most awful thing ever. Obviously evil. Angelique. Of course, the other sad thing is we still have her being gaslighted and having this lie reinforced by other ages, even though the war council in frog prince. The other underlying thing for Evariste is Angelique thinks he's naive. She thinks he just doesn't get it. He thinks she's good because he can't understand that she's not good. She really needs the people she couldn't dismiss as naive about her magic and even friendship before she could really rise up against this reinforced big lie, and I love that in the intro of magic.

We see Emerys and Quinn, and the other ladies coming into play brilliantly for that piece.

**Kitty:** Yes. It was really important to me to have other people basically speak the truth about Angelique's life. It took time. It took, I think Evariste was out for seven years or something like that, but it helped her though to be able to talk to these royals who had no framework, and who, as we all know now, weren't at all involved with the chosen. That helps that none of them were being manipulated that way. It was very interesting to try and hit a stride where she was physically tired from all the stuff she was trying to do. Yet, at the same time, the various heroines and royals that she was encountering were building her up slowly, but surely in different ways.

**Kimberly:** Right. We have the dream portion where Evariste and Angelique are actually talking to each other. There's that hint that there are feelings in Angelique, because it's like, "Oh, no, there are no feelings here. No, no, no." Nopes out of feelings, but the thing is, because of her big lie, she was not in a place where she could entertain even the thought of a romantic relationship. She needed to accept her magic and she needed to accept friendship without this caveat of always doing something for other people, and that's really the big first step for her in conquering the lie and getting to a place where she can have healthy relationships, both platonic and romantic.

**Kitty:** Yes. I know it's going to come up. We will be dealing with that dream sequence in book five. Yes, book five.

**Kimberly:** This is what I love for both Pip and Angelique is they have these super realistic struggles for coming to term with their big lies. Their challenges, they don't fall into the hand wave trap where they're just resolved in a single conversation. Instead, you give them the weight they deserve, both from the viewpoint of, "This is how the human psyche works," and from the viewpoint of, "This is what realistic character growth looks like for healthy characters."

**Kitty:** Yes. It typically involves more than just the romantic love interest too. That's one of my personal opinions.

**Kimberly:** Yes. Kiss and make it better does not work for these types of character flaws.

**Kitty:** Yes. As much as the anti-hero. "Oh, but she could fix him." "No, she can't. It's not going to end well that way." Yes.

**Kimberly:** Yes, that is basically the short version of what I have rambled on in Discord a couple of different types.

**Kitty:** It's not rambling. It's fun. It's always fun to discuss, yes. During panel chat, everyone's chiming in that they enjoy the Discord chats. A quick commercial here, if you guys ever want to pick Kimberly's brain, she's very active in our Discord server, the regular Discord Server, which is called Kitty's Champions. You guys had to join it in order to join this one. You can feel free to ask her anything. She's very good at picking this kind of thing apart, where I'm just like, "I know stuff, huh." That's why she has her title of Dr. Kimberly PH book. It's because she's very good at picking things apart so it makes sense.

**Kimberly:** I was rambling about Grayson being the healthy alpha, and then Vin was like, "She's over here being Dr. Kimberly PH book." And then changed my name!

**Kitty:** That was hilarious. I was highly gratified though, because I was like, "Does anybody understand how hard I had to work to make him not toxic?"

**Kimberly:** I do.

**Kitty:** Yes. I appreciate your book, genius. It really was lovely.

**Kimberly:** I appreciate it so much.

**Kitty:** [laughs] Thank you very much. I will add just a little. We are talking with Kimberly, the fellow champion. As mentioned, she does have her own books. If you want to talk to her about her books, you can go to our Kitty's Champion server when she comes over and just tag her and she will happily talk about that. I think we are out of time now.

**Kimberly:** Yes. We're right on the dot.

**Kitty:** Yes. Let's see. Up next on hour, so in about 30 minutes, we have the next trial of trivia. I'm really looking forward to this because I haven't gotten to attend yet. I'm going to be there. Then later tonight, we do have these *Celebrity Retha and Dragons*. That's again, led by Zook, who hopefully, his voice has bounced back after this morning. Just a reminder to everybody, if you are enjoying *Retha and Dragons*, Zook has a version, has a PDF copy that you can download for free. It's in the goodie bag that has all the work he's done on this. It has maps and characters and stuff like that.

If you are interested in doing something like this on your own time, go ahead and check it out, and grab it for free. He did want me to say that it's unedited, but I told him that you guys are used to looking at my unedited, short stories and stuff, which are just full of

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errors. I said you guys wouldn't mind. You'd rather just have access to it now. Thank you so much, Kimberly, for brainstorming for this panel and for sharing all of your amazing insights and your talents when it comes to-- my brain is starting to die. Your talents at--

**Kimberly:** Character analysis.

**Kitty:** There you go. Yes, that's the correct words.

**Kimberly:** You're welcome. Thank you for inviting me.

**Kitty:** Oh, so glad. It was so fun. Selfishly, I'm glad that you came back because last time, I didn't get to be on the panel with you. It's like, "Yay, I got Kimberly."